

Working with Nature in and around Anstruther



The James
Hutton
Institute

A summary of a study about people's perceptions, motivations and experiences

What is this document about?

This short document shares headline findings from a study led by researchers from the James Hutton Institute and funded by the Scottish Government. The study examined people's experience about nature-based Solutions (NbS) and related activities. The document is for local residents and community groups interested in learning more about involving more people when working with nature in and around Anstruther. In the following sections we provide some key insights from this study.

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Aim of the study

We set out to learn about awareness, involvement, and what helps or prevents people's involvement in nature-based solutions (NbS). Currently there is great interest in exploring these kinds of ideas around Scotland, including the Dreel Burn Catchment.

What did we do?

We developed a survey and 116 people in and around Anstruther filled it in during summer – autumn 2024.

What did we learn?

1. What were local people's understandings of NbS?

Many people said that before our survey, they were not aware of the term NbS. After we explained NbS, adding that the Dreel Burn Project was one such idea, people identified several other local activities they could relate to as NbS. For example:

- Nature-focused activities linked to conserving the environment, including tree planting, biodiversity enhancement, beach clean ups and creating wetlands.
- Activities focused more on well-being such as greenspace upkeep, creating cycling paths and trails, community allotments and food-growing activities.



Anstruther was the study area

What are “nature-based solutions” (NbS)?

Ecological actions that help address different societal challenges – anything from improving recreational spaces to tackling flood risk – so delivering benefits to both people and nature¹. For example:

- Planting trees along rivers can help slow water entering waterways when it rains, reduce flood risk; and create corridors for wildlife to live and move.
- Establishing wetlands can help filter harmful chemicals to improve water quality.
- Creating parks and green spaces can improve people's mental and physical health by providing opportunities for exercise and relaxation.
- Installing leaky dams across streams can slow down the flow of water, especially during very rainy periods to reduce downstream flooding and make the stream more natural.

2. How are people involved already?

Levels of involvement vary, from no involvement to being involved in one or many activities. However, those involved take on different roles across different activities.

- **The activities some people are involved in include:** biodiversity activities and tree planting; tidal pool restoration activities; allotment creation, gardening & horticulture; litter picking and beach clean ups.
- **Common roles** include hands-on volunteering activities like tree planting, habitat/meadow work, litter picks, greenspace maintenance, water-quality monitoring, attending events or holding membership for a group undertaking such activities.
- A few people take on more substantial roles like being an organiser, a landowner or leading outreach programs.

3. Why are people getting involved?

People get involved in NbS activities for a range of reasons, including the need to improve local places, help wildlife, reduce flood risk, reduce litter, learn new skills, enjoy being outdoors, and to meet others.

Many people also expressed their belief that:

- Nature can help people in local communities to connect with each other.
- People have a responsibility to respect and care for nature.
- Nature can help address different challenges people faced by local people.
- Nature can support personal wellbeing, including reducing stress.



1) Trees are being planted along rivers



2) Rain gardens being used to naturalise urban areas



3) Wetlands are being restored and connected



4) Grassy channels (called swales)



5) Parks and greenspaces



6) Leaky dams/barriers are being installed across streams

Examples activities that could be related to NbS²

4. What are people interested in for the future?

People strongly support the idea of NbS and want to see such activities expanded to provide benefits for wellbeing, local places, and solutions to practical problems like flooding and water quality.

- The activities people want to see more include green spaces, tree planting, habitats/rewilding, and natural flood management (e.g. leaky barriers, rain gardens).
- Most people would want to practically get involved in such activities, with some already involved.

5. What gets in the way of people who want to get involved in NbS?

Everyday constraints and how groups run activities potentially limit desire to get involved more than attitudes do.

- **Time** is the big one (work, caring and other commitments). For example, people who have full-time work or caring responsibilities may find it difficult getting involved, especially when they are already involved in other voluntary activities.
- **Accessibility** – health, mobility, transport, childcare, weather, timing – become challenges when activities are not flexible enough to accommodate diverse needs.
- **Project experience and communication** including not hearing about opportunities, unclear aims, slow updates, or group dynamics (e.g., too many meetings, little follow-up) also discourages people.
- **Skills and confidence:** Some felt they lacked skills/know-how to contribute meaningfully to activities.
- Some people were unsure whether these issues will pose a challenge to them if they decide to participate in future or not.



Dreel Burn in Anstruther. Credit: Kerry Waylen

6. What encourages people to get involved?

Being flexible, clear communication and aligning to the needs of those you want to involve can help people to get more involved in NbS.

Flexible, varied ways – short sessions; drop-in options; evenings/weekends; family-friendly – to join in are good ways to address the challenges like time, caring responsibility and accessibility issues that often get in people's way.

Roles for all abilities, including non-physical roles like taking photos, data entry, outreach, training programs can encourage people who feel they do not have the needed skills or confidence to take part in activities.

- **Good communication & simple sign-up** with clear, advance notice, replies to expressions of interest, and visible updates on progress and impact will keep people informed and more interested in the events.
- **Structuring activities to be welcoming** with a friendly culture can increase people's confidence to take part in activities.

What could community groups do to improve people's involvement in NbS?

Community groups seeking to undertake NbS activities can help mobilise those interested in such activities by first helping people to better understand the objectives of NbS activities (i.e. the socio-economic challenges they aim to help

tackle) and second creating practical ways for more people to actively contribute. These include:

- **Design for everyday lives:** offer short, regular slots and a mix of roles (hands-on/outdoor, social/hosting, admin/comms, monitoring/science).
- **Be clear and welcoming:** use plain-language invites with the purpose, who benefits, what to bring, and how to join; show early wins and longer-term plans.
- **Partner and piggyback:** link with other groups and events (nature-focused groups, health & wellbeing groups, youth groups, festivals) to widen reach without extra effort.
- **Grow confidence:** offer brief, practical training (e.g., water-quality sampling, species ID, safe tool use) and buddy systems so newcomers feel supported.
- **Remove practical barriers:** provide tools/materials, cover small costs where possible, choose accessible locations, and consider childcare/transport options.
- **Close the loop:** share quick updates (photos, “before/after,” simple stats) showing what changed and how people’s contribution shaped the next steps.

What is next in this study?

Now we need to explore and expand on these ideas on how to improve involvement in the future. These include organizing a group discussion on the 29th of September to examine:

- Further ideas for the future.
- Who should implement the recommendations?

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Further information

This document was developed on 22nd September 2025.

You can read the full survey report here: **Ibrahim, A.; Banks, E.; Waylen, K.**, (2025) Understanding perceptions of nature-based solutions understandings, motivations, and factors shaping potential engagement, *Aim NbS Project, Cragiebuckler, Aberdeen: James Hutton Institute*. https://www.hutton.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2025-02-28-JHI-D2-2_community_NbS_views_M2f.pdf

Notes

1. References include:

- IUCN (2020). IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. A user-friendly framework for the verification, design and scaling up of NbS. First edition, IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gland, Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.08.en> [Accessed on 16th March 2021]
- Prado, H. A., Rodrigues, T., Manes, S., Kasecker, T., Vale, M. M., Scarano, F. R. and Pires, A. P. F. (2024). Designing nature to be a solution for climate change in cities: A meta-analysis, *Science of The Total Environment*, 954, 176735. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.176735>
- Rădulescu, D., Ion, M. B. and Ciobanu, R. (2024). Implementing green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in flood risk management in Romania, *Revue Roumaine de Géographie / Romanian Journal of Geography*, 68, 155-165. <https://doi.org/10.59277/RRG.2024.2.02>

2. Images of NbS activities were obtained from the following sources (accessed 14 June 2024):

- Tree planting: <https://2030palette.org/riparian-buffers/>
- Rain gardens: <https://greenactiontrust.org/project/zetland-park-raingarden/>
- Wetlands: <https://inews.co.uk/news/turkey-brook-london-river-save-uk-waterways-2312081>
- Grassy channels: https://wiki.sustainabletechnologies.ca/images/7/7f/DAA_Grass_swales_1_550x550.jpg
- Parks & greenspaces: <https://greenactiontrust.org/solution/urban-greenspace/>
- Leaky dams: <https://www.jbatrust.org/about-the-jba-trust/how-we-help/publications-resources/rivers-and-coasts/nfm-leaky-barrier-retention-times/>