

A group of children in school uniforms are engaged in a gardening activity. One child in the foreground is kneeling and planting a seedling in a raised wooden bed. Another child stands nearby, also wearing orange gloves and holding a seedling. The scene is outdoors on a paved area with a brick wall in the background.

Postcode

Gardener

Bringing back nature

Year 1 impact report

October 2023 – September 2024



Friends of
the Earth

The
co-operative
bank

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Cover image: local students participate in a gardening workshop at the Hackney Postcode Gardener site.
Above: child takes part in gardening session in Wythenshawe, Manchester.

Introduction

Daily contact with nature is linked to less stress, better mood and better health.

It's no surprise people want healthier and greener streets. But they often lack the time or skills to maintain new planting. That's where our Postcode Gardeners can help.

Postcode Gardeners are employed to bring people together in some of the UK's most nature-deprived places to make their streets greener and more biodiverse. In turn, communities are more connected to nature and each other. Postcode Gardeners co-ordinate the greening plan for their postcode, do some gardening themselves and upskill volunteers so that local communities can dig in and create greener streets. The result is more people actively working to protect our natural world.

In partnership with The Co-operative Bank, we're funding Postcode Gardeners in nature-deprived communities to green up their spaces, their way. Together they'll bring back nature to 1,000 spaces across England and Wales over 3 years, catalysed by The Co-operative Bank's support and sustained through fee-paying services that improve local biodiversity.



Greener streets



Increased biodiversity



Communities connected



More people protecting nature

This report features activity, impact and outcomes achieved by Postcode Gardener projects between October 2023 and September 2024, offering a summary of our first year of programme delivery.

Our impact in numbers

Within the first year of the Postcode Gardener programme, our projects have achieved all this and more...

11

Postcode Gardeners operating across England.

186

public spaces¹ transformed by Postcode Gardeners and their communities.

5,000+

pollinator-friendly plants planted – including native wildflowers, fruit bushes, vegetables, herbs and spring bulbs.

1,000+

community members took part in gardening and nature based activities.

94

local groups, such as schools, residents' groups, faith groups, cultural centres and women's groups, collaborated on Postcode Gardener projects.

£257,000

of income generated by Postcode Gardener pilot projects through further grants, maintenance contracts and corporate services.

Our projects



London: Hackney and Notting Dale

Programme highlights



Notting Dale, London

Volunteers recruited by the Postcode Gardener project in Notting Dale have begun developing a wildlife friendly woodland edge on Latimer Road. At around 100m², this is one of the largest spaces being developed through the programme. The summer was spent weeding, pruning, mulching and collecting bug hotel materials. The space will eventually have a standing deadwood bug hotel feature, a small clay pond, ferns, grasses, bulbs and flowering plants. To round it off, the sunniest edge will be sown with perennial wildflower seed.



Balsall Heath, Birmingham

In Balsall Heath, the Postcode Gardener project has partnered with Willows Road Mosque to lift paving slabs within the mosque grounds to create a small parklet. Local residents also pulled up concrete slabs in their front gardens to add a row of fruit trees along the main road.

Bransholme, Hull

Jon, Postcode Gardener in Bransholme, has been making plans for 2 community garden spaces. Jon will be collaborating with the Alf Marshall Community Centre to help install a garden from the Chelsea Flower Show as part of their upcoming garden conversion project. He's also designed a playpark and garden in collaboration with residents from Temsdale to boost greenery.



Bideford, Devon



“It was fantastic! I swapped 2 buckets full of wild garlic for lots of other plants and seeds which I can share with my neighbours. They’re really keen to grow some seeds and plants!”

Helen, Bideford – Big Seed Swap attendee

In March, the Bideford Postcode Gardener project hosted the “Big Seed Swap” in the town’s Pannier Market. More than 80 attendees took part by swapping, donating or taking home seeds and plants for free. Attendees were excited to discover many things they had never grown before, while others were happy to donate items – in some cases by the bucket load!

The project’s efforts to green the town expanded beyond public spaces and into residents’ front and back gardens. Given the success, the volunteer team has added seed collection into their weekly gardening activities and have been collecting as many seeds as possible. They plan to host an even bigger and better swap next spring.



West Gorton, Manchester



In September, The Co-operative Bank and Friends of the Earth supported the launch of 2 new projects in Manchester. The launch event (above) in West Gorton brought together residents, community groups and community leaders from the area to introduce 2 new Postcode Gardeners – Wardeh Al Nasir and Catherine Clarke – to West Gorton and Wythenshawe respectively. The gardeners got community members and The Co-operative Bank staff involved in nature-based activities such as apple pressing, bug hotel building and bulb planting.



Notting Dale, London

Businesses renting units for office or retail space on Thorpe Close had planters containing wildlife friendly plants installed outside of their spaces. Business owners (top right) chose what sort of display they wanted to align with their own brands.

Liz, the Postcode Gardener, provides them with worm tea from their wormery as plant food, encouraging business owners to consider organic growing.

Liverpool 8, Liverpool

Liverpool 8's Postcode Gardener Addae worked with Princes Park Methodist Church in Liverpool 8 to create a no-dig "healing" garden. No-dig gardening improves soil structure and helps to increase earthworm populations, a key species indicator we are tracking as part of our biodiversity monitoring. Addae worked with the local community to create the beds at the project's launch event in April, which have since been maintained by the minister and his congregation. They've successfully grown a mixture of pollinator-friendly flowers and vegetables that are available for residents to harvest.

A local mother frequently stops by to garden with her autistic child

When Friends of the Earth staff visited the space, they met a local mother who mentioned that she frequently stops by to do some gardening and harvesting on her way

to the shops with her autistic child.



Wythenshawe, Manchester

Since launching the Postcode Gardener project in Wythenshawe in late summer, Sow the City has engaged with more than a dozen groups and almost 100 people. The project has made big improvements to the area, provided opportunities for people to get their hands dirty and soak up the therapeutic benefits of nature.

Emily and Ciaran have been running mass bulb planting sessions to boost biodiversity in parks across Baguley alongside students from Piper Hill High School, a special educational needs academy based in the area.

"It has been a very positive experience working with Sow the City to plan and implement learning opportunities which help pupils to develop their independent living and employability skills, their interests and allow them to actively participate in the improvement of their local community."

Anna Conway – teacher at Piper Hill Post 16 Department.

Balsall Heath, Birmingham

The tree planting event attracted over 60 volunteers

Our Postcode Gardener project in Balsall Heath organised a community tree planting session with Nisa Nisham, an interfaith organisation working with Muslim and Jewish women and Welcome Here, an organisation that works with asylum seekers. The tree planting event attracted over 60 volunteers who made short work of the planting, staking, fencing and mulching of 10 new trees. Over lunch, volunteers also worked with children to create natural decorations.

“It’s really great to see people from across the community coming together and taking care of our local environment.”

Tommer – volunteer





Supporting community growth

Wellbeing and nature connection

Stronger communities

Biodiversity and wildlife

Financial sustainability



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Wellbeing and nature connection

After taking part in a Postcode Gardener activity or event...²

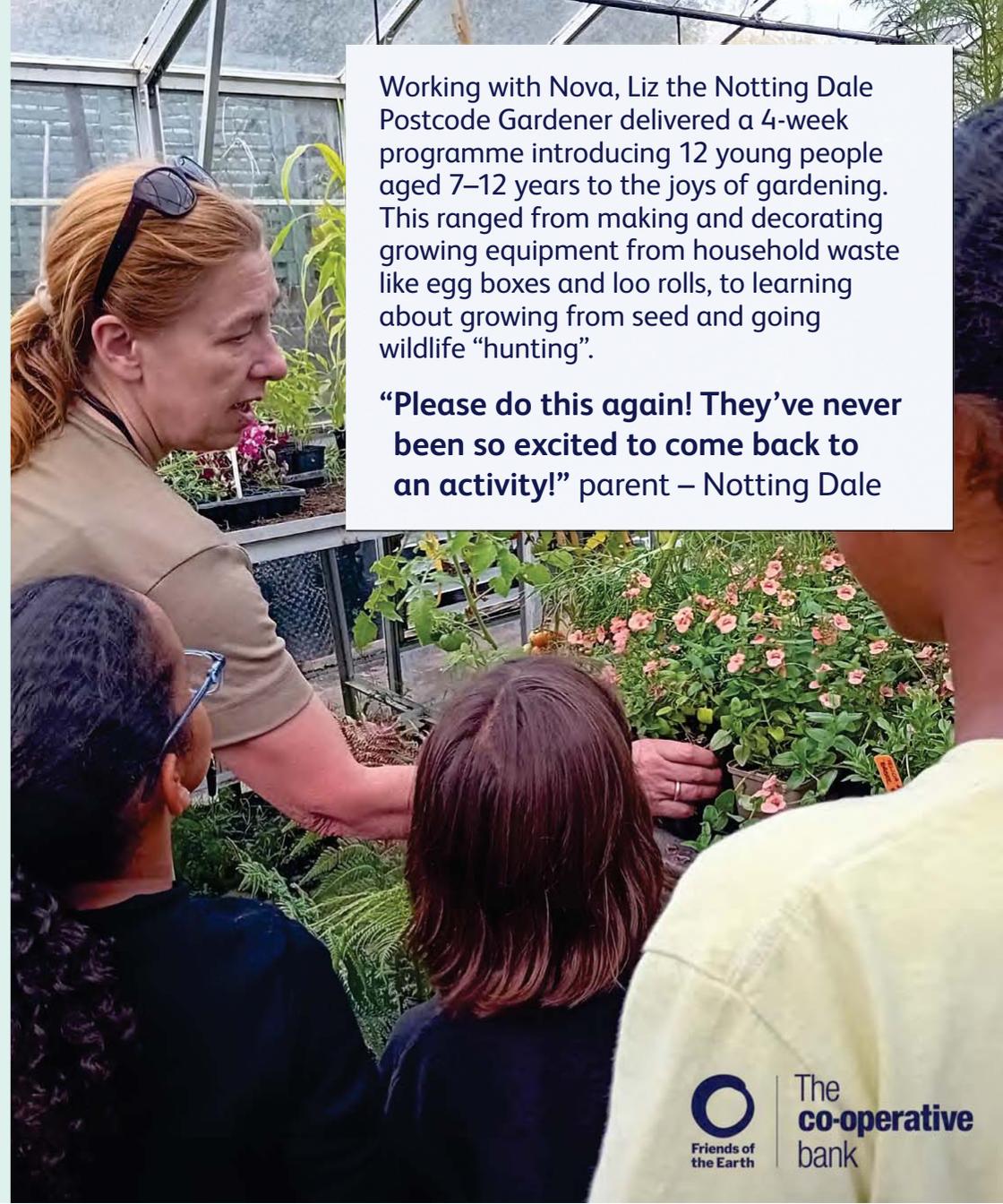
92% of attendees felt the session supported their wellbeing

96% of people felt more connected to nature

Nature can have a profoundly positive impact on wellbeing. Research suggests that people who are more connected with nature are generally happier.³ Nature can help people feel calm, joyful and creative.

Research also shows that people who connect with nature are also more likely to act in other ways that benefit the environment, such as recycling and buying seasonal food.⁴

Postcode Gardener projects deliver regular gardening sessions and nature-related activities that aim to boost wellbeing and foster a deeper appreciation of the natural world.



Working with Nova, Liz the Notting Dale Postcode Gardener delivered a 4-week programme introducing 12 young people aged 7–12 years to the joys of gardening. This ranged from making and decorating growing equipment from household waste like egg boxes and loo rolls, to learning about growing from seed and going wildlife “hunting”.

“Please do this again! They’ve never been so excited to come back to an activity!” parent – Notting Dale

“I have attended every Tuesday Postcode Gardener session since April and I enjoy being able to chat to other people. I really feel part of this project. I enjoy being able to wear the Postcode Gardener t-shirt. I’m retired so if I wasn’t involved I would just be sat at home bored. I’m not a wildlife expert but I do enjoy doing the wildlife surveys, like counting the worms and the bees.”

Reg, regular volunteer in Orchard Park

“During the school holidays I was able to bring my twin 5-year-old boys, including one who has autism and a short attention span. In the security of the allotment, they were able to have the freedom to engage in nature activities such as planting flowers, watering plants and looking for insects. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves.”

Stacy, session attendee in Orchard Park

“I love coming to the healing garden. It makes me feel happy and calm. I really like digging and playing in the dirt. It helps me forget about all my worries.”

Jake, aged 11 in Liverpool 8



Stronger communities

We also know that connecting with nature can help you meet new people and feel more connected to your local community.

Postcode Gardener projects aim to build positive connections and stories in areas that might feel “left behind”, “run down” or written off by some people. Residents coming together to transform and beautify their streets not only strengthens ties to the area but also allows a sense of ownership, care and responsibility over public spaces.



“After feeling isolated and alone when I first moved to the UK 3 years ago, it was gardening and volunteering that helped me grow in my language, interpersonal skills and confidence. I want everyone to know that the garden is a place where it doesn’t matter what background you’re from or what qualifications you have, you can always add something beautiful to the world around you.”

**Wardeh Al Nasir, West Gorton
Postcode Gardener**

“I’m enjoying learning as part of a group and look forward to the sessions. I’m learning lots about plants, how they change through the seasons and noticing more detail. It gives me a sense of pride to think that we’ve planted and cared for them when we walk around town and to hear the appreciative comments from the public.”

Becky, volunteer in Bideford

“I enjoy the creativity of it

The coming together of different groups from different communities...

and expanding our connection with growing things. We’re making this place beautiful. Not necessarily for us, but for people who come after us.”

Rajan, volunteer in Balsall Heath

Tatiana was surprised to see how much the area she grew up in had changed since moving to the US. Tatiana saw the Postcode Gardener and other volunteers tending to one of their spaces...

“I just saw you guys throwing the seeds and I thought, I must go and thank them for changing the environment because it’s just lovely to see people care about the community, the neighbourhood, but also do something that is so visually evident. We’ve all been talking about it in the house!”

Tatiana, former resident of Liverpool 8



Biodiversity and wildlife

We're working with ecological consultants Ecosulis to monitor the Postcode Gardener projects' impact on biodiversity.

Postcode Gardener projects are conducting surveys on earthworms and pollinators, with a particular focus on bumblebees. Bumblebees are an important group to monitor because they play a crucial role in pollination and are sensitive to changes in their environment. Earthworms were chosen as a group to monitor because their presence is an important indicator of soil health and quality. As soil engineers, earthworms play a vital role in maintaining soil structure, nutrient cycling, and water infiltration – all critical for plant growth and ecosystem functioning.

Combating alienation from nature

By tracking bumblebee and earthworm abundance and species diversity, we can gain insights into the health of ecosystems and the impacts of Postcode Gardeners' interventions. Moreover, biodiversity surveys as a citizen science activity provides a fun, educational experience for children and adults. Crucially, it's been shown to combat alienation from nature, as well as boosting wellbeing.

Survey reporting

Four Postcode Gardener projects began surveying this summer to create a baseline for their biodiversity reporting.⁵ Pilot projects in Hackney and Bideford completed a full season of pollinator surveys, offering a comparison to their baselines from 2023.

269 bumblebees

A total of 269 observations of 7 bumblebee species were recorded from surveys carried out in our greened sites.⁶ Projects also observed a total of 1,393 observations from 10 out of 10 pollinator groups, ranging from solitary bees, wasps, hoverflies, beetles, butterflies and more.⁷ This includes at least 39 different pollinator species.⁸

1,393 pollinators

Expert analysis on projects' pollinator survey results found that **the public spaces transformed by Postcode Gardeners consistently support greater diversity and abundance of bumblebees**, compared to control sites.

The nature-friendly gardening practices and diverse planting schemes intentionally implemented by the Hackney Postcode Gardener project – combining wildflowers, bulbs and perennials – has proven to be beneficial, with a varied and balanced pollinator community observed in the area. Two of Hackney's survey sites, Concorde Youth Hub flower beds and Kingsmead Meadow, scored as the best sites for biodiversity among pollinators. The sites also indicated a marked increase in the diversity and abundance of bumblebees recorded in comparison to last year's surveys.

85 earthworms

Bideford's 2024 survey results indicated a high diversity of native bumblebees and solitary bees in the project's greened spaces. This is likely due to the project's efforts to provide a rich variety of plants, creating habitats that provide continuous for pollinators through the seasons.

A total of 85 earthworms were counted in surveys conducted in Bideford and Rose Hill. The higher count, up from just 11 earthworms recorded in Bideford last year reflects both an increase in survey effort and impact of greening initiatives in the area on the earthworm population. More data will be gathered on earthworm populations over the winter months.

Pollinators' favourite plants*

- autumn sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*)
- spiked speedwell (*Veronica spicata*)
- dwarf catmint (*Nepeta racemosa*)
- lavender (*Lavandula*)
- Macedonian scabious (*Knautia macedonica*)
- butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*)
- cosmos (*Cosmo spp.*)
- kale (*Brassica acephala hort*)
- devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*)
- wallflower (*Erysimum spp.*)

Rare species sighted

- four-banded flower bee (*Anthophora quadrimaculata*)
- heath bumblebee (*Bombus jonellus*)
- sharp-tailed bee (*Coelioxys rufescens*)
- narcissus bulb fly (*Merodon equestris*)

* These are the top 10 plants most commonly landed on by bumblebees and pollinators in our surveys.

Connecting young people with nature in Derby

Steven, Rose Hill Postcode Gardener, ran a number of nature-based workshops with young people over the summer holidays.

Young adults with special educational needs from Horizons Sixth Form collected seeds from trees in Derby Arboretum, the oldest public park in the country. The young people had fun collecting seeds, guessing how old the trees were and talked about how each tree has evolved to disperse its seed in a different way. The group will come together again to sow the seeds and create a native tree bank.

Working together with the local Wildlife Trust, Steven also kicked off biodiversity surveying for the project this summer. He brought

children from the West Indian Community Centre to count and survey bumblebees in an area of the park that the project has begun transforming through planting.

Lots of the children live in nature-deprived parts of town and many of them were afraid of bees before the session. As they started to capture the bees in spyglasses, lots of the children became interested in them and soon lost their fear. They also did pond dipping to get up close to pond-dwelling creatures like newts, beetles and frogs. The children also took part in litter picking to take care of the area for both people and wildlife.



Financial sustainability

Greening projects often rely heavily on grant funding. When that funding runs out, the project can fizzle out too. We don't want that to happen to our Postcode Gardener projects.

Postcode Gardener projects are seed funded by The Co-operative Bank to provide a springboard to financial independence. Our aim is to maintain the viability of these projects and to create long-term opportunities to keep Postcode Gardeners working in their neighbourhoods.

We're working with projects to develop and test different methods of income generation.



Hackney's blended income success

The first ever Postcode Gardener project in Hackney E5 has leveraged its impact to raise income from a diverse variety of sources, generating more than £250,000 within a year.

ecoACTIVE secured 3 years of funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to continue the project, using the funding and support from Friends of the Earth and The Co-operative Bank as a springboard. The funds will be used to build the Hackney Buzzline – a flower-rich wildlife corridor that will link 4 parks across the borough. This project will boost local bee and butterfly populations, help residents enjoy and explore their local green spaces, become more active and connect with nature.⁹

The grant funding has allowed the Hackney Postcode Gardener project to experiment with different ways to generate income and sustain the project, while adding social and environmental value to the local community. The project's delivered 2 staff volunteering sessions, with companies based in East London getting their hands dirty. It's also raised thousands of pounds through individual donations and selling guided walks of the area.

The Hackney Postcode Gardener project has also cracked one of the key challenges of income generation for many of our charity partners. It has been able to do so by collaborating with a local business to help handle the entrepreneurial

aspects of a corporate contract. ecoACTIVE has partnered with Grown22, securing a contract with Hackney Council to maintain 15 parklets and transform other local authority owned spaces, including refitting a pollinator garden at Kingsmead Medical Centre.

This collaboration will not only generate income and boost biodiversity for the Hackney Buzzline, it'll also seek to provide green jobs for the local community. We're really excited to see how the partnership progresses and what the rest of the Postcode Gardener network can learn from Hackney's blended approach to income generation.

Generating more than £250,000 within a year

Network development

Friends of the Earth's role is to support the growing network of Postcode Gardener projects. From recruiting and onboarding new delivery partners to providing ongoing advice and practical help to deliver impact in communities, we're present at all stages of the project.





Monthly training

Expert speakers and consultants are invited to deliver training or “spotlight talks” on a range of topics, from setting up a successful social enterprise to conducting bumblebee surveys.



Education

Access to bespoke resources, guidance, tools and templates, ranging from the basics such as Postcode Gardener job descriptions and attendee feedback forms to creating an editable deck to help with pitching staff volunteering days to local and national companies.



Coaching

Bookable 1:1 advice sessions with Friends of the Earth staff and subject-specific experts in topics like social enterprise.

News

Monthly updates containing funding opportunities and details of the latest support available delivered straight to our projects’ inboxes. We also provide a round-up of news from our network to allow projects to have an overview of what’s going on in other communities.

Peer-support network

Projects are given space to build connections, share knowledge and inspire one another through regular online forums and by being paired up with a “buddy” in the network. Projects are matched for various reasons such as geographical proximity, similar challenges or having relevant knowledge to share with another project.



Community partnerships

Connections with Friends of the Earth’s network of local action groups, activists and other community partners. Providing opportunities for allyship, amplification and collaboration with local leaders and community members taking action on nature and climate.

Media

Practical support from Friends of the Earth’s press team to boost local and regional visibility of projects when they launch and to identify opportunities to showcase the project through media features.

Building a community of practice in Hull

Our 2 Postcode Gardeners in Hull, coincidentally both named Jo(h)n, have been making the most of being neighbours. They meet monthly to share ideas and make light work of solving problems for their respective projects.

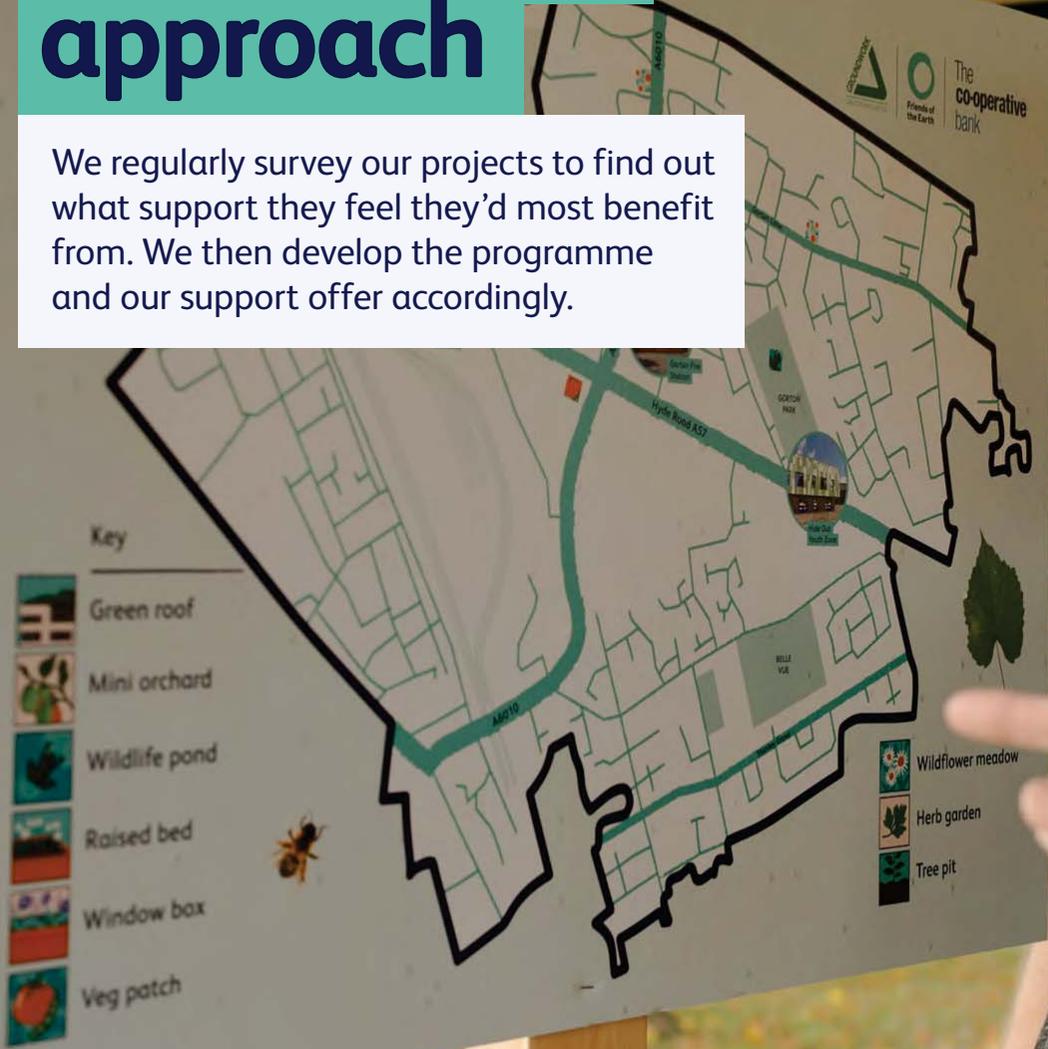
The gardeners have also enlisted support from local organisations, such as Hull Food Partnership, Hull Friends of the Earth and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, all of who are interested in experimenting with Hull City Council's ground-breaking Right to Grow policy once it comes into effect. The policy aims to make it easier for residents to grow on public land, providing communities with a right to access and use often neglected spaces for food growing, community gardening and wildlife projects.¹⁰

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust provided its expert recommendations on boosting biodiversity and supporting local wildlife across spaces in Orchard Park, which will be monitored and implemented by John.



Our iterative approach

We regularly survey our projects to find out what support they feel they'd most benefit from. We then develop the programme and our support offer accordingly.



On average, projects rated Friends of the Earth's training and network sessions

4.5/5
stars

2,685
minutes

of 1:1 helpline support provided to Postcode Gardeners and delivery partners (via phone/videocalls).

10 projects

visited in person by Friends of the Earth staff to support with session delivery, potential site assessments and strategic planning.

“It was really good to meet new people on the project and learn about their respective organisations. Apart from a really good introduction to the project, I found that the enterprise element was explained and emphasised well.”

Attendee feedback – project onboarding training

Looking forward

In 2024-25, we'll be growing our network and impact by:

More

opportunities for knowledge exchange and peer-learning among our diverse network of gardeners and organisers.

Future-proofing

projects through developing and testing sustainable business models. These include corporate volunteering days, garden maintenance contracts and bespoke green products.

4x

the number of public spaces transformed into havens for nature and wildlife.

Strengthening

our existing partnership with The Co-operative Bank, focusing on ways to bolster and amplify the impact of Postcode Gardeners within their communities.

8

new projects planting Postcode Gardeners in communities in Wales, Bristol and London.

Thank you

Friends of the Earth would like to thank The Co-operative Bank for their generous sponsorship of the programme that has made this work possible.

A massive thanks to our hardworking delivery partners (below) and Postcode Gardeners up and down the country, as well as local residents volunteering skills and time within their communities to bring back nature.



Footnotes

- 1 Public spaces for the purpose of this project are defined as publicly accessible plots or spots, ranging from smaller areas under 2 square metres (eg, tree pits, window boxes, planters) to larger spaces approximately. 2 – 10 square metres, such as raised beds, verges, green walls and roofs, alleyways or neglected amenity grassland.
- 2 Statistics come from 24 adults and children surveyed following Postcode Gardener sessions and activities at Wythenshawe, Notting Dale and Orchard Park projects between April and September 2024.
- 3 & 4 www.mentalhealth.org.uk
- 5 Bransholme, Orchard Park, Rose Hill and East Middlesbrough projects began biodiversity surveys in 2024.
- 6 This is drawn from a total of 84 bumblebee surveys carried out in our greened sites throughout 2024.
- 7 This is drawn from 55 pollinator surveys conducted in our greened sites in 2024.
- 8 In contrast, there were only 8 bumblebee and 21 other pollinator observations from 14 surveys carried out in the control areas during 2024. In Hackney and Bideford in 2023, there was a total of 28 observations of 3 bumblebee species from 13 surveys carried out in our greened sites. Projects also observed a total of 124 observations from 7 out of 10 pollinator groups from 13 surveys. This includes at least 21 different pollinator species. In contrast, there were no bumblebee and 1 other pollinator observation from 5 surveys carried out in the control areas.
- 9 www.ecoactive.org.uk/hackney-buzzline
- 10 www.incredibleedible.org.uk



Postcode Gardener

Find out more: friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/planting-more-postcode-gardeners-create-greener-streets

Get in touch: postcodegardener@foe.co.uk



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