

February 2022

Local Trust's commitment on climate change

Reporting against the Funder Commitment on Climate Change

In October 2019 Local Trust became a founding signatory of the Funder Commitment on Climate Change. Alongside a small number of other charitable trusts and foundations, we helped to launch the Commitment, at the annual conference convened by the Association of Charitable Foundations, whose leading theme was the climate crisis.

The Commitment was a pivotal moment and signalled a realisation that the climate crisis is not a concern solely for environmental funders but is of fundamental importance to funders right across civil society, because we are all trying to achieve our respective missions against the backdrop of the climate crisis. And so to deliver these missions, any funder needs to factor in the challenges and opportunities the climate crisis brings. The Funder Commitment on Climate Change is a guide for how to do this, setting out six broad commitments to help funders navigate and address the climate crisis.

The six commitments are:

1. Educate and learn
2. Commit resources
3. Integrate
4. Steward our investments for a post-carbon future
5. Decarbonise our operations
6. Report on progress

You can find out more about each on the [funder commitment on climate change website](#). The targets are broad as they recognise every funder is different and needs to respond in its own way. Local Trust's own peculiarity is that we make very few decisions about what the money we hold is spent on. Our primary activity is coordinating the Big Local programme, a fund established by the National Lottery in 2010 to place money and power directly in the hands of local people. Each of 150 Big Local areas we fund was allocated a little over £1m to spend over the course of a decade to improve their local community. In the Big Local model, residents come together to form a partnership for their neighbourhood, consult the wider community, and develop their own plan, always deeply rooted in local concerns and reflective of the specific local context. Local Trust can support and advise, but we cannot mandate or control.

That said, as an organisation we do have a significant role to play in supporting Big Local partnerships and in making the case for community-led change outside of the programme, both in policy and practice. It is in these two arenas that we are able to work towards the commitments, as set out in the funder commitment on climate change.

In our efforts to both **educate and learn**, since 2019 we have hosted or supported numerous events for staff, trustees, contractors and Big Local partnership members to find out more about the climate crisis, how it affects us and what action we can take.

In October 2019 we hosted an all-day event in Bristol exploring climate change and sustainable community energy. It was attended by 35 people from 23 different Big Local partnerships across England. One of the event's notable outputs was [a letter written from Big Local partnerships to policymakers](#), expressing a fear of being further excluded and marginalised not just by the direct effects of climate change, but also by the policy decisions being made in response.

The following month, in Doncaster, Local Trust supported a climate emergency workshop hosted by Woodlands Speaks Big Local. Over 50 people attended from the local community and beyond, including local councillors, pupils from local schools, Big Local partnership members and local MP Ed Miliband, then also co-chair of the Institute for Public Policy Research's (IPPR) Environmental Justice Commission (EJC). The event was delivered in partnership with IPPR and fed into the findings of the EJC. To ensure the discussion and learnings were shared more widely we published [a write up of the session](#) and [a podcast which was recorded](#) live at the event.

Since then, we have held multiple sessions on the climate crisis at our annual event, Big Local Connects, which invites community members from all 150 Big Local areas to learn and network, online in 2020 and in person in October 2021. Alongside this, we have held climate crisis awareness raising sessions with our staff, trustees and reps (individuals contracted by Local Trust to offer tailored support to a Big Local). Local Trust benefits from a [board of trustees](#) with deep expertise and knowledge about the climate crisis.

Whilst Local Trust is limited in how it can **commit resources** of its own to climate action, a core part of our work is making the case for a shift of power and resources to neighbourhood level, especially in 'left behind' neighbourhoods. In doing so we have actively researched, interrogated and made the case for how this shift of power is vital for communities to navigate the climate crisis.

Simultaneously we are providing specialist advice for Big Local partnerships who wish to explore what climate action means for them, **integrating** this advice with existing support offers for the communities we work with. Working with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, we have developed a package of support for Big Local partnerships keen to build climate action into their plans. Partnership members work closely with the experts so they can develop a detailed understanding of the local context and ensure any new activity builds

on what is already there. In order for communities across the country to learn and share with each other on the topic of climate change, we have also set up a Big Local climate action network.

In the knowledge that activity has been taking place for many years in communities across the country, in March 2021 in partnership with IPPR we published [‘The Climate Commons: how communities can thrive in a climate changing world’](#). This major report, which [gained national coverage](#), showcased best practice in community-led action on climate change through highlighting schemes already active across the UK. The authors argued that community level action is an essential element of the response to the climate emergency, but communities were being held back by over-centralised, institution-led solutions. They critiqued the dominant narrative that focuses almost entirely on the role of central government policy and individual behaviour change, a narrative which mostly ignores the important middle-ground of collective action. Their recommendations described what communities can do, as well as the support necessary to strengthen and scale this community-led change. The report was launched at an event attracting several hundred people from communities, civil society and central government and went on to inform a well-attended event on the role of communities at the COP26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021.

To further understand what was needed to support collective action on climate change in a way that fostered local engagement and support, we commissioned a quantitative survey of people living in ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods to find out how they felt about the climate crisis. The research found people in England’s most marginalised communities are just as concerned about the impacts of climate change as anyone else, are attracted to the benefits of a successful transition to a zero-carbon economy, but are dissatisfied with progress being made and want more of a stake in the decisions being taken locally.

The data was presented at a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods attended by parliamentarians and a wider range of stakeholders, and informed the APPG’s report titled [‘Levelling up through climate action: A once in a lifetime opportunity to make sure no neighbourhood is ‘left behind’](#).

Alongside working to influence attitudes in the third and public sector, Local Trust has made the case for a community-led transition to the private sector as well. Partnering with Innovate UK and Friends of the Earth, [we supported research into the business models that companies are adopting to reduce their carbon emissions](#). The research shows that insufficient attention is being paid to the community and social aspects of those business models, but that with small changes, many more benefits could flow to communities, aiding the levelling up agenda.

When it comes to **stewarding our investments for a post-carbon future**, the Big Local programme will end in 2026, by which time all grant money will have been spent. The programme is funded through an endowment from the National Lottery that was initially invested in a range of funds, but which in 2021 was moved into cash and bonds to minimise risk as we approach the end of the programme. Therefore, unlike many other funders, Local Trust doesn’t have the opportunity to support zero carbon activities through our investments, nor are we supporting carbon-intensive activities.

Local Trust is an organisation of fewer than fifty people. Our direct impacts on the environment are chiefly related to our office and travel and accommodation for meetings and events. We also host events for larger audiences, including staff and Big Local partnership members, as well as other stakeholders. Occasionally we might print reports or buy or commission materials such as water bottles or posters. During the pandemic these direct impacts have dramatically reduced as all activity moved online, and it is unlikely that

post-pandemic we will return to a full in-person programme, allowing us to significantly **decarbonise our operations**.

This is our **first report on our progress** against the Funder Commitment on Climate Change. However, as described, Local Trust has published several reports and many blogs, and hosted a number of public events with the aim of sharing our learning and building a dialogue with others so that change can accelerate. It is a mission we are wholly committed to. We know that the climate crisis is of fundamental importance for the future of the communities we work with and will only become more so through the 2020s and beyond. We will continue to work with Big Local partnerships and partner organisations on this critical issue.

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place

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