

Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector: Building Equity, Collaboration and Resilience

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Introduction

On the 25th of June Macc hosted an event exploring Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector: Building Equity, Collaboration and Resilience.

We were joined by 33 colleagues from across the VCSE sector, statutory bodies, and individuals interested in climate action. Throughout the morning the following speakers shared their organisation's ongoing work and perspectives:

- **Michaux Danzoll** (Macc, Executive Assistant Trainee): Impact Research report 'Mapping Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector'
- **Kieron McGlasson** (Sow the City, Director, Communities Team Manager & Green Spaces Fund Advisor): Supporting grassroots climate and environmental action across Manchester
- **Daniell Musaheb** (Ardwick Climate Action): Creating access to green spaces, travel routes, and raising awareness of air pollution in Ardwick
- **Peter Norris** (Manchester City Council, Strategy and Economic Policy Manager): Implications of Manchester's strategy and policy framework for climate action
- **Dr. Kat Lowe** (Manchester Climate Change Agency, Programme and Partnership Manager at In Our Nature): The work of In Our Nature supporting diverse grassroots climate action projects across Manchester.

Following these presentations, attendees shared their thoughts on the research outcomes, the current landscape and discussed next steps in Manchester to support and grow climate action in the VCSE sector.

Below is a summary of our findings from these discussions. Please see resources and presentations from our speakers at the bottom of this document.



Table Discussions: Reflections on the research Mapping Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector

Reflections on the research Mapping Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector

1. Perspectives on climate action

Attendees shared that 'climate action' can sometimes feel abstract, and they struggle to translate it into practical terms. This feeling reinforces a common perception of climate change being too big of an issue for individuals or grassroots organisations to make an impact on.

Creating a term and definition that acknowledges the diversity of projects that drive climate action would be beneficial, as it would enable groups to identify their climate related work.

Conversations highlighted that due to the limitations of the terminology, some organisations deliver climate benefits without recognising or labelling them as such. They instead emerge as co-benefits from wider objectives. To acknowledge this diversity, one attendee mentioned that it might be beneficial to create sub-groups or categories within the larger networks that exist.

2. Perspectives not captured in the research project presented by Michaux at Macc

Participants highlighted a range of considerations and perspectives that the research did not address.

One discussion explored the trade-offs between targeting high-emitting, wealthier communities that can afford to retrofit their homes compared to working in low-income communities that more frequently face fuel poverty and health inequalities. This reflects a wider conversation regarding the sector's focus on climate adaptation (resilience), while system-level action to achieve widespread emissions reduction feels out of reach.

Other attendees enquired about the possible causes driving the difference in engagement with North Manchester communities compared to South Manchester. A potential further research topic that emerged was investigating the idea of climate action from the perspective of service users.

Another overlooked phenomenon was the post-Covid dip in public interest in climate change, driving the view of climate action as secondary to health and poverty objectives despite the strong co-benefits. It was highlighted that climate action is interconnected to a lot of the current social issues and further exacerbates existing health inequalities. However, with existing challenges and the impact of the cost of living crisis communities have been pushed to focus more on urgent day-to-day needs. This has left sustainability and long-term solutions (which take time to come to fruition) in the periphery and at the bottom of the list of priorities to dedicate time and resource to.

3. Reflections on barriers and support needs

The discussions reiterated the support needs that exist across the VCSE sector, which include access to core funding, centralised resources, stronger networking routes and meaningful engagement with the public and private sectors.

Interestingly, an attendee mentioned the skills shortage that is preventing organisations from working on retrofitting and renewable energy projects, suggesting that partnerships with specialised firms could be a potential route to address this shortcoming.

Another common theme was the fragmented co-ordination between Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Manchester City Council and the VCSE sector, with limited opportunities for interfaces.



One attendee mentioned the opportunity to learn from London's success in co-ordinating both horizontally and vertically across sectors and scales. Multiple participants explained the barriers presented by funding structures that set priorities without consulting local communities and VCSEs, in addition to the disproportionate amount of activity funding compared to core funding.

4. Future opportunities and support offers

Table discussions emphasised that regular dialogue with MCC and efforts to influence funders to align structures with sector needs are priorities for increasing the impact and scale of VCSE climate action.

Macc has a role in pushing funders to provide core funding, medium-sized grants and other flexible funding structures that are most impactful for VCSEs working on climate action projects. As part of reshaping structures to reflect bottom-up priorities, one attendee suggested partnering more closely with MCC through neighbourhood-level officers, to co-design solutions with communities and VCSEs. Participants also cited a central climate funding portal or clearer bulletin for grants as a potential first step.

One participant highlighted the opportunity to reach new audiences and reframe climate action through everyday issues through existing trusted channels such as faith groups and food banks. Attendees mentioned the creation of more corporate volunteering and skills matching schemes as a potential avenue to draw in new audiences and capabilities.

This could also take the form of mentoring for groups based on issues or organisation structure, with a participant citing a mentoring for co-operatives scheme with MYCO Manchester. Attendees shared their concerns about duplicating existing networks and resource hubs when creating new support offers.

Additionally, table discussions focused on support for groups in communicating the importance of climate change and how it intersects with more salient community issues.

Table Discussion 2: Current Landscape & Next Steps

1. What stands out in Manchester's VCSE Climate Action

From conversations with attendees, the number of local, grassroots projects that foster pride and community resilience stood out as a defining feature.

They also highlighted that these projects often spring out of modest seed funding that sparks lasting change. One participant cited that the online hub as part of the In Our Nature programme, which will be available after the funding ends, provides many of the resources cited within the proposed resource hub.

2. Lessons learned from peers

An important learning from the session was the importance of leading with co-benefits or win-win scenarios, such as cost savings, health benefits, or social cohesion, before delving into the larger climate impacts. Similarly, story-based case studies resonated with participants and service users far more than scientific or technical messaging.

3. Next steps for the sector

A frequently mentioned next step was the creation of bespoke training for VCSE organisations that avoids the one-size-fits-all approach.

Attendees cited initiatives such as Carbon Literacy as a model but emphasised that it is important that any training be tailored to the VCSE sector and the level at which organisations are at in their climate action journey. Ultimately, the goal of this kind of training would be to bridge gaps of understanding and application to embed climate considerations into everyday work.

Discussions also covered the creation of a central resource point for Manchester VCSEs that shared curated resources, case studies, and accredited training opportunities. This would also provide an opportunity to centralise funding opportunities.



Based on the recommendations provided as part of the research project, attendees considered the creation of an independent VCSE network. Participants emphasised the importance of this type of network being independent of MCC and based on a simplified offer that promotes inclusivity for smaller groups. The aim of this network would be to build capacity outside of the existing climate-focused groups, encourage partnerships, advocate for strategic working with MCC, and possibly apply to large funding pots as a consortium.

4. Future vision

Participants highlighted stronger links with health issues and statutory bodies as critical for the future growth of the sector. This relies on the potential of centering green social prescribing in prevention to reduce NHS strain and address inequalities.

Discussions also reinforced the importance of demonstrating and quantifying co-benefits to convey impact for funders. One suggestion was to work with the MCC Zero Carbon VCSE teams to look at and embed co-benefits of climate action into impact monitoring and evaluation standards that will promote the work of small organisations.

There was also a suggestion that, moving forward, Macc convene networking spaces to bring the sector together. However, we think our role in this space is to support, enable and amplify what is already happening and ensure we are not duplicating any work that's already underway. There is indeed a role for Macc to be the connector and the conduit through events of similar nature, through the Community Explorers network and VCSE Leaders group, as well as through the strategic VCSE representation work within different decision-making spaces and structures at MCC.



Resources

**Michaux Danzoll (Macc, Executive Assistant Trainee): Impact Research report
'Mapping Climate Action in Manchester's VCSE Sector'**

[Article: Nature in the City of Bees: Greenspaces, Climate Resilience, and Social Justice in Manchester](#)

Daniell Musaheb (Ardwick Climate Action): Creating access to greenspaces, travel routes, and raising awareness of air pollution in Ardwick

[Ardwick Climate Action Kale Street Project](#)

[Ardwick Climate Action Scouts Project](#)

Dr. Kat Lowe (Manchester Climate Change Agency, Programme and Partnership Manager at In Our Nature): The work of In Our Nature supporting diverse grassroots climate action projects across Manchester

[In Our Nature Resource Hub](#)

Macc Resources

[Macc Climate Resources](#)

[Corporate Volunteering and Employer Supported Volunteering](#)

[Sign-up for monthly funding bulletin](#)

[Macc Membership Sign Up](#)

[Capacity Building and Support for Groups](#)





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