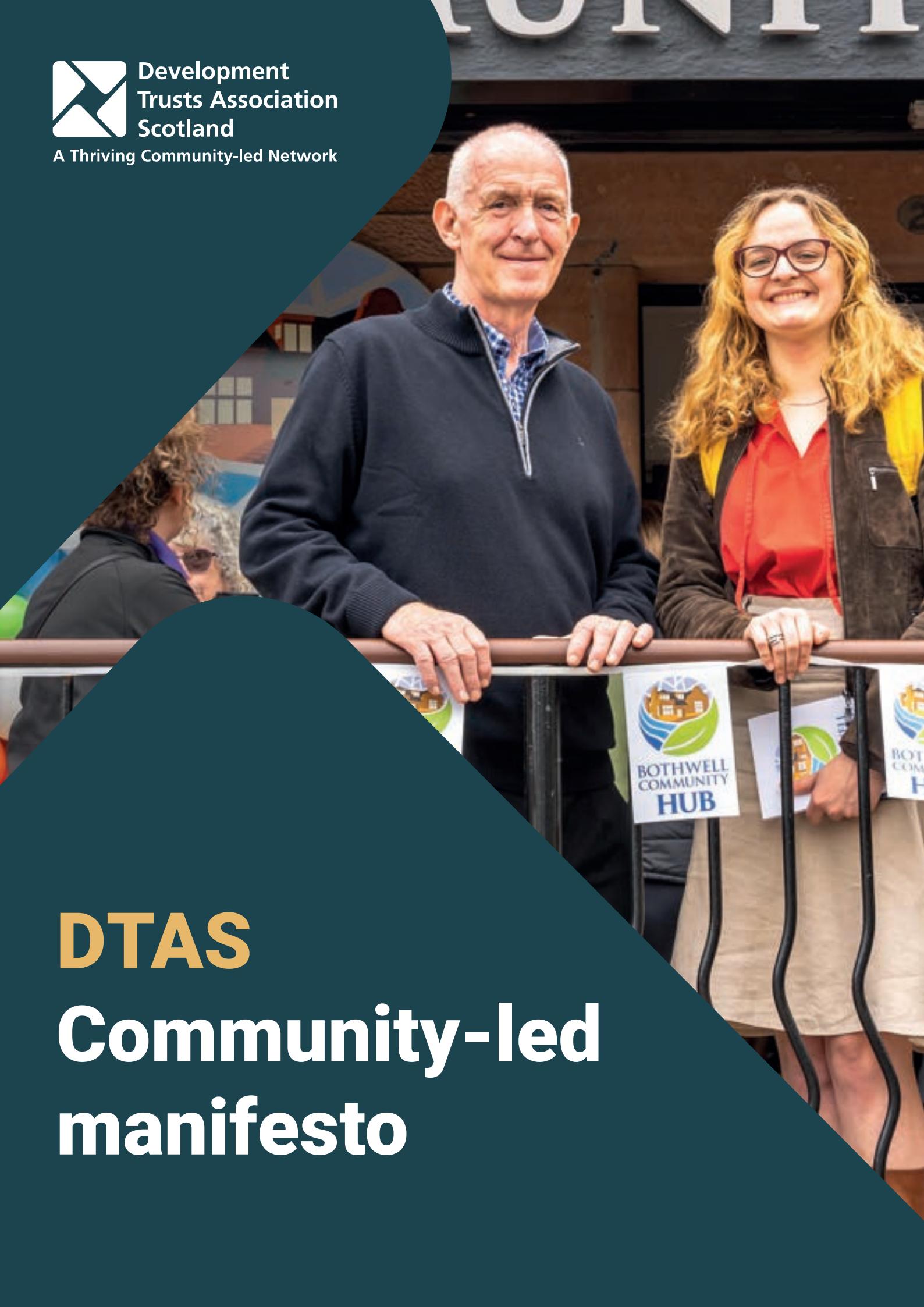




Development
Trusts Association
Scotland

A Thriving Community-led Network



DTAS

Community-led manifesto

Communities across Scotland are leading the way in building a stronger, fairer and more sustainable nation. By embracing reform and investing in community-led action, Scotland can unlock the full potential of its people and places.

Pillars for change

A sustainable, supportive environment for communities

Developing local democracy

An inclusive, sustainable, wellbeing economy

Land reform and community ownership

A just transition and climate action



Our mission:

‘Supporting communities to thrive, through our community-led network and national place-based sustainable action’.

[Read our 2024-2027 strategy here](#)

About us:

The Development Trusts Association Scotland is a **member-led network** representing nearly 400 development trusts across the country. We also support hundreds of community enterprises through our **Community Ownership Support Service**, which helps with asset transfers and ownership of land and buildings. In addition, our **Democratic Finance Scotland** team supports communities by enabling citizen-led investments such as community shares.

What is a development trust?

Development trusts are organisations that are:

- Community-owned and -controlled
- Place-based
- Enterprising

Based in diverse urban, rural and island communities, they are important ‘community anchor organisations’ – rooted in place – which provide thousands of essential services across Scotland, own vital community assets and deliver economic, environmental, social and cultural impact at a local level, with a national effect.

This manifesto is for all political parties, policymakers and citizens who want to see communities empowered to shape their own futures. It sets out practical, systemic reforms and actions that can be embraced by any political party or government committed to stronger communities and a healthy and wealthy Scotland.



1. A sustainable, supportive environment for communities

Unlocking the full potential of development trusts and other community-led enterprises.

Development trusts have long been filling gaps left by the state and private sector – from vital services like health, transport and housing, to creating jobs and tackling poverty. Let us stop fragmented funding and create an enabling environment that removes barriers, truly backs local leadership, and trusts and invests in communities to deliver on local, regional and national priorities.

We call for:

- **Long-term funding and investment:** multi-year (3, 5, or 10 year) commitments that end short-termism and enable sustained, place-based delivery. Economic, social, environmental and cultural change that is delivered through development trusts (inclusive, democratic businesses) resulting in lasting change; resilient and sustainable for generations to come.
- **Creation of a Scottish Community Wealth Fund:** use revenue from renewables and other sources to invest in community infrastructure projects. Communities will lead the design and governance of a national wealth fund, allowing the whole of Scotland to benefit from the renewables revolution and achieve a just transition.
- **Community capacity building:** ensure there is a strong support system in place so every community in Scotland can create and sustain a community anchor organisation.
- **Value and support volunteers:** fully implement Scotland's **Volunteering Action Plan** to ensure volunteers are respected, protected and supported in their role.
- **Public funding for local services:** fair and equitable funding needs to be granted to ensure community buildings and services continue, and that statutory responsibilities are not off-loaded on to volunteers. Social prescribing should be taken seriously and as integral to health prevention work. Communities should be financially supported to achieve long-term health improvements across the country, but particularly in our most deprived areas where we know sustained austerity has hit hardest.



Case study: Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association

The Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association (GURCA) formed in 1949 out of a need to protect local assets and create opportunities for community development. Initially focused on organising social events and managing spaces like the park, village green and hall, the organisation has grown into a driving force for community-led change.

A key milestone came when ownership of the village hall was transferred from trustees to the association – paving the way for GURCA to take on larger, more ambitious projects. One of its biggest successes was acquiring the village tourist information site and public toilets through community shares and transforming it into a tourism and transport hub which supports local businesses and visitors alike. This initiative, dubbed the 'Loch Ness Hub', is now a self-sustaining and separate entity to the trust - a community benefit society.

Building on this momentum, GURCA went on to develop new social initiatives. The organisation now leads mental health and wellbeing projects – including lunches, social evenings and support groups. It also collaborates with other local charities such as Glenurquhart Care Project - developing a community growing project on their land. GURCA recently bought a site which is now home to its ever-growing Men's Shed team.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate its commitment to support vulnerable community members, build thriving partnerships, and revitalise local businesses.

Helping to make a positive social impact, GURCA also works collaboratively with local charity Soirbheas – reinvesting profits into local groups and projects.

What began as a small local group has grown into a powerful force; empowering the people of Glen Urquhart to shape their own future – one built on care for the environment, community, and each other.



Drumnadrochit Community Garden from the 'Let Us Grow' project, in collaboration with GURCA

2. Developing local democracy

Strong, local, participatory and accountable.

Development trusts already deliver with and through local democratic structures. They own land, buildings, deliver services and lead on community action plans, often despite, rather than because of, the system. Our communities need more than just a voice: they need local democratic bodies that have real power, resources and democratic mandates to act. The principle of subsidiarity is paramount: placing authority, budgets and control at a community level will strengthen Scotland's democracy and truly empower communities.

We call for:

- **Commitment to new local democracy structures in Scotland:** a whole public sector and government (cross-party and COSLA) approach is needed to build capacity and devolve powers, decisions and finances to communities. This will aim to address our democratic deficit and improve democracy in Scotland through:
 - **Place-based local democratic bodies** (enablers) to include development trusts (deliverers) and other local community organisations, replacing or fully reforming existing community council structures.
 - **Local democratic bodies that are transparent and accountable.** Such bodies should have local elections, statutory powers, set priorities, and paid staff to administer and support the aims of the body.
 - **Powers and finance devolved to local democratic bodies.** Such bodies should be properly financed and managed and directed appropriately and proportionately. Planning and procurement powers should allow for these bodies to align directly with local priorities.
 - **Local democratic bodies that are, as far as possible, non-partisan.** They should be independent of existing party structures, with their priority on place not politics.



Case Study: The Pavillion

A key part of the Blairtummock and Rogerfield Partnership, The Pavillion in Easterhouse champions community-led democracy – where local people shape the services that matter most. Formed through collaboration between neighbourhood groups, the partnership unites organisations to deliver inclusive activities, cost-of-living support and strengthen the community's voice within Glasgow City Council's North East Partnership.

The foundations of the partnership were laid during the Covid-19 pandemic, when community groups coordinated emergency support for vulnerable residents. As restrictions eased, engagement with locals raised concerns around isolation, poverty and poor health. In response, The Pavillion secured funding to create initiatives like a weekly walking group and men's shed, which continue to strengthen local connection and wellbeing today.

Collaboration has since expanded through joint bids with partners. In 2024 and 2025, The Pavilion delivered thousands of snacks and hot meals to families facing hardship, and in 2023, it became one of two pioneer neighbourhoods for the Creative Climate Futures initiative. This saw nearly 2000 Easterhouse residents take part in sessions discussing how to embed sustainability into daily life.

The Pavilion is now focussed on the construction of a multiuse destination park, which has been co-designed with residents and is supported by Glasgow City Council. The new facility will include flexible indoor spaces, nature trails, play zones, a pump track, bouldering area and Net-Zero-standard amenities for climate learning and enterprise.

From cost-of-living support to combating climate challenges, The Pavillion shows how community partnership can drive real impact, empowering local people to drive lasting change in their community.



Session on the new Pavillion Complex and Destination Park delivered to local young people

3. An inclusive, sustainable, wellbeing economy

Creating community wealth that works for people and planet.

A place-based approach to economic policy that puts citizen and local needs at the centre, grows resilient local economies, and roots prosperity across all communities in Scotland. Development trusts, when given powers and resources, deliver proven socio-economic impact. To make this the norm, we need democratic finance, community wealth building, and a level playing field for community-owned businesses alongside private enterprise.

We call for:

- Support for democratic finance models:** increase citizen investment via community shares and bonds, including a Scottish Community Shares Booster Fund, to reduce grant-dependence, grow community-owned enterprise, and give people the tools to take a real local stake.
- Commit fully to community wealth building and the principle of the wellbeing economy:** embed these principles in policy and budgets – local solutions, participation, dignity, fairness, purpose and nature; measure success beyond GDP and grow and retain wealth in communities.
- Fair, proportionate procurement:** embed social value principles in procurement policy, recognise the added value of community-owned enterprises, embrace community-led consortia across regions and, on the principle of subsidiarity, commission services where they are needed most.
- Focus on rural depopulation:** targeted, long-term investment for development trusts to support the reversal of depopulation efforts. Development trusts are regularly found in fragile rural communities. We need investment that will provide affordable housing, quality jobs and enterprise, better transport and digital connectivity. Much of this is vital to attract and retain young people, growing diverse, sustainable, vibrant communities.



Case study: St Andrews Environmental Network

After community members in Fife highlighted a lack of accessible beach options for people with mobility impairments, St Andrews Environmental Network took action.

With crucial funding from The Hamish Foundation to kick start the project, the charity has provided access to six wheelchairs and a walker, allowing people with a range of mobility impairments to enjoy the beach. Visitors and residents can rent the equipment four days a week, from April to October.

The St. Andrew's Beach Wheelchairs are in high demand, allowing those who have been unable to access the beach to enjoy it again. One family has used the service regularly for the past three years, and another was able to take their terminally ill child to the beach for the last time.

The project was originally managed by volunteers, however thanks to funding from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, a coordinator recently joined the team to manage logistics and begin expanding the service, starting with an additional container to house more wheelchairs.

The mental health benefits are clear – with users, staff and volunteers all sharing in the joy of inclusion and making the beach accessible. The project's impact extends beyond individual users to entire families and groups, such as scout troops, who benefit from the increased accessibility.

St Andrews Environmental Network offers advice to further trusts looking to implement similar projects – highlighting the importance of consultation, collaboration, inclusion of those with lived experience and comprehensive evaluation.

Case study: Culbokie Community Trust

Culbokie Community Trust (CCT) was set up in 2014 with a vision to regenerate its community and lead on community development. Underpinning this core aim is the Trust's commitment to environmental action.

The Trust used Community Right to Buy legislation to purchase 1.5 acres of land geared at creating a site for widescale community regeneration. The land is to be used for a community hub with a biodiverse central gathering space, affordable housing, a community café and a multipurpose community and business space with a focus on health and wellbeing – all meeting extremely high environmental standards.

To date, it has developed Culbokie Green, a volunteer base, a rapid EV charge point, a public toilet and six new affordable houses through Cairn Housing Association. The Trust also supports a "Sharing Shed", where people

can drop off and pick up a variety of items, to support a circular economy and reduce waste.

Now a focal point for village life, Culbokie Green is enjoyed by families, walkers and members of the local community who gather there regularly. Building on its success, CCT is also developing an active travel route with support from Sustrans and Highland Council. The route will connect the village's main assets, making it easier to walk, wheel or cycle end to end through the village. The project includes green spaces to encourage walking, cycling and socialising. The Trust also runs a cycling club with trained ride leaders.

The impact of CCT's work has been transformative - CCT's experience shows how community ownership, collaboration and environmental stewardship can create lasting, low-carbon change.

4. Land reform and community ownership

Empowering communities to take on sustainable assets.

Land and assets must first serve the people and places they are located in. To make that possible, we must support communities to acquire and steward viable, sustainable assets – not liabilities. Community-owned buildings and land underpin development trusts and work in communities, providing homes, enterprise space, culture and essential services. From former churches and police stations to council community centres, parks and derelict sites, these assets can be repurposed for local benefit. However, the system must effectively back communities to take them on and make them work.

We call for:

- **Land Reform Bill amendments:** to strengthen community rights, increase transparency and enable communities to act when land isn't serving public and community interests.
- **Refreshed Community Asset Transfer and Community Right to Buy legislation:** take forward recommendations from the consultations to make it easier and faster for communities to secure sustainable assets that serve their needs.
- **Tackling empty properties and derelict land:** strengthen and enforce existing powers – including compulsory purchase and sale orders – so they are used effectively. Giving communities the ability to trigger action when land and buildings are left vacant and adopt a clear “**community first**” approach to bringing these sites back into productive use. The development of a **national post-acquisition facilities management service** to support the long-term sustainability of assets (buildings) in community ownership.
- **Community ownership funding:** An increase in the Scottish Land Fund and dedicated community ownership funding, ensuring communities have the investment needed to take on land and assets, and the capital and revenue funding required to make those assets productive and sustainable. This includes support for refurbishment/renovation of community assets and for redevelopment and repurposing where required.



Case study: Tayport Community Trust

When residents in Tayport identified a lack of local sports and community facilities, Tayport Community Trust stepped up to create a new hub for the town.

In 2016, after years of planning, fundraising and consultation, the Trust secured a three-acre former steel fabrication site close to Tentsmuir Forest and the beach. With support from the Scottish Land Fund and Community Ownership Support Service, the land was purchased from Fife Council for £40,000 - significantly below the original asking price. Remediation of contamination from the site's industrial past was further supported by Fife Council and the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund.

The once-unused site has been transformed into The Larick Centre – a vibrant, multi-purpose community facility with a café, event spaces and a nearby campsite. The project was made possible by funds raised by the Tayport Community and Sports Centre Action Group, and more than £3 million in additional support from partners including Big Lottery Fund's Growing Community Assets programme, the Robertson Trust, Fife Council, Fife Environment Trust and the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund.

Since opening, the centre has become a cornerstone of community life. During lockdown, locals described it as a "life-saver", offering a safe and welcoming place to connect. It also served as a vaccination venue and now hosts yoga classes, youth groups, advice sessions and family activities – alongside a popular community fridge where visitors can donate and share food.

Tayport Community Trust continues to expand its activities through its trading arm, Tayport Community Enterprises, which operates several cafés, The Larick Campsite and an environmental project, PLANT (People Learning About Nature in Tayport).

Today, the Larick Centre stands as a lasting symbol of persistence, partnership and local pride.



Larick Cafe exterior

5. A just transition and climate action

Positioning communities at the heart of Scotland's net zero journey.

A just transition must place communities at the centre to build stronger, fairer community infrastructure and local economies. Development trusts and community enterprises are central to climate action, renewable energy generation and climate resilience. To build public support for renewables and the energy transition, we must enable and support increased community ownership and shared ownership of new and existing electricity and heat infrastructure, and fair distribution of the wealth that is being consolidated through renewables.

We call for:

- **Action to reach 1GW of community-owned energy in Scotland by 2030:** capacity building and financial support for communities to have 100% ownership of renewable energy or a shared ownership stake (shares) in private developments. Increase CARES funding for community energy to £15m/year, rising each year (compared to £13m in 2025.)
- **Long-term investment in community-led climate action:** end the cycle of short-term pilots and enable communities to become climate resilient.
- **Increased support for the implementation of locally-led adaptation initiatives** within the Adaptation Scotland programme.
- **Mandatory and meaningful community benefit funds:** provide community benefit funds at the benchmark level set out in the Scottish Government's Good Practice Principles, or any higher benchmark set by the UK Government.





Case study: Glasgow Eco Trust

For over two decades, Glasgow Eco Trust has championed sustainability and community-led climate action in west Glasgow. Originating from the Dumbarton Road Corridor Environment Trust (DRCET) – established through an 18-month community consultation under the former Social Inclusion Partnership programme – the organisation was founded to deliver a 20-year environmental vision for the local area. Rebranded in 2018, Glasgow Eco Trust continues to turn that vision into reality.

Despite facing administrative challenges and limited resources, the Trust has become a foundation for local climate and social wellbeing initiatives. Working across five core themes – transport, food, resource use, energy and spaces – it delivers practical projects that help residents adopt climate-friendly behaviours while improving daily life.

Flagship initiatives include De'ils on Wheels, a community bike workshop that has inspired the reuse of over 2,500 bikes since 2014, preventing over 32 tonnes of CO₂ emissions. The Trust also supports community gardens and clean-ups, and the Food and Climate Action project – all aimed at promoting sustainability and reducing inequality.

Recognising that individuals can't tackle the climate crisis alone, Glasgow Eco Trust also advocates for systemic change, developing active travel and sustainable transport plans that push for improved public transport and safer walking and cycling routes.

As a small organisation serving more than 70 residents each week, capacity and funding remain ongoing challenges. Yet through innovation – such as its pioneering community flight donation scheme, which redirects funds from frequent flyers into local climate projects – the Trust continues to deliver real benefits for people, place and planet.

Read other manifestos here:

- [Scottish Community Alliance](#)
- [Scottish Community Coalition on Energy](#)
- [Social Enterprise Scotland](#)
- [Community Land Scotland](#)