

Grass roots projects in West Lothian do their bit on climate change

A project set up to encourage a grass roots approach to tackle climate change has seen results bloom in its first year.

More than 70 community groups have joined the West Lothian Climate Action Network as it works on small-scale environmental improvement, as well this winter offering practical advice on saving on heating bills.

And in the New Year the Network wants to hear from communities about one of the biggest issues they face -transport. All of their projects breathe life into the phrase 'Think global, Act Local'.

The Network has cultivated schemes across the county with seed-corn funding from the Scottish Government of £50,000.

Initial funding was in place by December 2023 and three staff had been recruited by January, ahead of a launch event at the Howden Park Centre.

The range of member groups is wide: charities, social enterprises, community hubs, businesses, education sector, nature groups, mental and physical wellbeing, development trusts, community councils, anti-poverty workers, diversity inclusion groups and support organisations such as the Voluntary Sector Gateway.

In the first few months, almost £50,000 was distributed to WLCAN's grass roots groups. This includes work on community gardens, development trusts, woodlands, water quality, clothing and tool re-use. The initial 27 applications for funding a year ago totalled £100,000, showing the extent of interest in funding eco projects.

The money was distributed as WLCAN's first Eco Development Fund, and later in the year a second round of government funding distributed a further £10,000.

Over the year, 23 community organisations have received funding for climate-related projects.

These include Broxburn and Uphall Development Group which was able to develop a community garden to include an education area.

The River Almond Action Group distributed water butts to householders and promoted better understanding about flooding. Easter Breich Wood Community Group trained volunteers in using scythes to manage grass and verges, to benefit biodiversity.

Kidzeco social enterprise expanded its work up-cycling used fabrics and materials into new products. And in Bathgate, Artlink has been developing local food growing and cooking projects.

All the projects help communities improve their environment, tackle waste and promote greener energy and travel.

The government's nationwide allocation to Climate Action Networks across Scotland is more than £5m this year to provide communities with channels to address the global climate emergency at local level.

WLCAN has also held a series of events, themed under the elements of earth, water, fire and air and tied respectively to food, water quality, home energy and transport. The food

gathering was held at West Lothian College in June, focusing on local production and supply.

Problems discussed included food costs and availability, supply chains and how to tackle waste.

The water themed event in September was co-hosted with River Almond Action Group and focused on pollution and flooding, better regulation and accountability. The two events were attended by 53 organisations including food producers, community action groups, gardeners, scientists and anglers.

Over winter WLCAN is delivering its home energy theme by hosting pop-ups at community venues. The aim is to widen knowledge about how to reduce energy bills, and help people use fuel more efficiently by accessing home improvement services.

The momentum is growing towards an annual network gathering in February – details are being finalised. After this, the last – and perhaps biggest – of the themes, transport in West Lothian, will be tackled.

Ruth Plevin, the chairperson of the Network, said: “WLCAN evolved taking the elements of earth, fire, water and air as its themes to make sense of the climate catastrophe. Channelling our efforts into specific areas allows us to make maximum impact with our limited resources. We are small but our growing membership gives us a big voice.”

The founding directors of WLCAN took on the company office bearer roles, and further directors were brought on board with the total now at seven.

Together they have worked with the staff to establish WLCAN over the year, running it as a ‘hub’. The hub isn’t a physical space. Staff and directors decided it was better to get out there and meet groups to deliver support and events.

WLCAN has also developed a climate education programme including workshops. They can be tailored for children, young people or adult groups and the aim of all training is to empower people to do things that reduce their carbon footprint and help the environment.

The hub is establishing a youth arm, engaging young people on the topic through climate cafes and inviting them to become involved in the hub organisation. Visits to numerous schools in the region, including Cedarbank, are building partnerships to help to establish food composting schemes and school gardens.

Partnerships are also being forged with the business community, with the West Lothian Chamber of Commerce among professional groups to have joined.

Companies involved in innovation such SilvioBio, which makes peat-free compost, are also members.

WLCAN also works with West Lothian Council's carbon reduction and regeneration officers, and two WLC councillors are on the board. Relationships with service providers in local authority and third sector are key to reaching people who are more vulnerable to climate injustice, food and fuel poverty.

Another collaboration has been developed with the charity Sniffer to gather weather stories for Climate Ready South East Scotland (CRSES). The CRSES project brings West Lothian together with five other regions across Fife, Lothians and the Scottish Borders to gather first-hand stories about changes in weather. This will build a picture of weather patterns and be used to develop adaptation plans.

Any individual or group can be a member of WLCAN, which is free and enables people to connect with projects, organisations and resources. Members' meetings take place on line or in person regularly, with the hub team outlining

upcoming events and projects.

For more information see: [Website](#), [Facebook](#). Add your West Lothian climate story [here](#). Watch for WLCAN's anniversary event – save the date of 21 February

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter