

Written evidence from Groundwork UK

1. About us

- 1.1. Groundwork is a federation of charities mobilising practical action on poverty and climate change. We work alongside the most disadvantaged communities in the UK, helping to restore nature, improve people's prospects and help people make greener choices. Since 1981, we have been working with local authorities, national government, businesses and communities to address environmental issues.
- 1.2. Groundwork's evidence will focus on the final question posed by the call for evidence, as this is the area in which Groundwork has the greatest expertise.

2. What role can local community groups play in helping local authorities achieve their net zero ambitions?

- 2.1. The involvement of communities in local authorities' net zero plans is vital. Reaching net zero will mean changes to the way we all live and work, and these changes cannot be imposed from the top down. While some changes will need to be made by authorities, local people must play a role in decision-making and other changes will be more effectively led from the bottom up.
- 2.2. It is important to bear in mind that many low-income communities have relatively low carbon footprints, and therefore the emphasis must be on improving the local neighbourhood through climate friendly measures. There are significant opportunities to improve the prospects of local people through green jobs, better public transport, more high-quality green spaces, and locally grown food. These opportunities should form the basis of engagement with communities and community groups around local authorities' net zero plans.
- 2.3. The voluntary sector plays an important role in facilitating community action on climate change, acting as a bridge between local authorities and local people. Over the past 40 years, Groundwork has worked alongside disadvantaged communities across the UK to help them improve the local environment and find solutions to the problems affecting them. Many of these activities contribute to reducing carbon emissions and increasing climate resilience.
- 2.4. Third sector organisations play a crucial role in facilitating community-led action on climate change. For example:
 - 2.4.1. Groundwork's Communities Prepared programme is a leading community resilience programme delivered in partnership with the Environment Agency, Cornwall Community Flood Forum and CCB Training. The programme is developing a network of trained and empowered volunteers to help communities take crucial steps towards greater resilience. Shortly after the Portreath Flood Group finished their training, they put their plan into action when their village was flooded. The volunteers provided a vital bridge between emergency services and residents, knocking on doors, handing out evacuation letters, and providing a safe space for displaced households.
 - 2.4.2. Through our national Green Leaders project, nearly 1,000 young people have been supported to lead local environmental projects in their neighbourhoods, building their understanding of climate change and other environmental issues while gaining the skills they need to do something about them. 80% say they now understand how climate change is affecting their local area and more than two thirds have become advocates for action among their family and friends.
- 2.5. Most people want to do the right thing for the planet, so equipping communities with the knowledge and practical help needed to identify and adopt greener lifestyle choices is vital to ensuring they can contribute to local authorities' net zero plans. For example:

- 2.5.1. Through Carbon Literacy training, Groundwork is supporting local community groups and businesses to increase their awareness of their carbon emissions, the first step in making informed decisions about reducing them.
 - 2.5.2. Groundwork's Green Doctors help vulnerable households across the country save energy, water, and money by providing practical measures, behavioural advice, and signposting to other forms of support. In Leeds, Green Doctors contributed to the City's Affordable Warmth Strategy, Housing Strategy and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy by undertaking 2,000 home visits to households in financial difficulty, helping residents realise savings of nearly £30,000.
 - 2.5.3. Learning green behaviours can begin at any age. The Wellies in the Woods programme allows parents and children to learn together to improve their health and wellbeing while exploring and caring for the environment. The courses cover topics including growing fruits and vegetables, healthy cooking and eating, using gardening tools safely, composting, pest control and gardening for wildlife.
- 2.6. Connecting the global issue of climate change to the local environment is vital to achieving community buy in to local authorities' climate action plans. Initiatives that create tangible improvements to the local environment, while increasing climate resilience, are an indispensable way of engaging communities in net zero. For example:
- 2.6.1. The LIFE+ climate-proofing social housing project delivered packages of low-cost climate-change adaptation measures across three social-housing estates in Hammersmith and Fulham. The project has helped to reduce vulnerability to climate change among those local communities by improving green infrastructure. The approach recognises the potential such measures have for increasing communities' resilience to climate change while also delivering multiple other benefits, including improvements in biodiversity, visual amenity, play provision, local food production and air quality.
 - 2.6.2. West Gorton Community Park is the first of its kind in Greater Manchester – described as a “sponge park” for its contribution to tackling climate change, the space is brimming with nature-based solutions that blend effortlessly as features in the landscape and overall design. When approaching the design of the project, Groundwork engaged the community to ensure they had a say in how the park would look at its priorities. As a result, residents feel ownership of the space and pride of its role in addressing climate change. Manchester City Council was among the partners involved in the project.
- 2.7. Building a more sustainable society means changing the way we work and ensuring we have the skills required for a low-carbon economy that also builds wealth in local communities. The transition to net zero should present significant opportunities for local communities to strengthen their green economies and take advantage of new green jobs. For example:
- 2.7.1. Groundwork's Green Teams are helping to restore nature and create new community facilities across the UK, while providing team members with the opportunity to learn new skills, gain qualifications and prepare for careers in the green economy.
 - 2.7.2. The Loops are two award winning community reuse hubs in London designed to help communities recycle and reuse more household goods, which reduces fly-tipping and the amount of waste sent to landfill sites. Unwanted furniture and other household goods are collected, repaired, up-cycled and sold at affordable prices to the local community. The Loops have built a movement of local people committed to

re-use and also provide training, employment and volunteering opportunities to residents.

2.8. Groundwork has a long history of working with both local authorities and community groups, helping them work together to address climate change and improve the local environment. We believe that this approach will be central to the success of local authorities' net zero efforts.

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