

CAST BRIEFING 44 - January 2026



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From awareness to action: The role of community climate hubs in encouraging low-carbon lifestyles

Key messages:

- Engaging with community climate hubs motivates people to adopt multiple sustainable practices. These include actions which limit waste (e.g., buying less; repairing or sharing items), but also travelling more sustainably, and reducing energy and water use in the home.
- Hub engagement builds people's knowledge and confidence to initiate discussions with others about low-carbon living, and this transforms passive citizens into active change-makers. By learning from each other, hub users feel inspired and better equipped to act individually and collectively on climate change.
- Community climate hubs have an important role in building community and improving wellbeing. They support people to manage their concerns about climate change, they prevent loneliness by providing a space where people can meet, and they increase community cohesion by bringing diverse groups together.
- Some hubs share knowledge with each other through regional networks¹ and with local partners in voluntary sector networks². The hubs help create 'communities of practice' for positive coordinated action on climate, health, wellbeing, education, and inclusion.

Background and context

This briefing is intended as a resource for local authorities and policymakers that are interested in how to engage the public on climate change and low-carbon behaviours.

Public engagement on climate change from national and local government has typically³ focused on information campaigns, which aim to educate people and provide clear, actionable steps for reducing energy demand or waste. Information campaigns may raise awareness and concern about environmental issues, but their effectiveness in leading to behaviour change is often limited⁴.

Community climate hubs (or eco-hubs) offer an alternative model of public engagement. They are public spaces that are physically located within the communities they aim to support, and so they are visible and accessible to anyone. Hubs aim to inspire and equip individuals and local organisations with the tools and understanding needed to reduce their environmental impact.

They use a peer-learning approach, where people share knowledge and practical skills with each other in workshops, events, and informal drop-in sessions. With the flexibility to adapt activities to local environmental challenges and community priorities, the hub model increases uptake of sustainable behaviours, strengthens people's sense of agency, and helps channel climate concern into constructive action.

¹The North East Scotland Climate Action Network ([NESCAN](#)) is one example.

²For instance, Greener and Cleaner is a member of [Community Links Bromley](#)

³Deliberative processes such as Citizens' Assemblies are another form of public engagement which has been increasingly used in recent years to inform climate policy and increase legitimacy.

⁴For example, a recent study by Nisa et al. (2022) found consumer messages to reduce food waste had a negligible effect in encouraging behaviour change. See: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2022.02.020>

Recommendations

Local authorities and policymakers that are seeking effective ways to engage the public on climate change should consider supporting community climate hubs in the following ways:

1) Provide long-term core funding

Grassroots initiatives often face a lack of money and rely on volunteers to provide vital services to their local communities. Where possible, provide sustained core funding to hubs and support them in identifying additional funding opportunities and developing bids.

2) Provide premises

One of the reasons community climate hubs work is because they are visible and accessible to everyone. Providing fixed premises in central locations in towns and cities, free or at low cost, would enable more hubs to be established across the UK.

3) Support knowledge exchange for emerging hubs

Drawing on the [NESCAN](#) and [SSCAN](#) examples, provide resources and build capacity for established hubs such as Greener and Cleaner and Sideshore to share their learning with new hubs. This could be through mentoring schemes, developing open access toolkits or training, and building regional networks.

4) Strengthen place-based communities of practice

Integrate hubs into local climate action plans and convene cross-sector service providers to enable coordinated action on climate, health, wellbeing, education and inclusion. This will help limited resources go further, identify individuals who need support, and improve community outcomes.



What we did

Researchers from the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) and the [European Centre for Environment and Human Health](#) at the University of Exeter conducted separate evaluations of two community climate hubs:

- The [Greener and Cleaner Hub](#) in Bromley, South East London
- The [Sideshore Community Hub](#) in Exmouth, Devon

These two place-based contexts – an urban centre and a semi-rural coastal town – demonstrate how the hub public engagement model works in different settings.

Data was collected from hub users via surveys and interviews in 2024/25. Both evaluations examined how attending the hub influences people's understanding of environmental issues, their adoption of low-carbon behaviours, and their community participation. The [Greener and Cleaner evaluation report](#) can be found on the CAST website, and the [initial Sideshore study findings](#) are available on the University of Exeter's website.



Findings

Figure 1 is an overview of the mechanisms of behaviour change employed by community climate hubs and the subsequent behavioural outcomes.

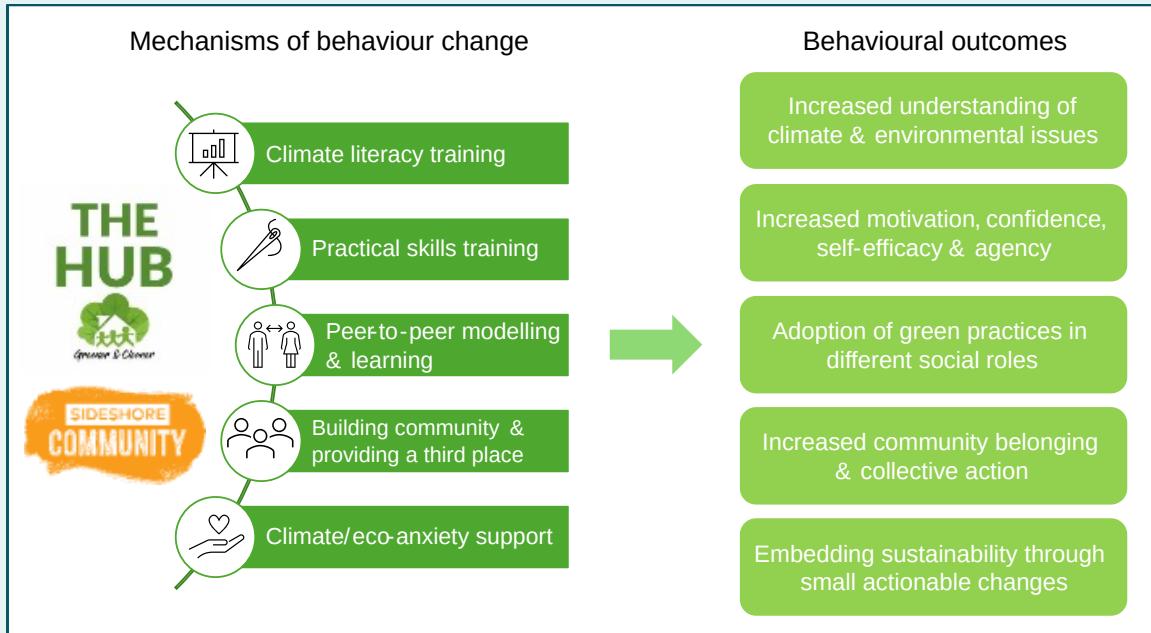


Figure 1: Community climate hub mechanisms of behaviour change and the behavioural outcomes

1) Community climate hubs motivate people to adopt low-carbon behaviours

A high proportion of hub users have adopted low-carbon behaviours, or do them more often, because of attending the hub (see Figure 2). These include individual actions, such as repairing or sharing items to reduce material consumption, but also different forms of environmental advocacy to influence systemic change, such as writing to the local MP.

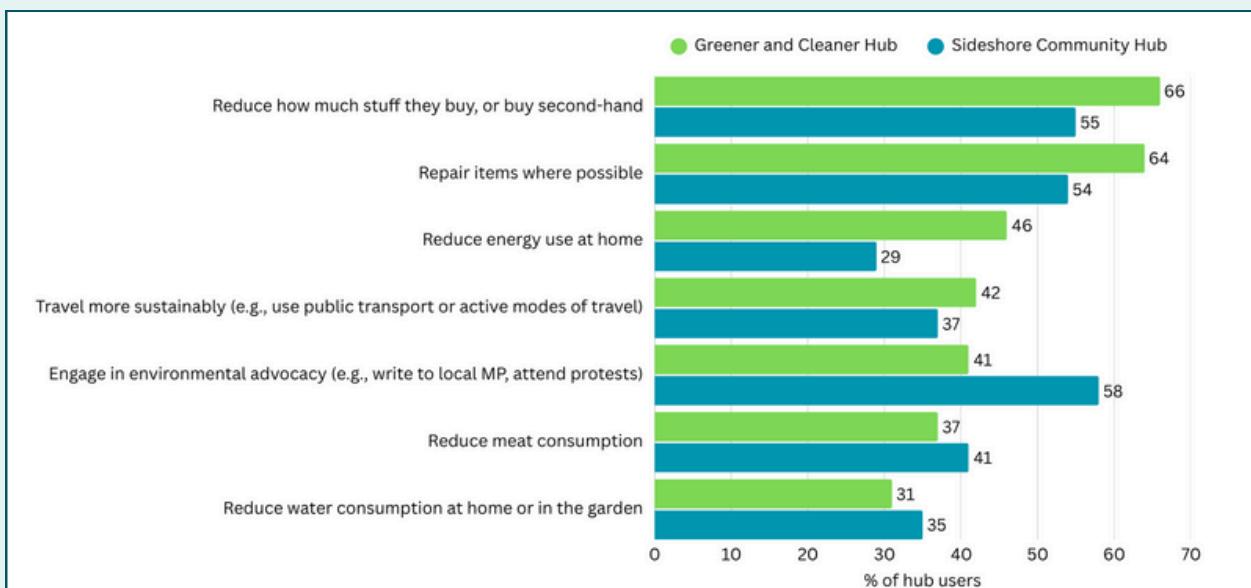


Figure 2: Percentage of hub users that adopt a low-carbon behaviour, or do it more often, as a result of attending the hub

Hub users highlighted how their understanding of sustainable living develops through informal and often practical peer-learning: *“If I have a question, I can always just come to the hub and ask, and I know for sure that I will have the answer”*. These conversations and shared experiences help people to critically reflect on their own lifestyles and learn how to embed sustainability through small, manageable changes in behaviour: *“It’s legitimised making small changes. Because I think sometimes with environmental issues you try and look for the silver bullet, like, really big bang changes”*.

2) The hubs increase people’s knowledge and confidence to initiate discussions about sustainable living

Both studies found that, over time, hub users gain confidence and become more willing to discuss low-carbon living with others: *“Well, I’ve got the language. So I’ve got the carbon literacy, I can talk about my footprint”*. This increased confidence translates into action. Almost a third (31%) of Greener and Cleaner survey respondents were hub volunteers, revealing that many people who use the hub subsequently choose to become more involved by, for example, running a workshop. Similarly, most (58%) Sideshore Hub users reported volunteering with environmental groups or sharing environmental knowledge.



Figure 3: A Greener and Cleaner volunteer discussing the hub’s activities with someone passing by the hub
(Credit: Greener and Cleaner)

3) The hubs improve wellbeing, support inclusivity, and build community

Many people experience climate anxiety, and this can lead to inaction or apathy if these negative feelings become overwhelming⁵. Hubs try to address this by offering different forms of support, for instance, by running ‘climate cafes’⁶. Most Sideshore users (86%) reported enhanced mental wellbeing through attending the hub, and this was associated with lower climate anxiety levels.

Hub engagement, therefore, increases people's individual and collective agency in tackling climate change: "*I think being around the hub does help me feel...part of the community that are trying to do something about it*".

Given the recent decline in community public spaces, the hubs also play a crucial role in preventing people from feeling isolated: "*Every Monday, the ladies come for the crochet group. Some of them, they have disabilities and are very old aged, and they need a community where they can come and spend their time and chat and it's very nice to see*". The hubs function as 'third places' that bring people together outside of home and work.

Providing these social spaces fosters inclusivity, connection and community resilience: "*That's another one of the massive strengths of the hub, is that it can draw in people from so many different backgrounds and walks of life and do it in such an approachable, friendly way*".

4) The hubs help create 'communities of practice' to enable systemic change

Community climate hubs are proactive in building networks of actors who can bring about positive change. A good example is the North East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCAN)⁷, which shares training resources, seed funding, and collaboration opportunities across 24 regional hubs in Scotland. Such networks ensure new hubs are not starting from scratch. A further benefit is that new knowledge can be shared quickly, for example, to raise public awareness of adaptation actions in response to climate impacts.

Hubs participate in and help develop cross-sector partnerships with local authorities, health and social care providers, and other voluntary sector organisations. For example, Sideshore regularly collaborates with Exmouth Town Council to host a range of community-focused activities, while Greener and Cleaner is a member of Community Links Bromley and supports the network's wellbeing and mental health programmes. As the hubs are embedded within their communities and their core role is to engage the public, they are well placed to help deliver coordinated action on climate, health, wellbeing, education and inclusion that meets local needs. The hubs can also help identify the intended beneficiaries, such as vulnerable individuals who may not typically interact with formal community support providers. These place-based networks support a just transition, as well as social justice more broadly.

⁵Sachet, P., New Scientist, published online 21 October 2019. [Stressed about climate change? Eight tips for managing eco-anxiety](#) | [New Scientist](#). Many organisations offer practical suggestions on managing eco-anxiety, for example: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/top-10-tips-combat-ecoanxiety-simple-actions>

⁶Climate cafes are an open, inclusive space for people to get together to talk about their emotions associated with climate change and how they can take positive actions. See: [What is a Climate Café®? – Climate Café®](#)

⁷Other examples include the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SSCAN), the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, and the Climate Emergency Centre project.

Further reading

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- Zanin, B., Verfuerth, C., Demski, C., Cherry, C., Whitmarsh, L. & Powell, D. (2024). Five principles for good public engagement: How to get people involved in the climate conversation. [CAST Briefing 29](#)

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