

SRP9: What works in delivering community-led active travel infrastructure projects?

Looking at the Scottish Context



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Executive summary

This report explores ‘what works in delivering community-led active travel infrastructure projects?’, in a Scottish context. It draws on a literature review and research with active travel professionals and community group members. This research was funded by Transport Scotland, and delivered by Sustrans, through the Scottish Research Programme.

There’s no single definition or model of what makes active travel infrastructure projects ‘community-led’. However, key elements include community members identifying issues and solutions, securing funding and maintaining a high degree of decision-making power and control throughout.

The anticipated benefits of this approach include creating schemes that communities feel ownership over and meet their specific needs, leading to better usage, less resistance and continued maintenance. If done well it empowers and upskills communities to tackle and advocate for further changes.

Success in community-led projects can be facilitated by strong partnerships among community groups, local authorities, and active travel organisations. Partnerships can help bridge skill gaps, manage risks and navigate bureaucratic issues.

However, care should be taken to ensure partnerships upskill, empower and assist communities, retaining their ownership and decision-making power throughout rather than diminishing their sense of control. Partners taking time to understand and build relationships with communities can support this, as can partners anticipating risks and managing expectations at the outset.

Longer-term projects are generally preferred as they allow for collaboration, flexible problem solving and help manage fluctuations in resource. However, means to maintain momentum and direction need to be considered.

Access to flexible funding with multi-year budgets and upfront financing are valued by community groups, providing the

financial security to start and sustain projects. Presently accessing funding means navigating multiple complex and competitive application processes with quick-turn arounds - creating barriers for community-led applications.

The risks of a sometimes-precarious reliance on skilled, motivated and time-rich community members also needs to be considered – as do equity issues. Barriers to participation mean that wealthier communities, with more time, education and resources often dominate funding applications.

Recommendations

Funding:

- Simplify and standardise funding application processes to make them more accessible to community groups.
- Make multi-year, upfront and sizable funding available to community-groups.

Partnership working:

- Retain a focus on partnership approaches to community-led infrastructure, whilst ensuring they don't detract from communities' control. This could be done by ensuring:
 - communities have self-determination over the structure of partnerships and how partners are involved
 - partnerships focus on upskilling, empowering and support with technical challenges
 - a focus on relationship building between partners.

Equity:

- Understand patterns of where community-led projects are being funded currently, from an equity perspective.
- Co-design more equitable models of community-led infrastructure development that overcome practical, personal, socio-economic and motivational barriers to participation by community members.

Monitoring & Evaluation:

- Develop criteria for what constitutes 'community-led'.

- Carry out standardised monitoring and evaluation of community-led projects to build an evidence base.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and research aims

Involving communities is an increasingly important element of the design and delivery of active travel infrastructure in Scotland. One of the five key outcomes of Transport Scotland's Active Travel Framework is that the "***delivery of walking, cycling and wheeling is promoted and supported by a range of partners***"¹. Among the indicators of this outcome, "***perception of community involvement***" is one of four guides to measuring success. Therefore, developing deeper understandings of community involvement and 'community-led' infrastructure is an important aspect of delivering this framework.

This research aims to generate understanding about 'what works in delivering community-led active travel infrastructure projects?'. To answer this question, it explores the following topics:

- models of 'community-led' active travel infrastructure development and delivery, and how these operate
- the benefits and challenges of community-led infrastructure delivery models, in comparison to other models of delivery
- outcomes associated with community-led infrastructure delivery models, in comparison to other models of delivery
- conditions or criteria that facilitate successful delivery of community-led active travel infrastructure

¹ (Transport Scotland, 2019)

- perceptions of community involvement and ownership amongst communities taking part in infrastructure projects.

This research has a particular focus on Scotland, speaking to specific Scottish active travel infrastructure programmes. However, the more general findings are likely to be applicable elsewhere.

1.2 Definitions of ‘community’ and ‘community-led’

Although the research explores different models and understandings of ‘community-led’ infrastructure development, it is helpful to define an overarching framework for the terms ‘community’ and ‘community-led’ from the outset.

For the definition of ‘community’, we adopted a relevant section of the definition used in the guidance on community transfer bodies within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015:

“A community can be any group of people who feel they have something in common. In many cases, it is that they live in the same area. However, it can also be that they share an interest or characteristic. Communities of interest could include faith groups, ethnic or cultural groups, people affected by a particular illness or disability, sports clubs, conservation groups, clan and heritage associations, etc.”²

Although it is likely that many of the communities involved in the development of active travel infrastructure are ones brought together by a particular **location or geography**, it is possible

² (The Scottish Government, 2017)

that communities of **interest** also lead or participate in infrastructure development.

To help guide the research project we devised a working definition of 'community-led' active travel infrastructure. This was projects which have **originated from a funding application made by a community group to a Transport Scotland programme**³. Adopting this working definition provided a focus and enabled targeting of the experience of professionals and communities involved in these programmes. It also enabled a differentiation from broader terms of 'community engagement' or 'co-design', where communities may be involved and engaged with projects but not leading them. However, we explored other definitions in the literature and invited research participants to discuss their own understandings of what being 'community-led' constitutes.

1.3 Methodology overview

This research used multiple methods to achieve its aims. This included:

1. **A review of existing literature and documentation** on infrastructure projects or programmes that have used a community-led approach or model, and the theory surrounding this.
2. **Interviews** with individuals who have had a central role in the planning, implementation or maintenance of community-led infrastructure. This included:
 - o Four interviews with five **active travel professionals**
 - o Three interviews with **members of community groups or organisations** involved in the delivery of active travel infrastructure

³

- One interview with a stakeholder who has **another relevant role in the delivery of community-led active travel infrastructure**, such as a local authority employee.

3. A **perception survey** targeted at individuals who have been involved in the planning, implementation or maintenance of a community-led infrastructure project in a community capacity. This had **11 respondents**.

2. Literature Review

This review summarises evidence from the existing literature and on the topic of **community-led active travel infrastructure** related to the research questions.

There is a range of literature covering different aspects of the planning and delivery of community-led projects in Scotland. However, very little of this is focused on an active travel context. Therefore, this review provides a broader overview of community-led processes and projects in Scotland. For the purpose of this review, the term ‘community-led’ is the primary focus, although phrases such as community involvement or participation are also included due to their slightly interchangeable and interpretable natures.

2.1 Definitions of ‘community-led’ in existing literature

What Works Scotland defines community-led as “projects, programmes, services, activities where individuals, groups or organisations within defined geographical neighbourhoods have a high degree of power and/or control over the aims, design, or delivery of activities”⁴. This is adapted from a definition developed by Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research.

The Scottish Rural Network build on this by suggesting that community-led local development, is development that gives communities the power to tackle local challenges on their own by building skills and knowledge, supporting new ideas, encouraging cooperation, and creating viable and resilient communities⁵.

⁴ (What Works Scotland, 2015)

⁵ (Scottish Rural Network, 2023)

2.2 Anticipated benefits: the role of community-led approaches in Scotland

The principle of communities being able to influence decision making has featured in Scottish policy discourse for some time. For example, in 2011, The Scottish Government published 'Achieving a Sustainable Future: Regeneration Strategy'⁶, which emphasised the 'community-led' concept:

"Community-led regeneration is about local people identifying for themselves the issues and opportunities in their areas, deciding what to do about them, and being responsible for delivering the economic, social, and environmental action that will make a difference. It is dependent on the energy and commitment of local people themselves and has a wide range of benefits." (p.20).

The strategy suggested that community-led regeneration would strengthen locally controlled community organisations to anchor long term sustainable change, especially in disadvantaged areas, and help people organise and respond to challenges.

The Scottish Government's 2015 Community Empowerment Act⁷ also stressed the importance of community-led design and regeneration. The Act introduced the Scottish Government Place Standard Tool as a framework to help communities identify and assess the aspects of their community they feel could be developed to improve health, wellbeing and quality of life⁸.

Despite this, a 2016 independent review of the Scottish Planning System called for higher levels of community

⁶ (The Scottish Government, 2011)

⁷ (The Scottish Government, 2015)

⁸ (Health Scotland, 2021)

involvement and influence⁹. The review said this would lead to improved public trust in the planning system and create more productive partnerships between communities and the planning system, making better use of community knowledge and priorities. The review also highlighted that groups such as disabled people, young people, minority ethnic groups and disadvantaged communities in particular still face significant disconnect with the planning system¹⁰.

Funds such as the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and Rural and Island Communities Ideas into Action (RICIA) are available to support community-led aspirations across Scotland¹¹. Both funds have a focus on rural and island communities and aim to build local knowledge and skills, empower communities to tackle local challenges, encourage cooperation and create resilient communities. These highlight some of the anticipated benefits of community-led development¹²¹³.

Transport Scotland provides funding to support community-led active travel infrastructure under various programmes¹⁴, all of which are open to community groups or organisations to apply for. These include:

- Places for Everyone, administered by Sustrans Scotland
- Street Design, administered by Sustrans Scotland
- Pocket Places, administered by Sustrans Scotland
- Community Paths Grants, administered by Paths for All
- Cycling Friendly Programme, administered by Cycling Scotland.

The importance the Scottish Government places on community involvement is clearly outlined within their Active Travel Framework¹⁵. A key anticipated benefit of community

⁹ (The Scottish Government, 2019)

¹⁰ (Beveridge, Biberback, & Hamilton, 2016)

¹¹ (Scottish Rural Network, 2023)

¹² (Scottish Rural Network, 2023)

¹³ (The Scottish Government, 2023)

¹⁴ This is accurate as of 23/24 financial year.

¹⁵ (Transport Scotland, 2020)

involvement and empowerment, discussed within this framework, is that it helps to ensure it is ‘fully used’, and therefore benefits a wide range of communities across Scotland.

“In order for active travel infrastructure to be fully used and for behaviour change projects to be successful, there needs to be a sense of community ownership of local projects. It is vital that communities are in favour of walking and cycling initiatives and therefore important to capture the level of involvement of community organisations. It is also key to collect data on what communities think of proposals for infrastructure projects in their areas and what they think of them once completed.” (p.18).

However, no research was found robustly evaluating the *actual* outcomes associated with community-led approaches, such as quality, value for money or social return on investment, compared to other delivery approaches. This is a key gap in the literature.

2.3 Typical processes and supportive conditions of community-led approaches in Scotland

2.3.1 Participation, engagement, and facilitation

A large number of documents reviewed provided guidance and suggestions for community-led processes. Whilst not always active travel focussed, this guidance could be applied in an active travel context.

What Works Scotland, have outlined a range of conditions for successful community-led planning or development, in five different areas:

1. Values and attitudes:

- a. Openness to change and willingness to compromise and learn
- b. Including the whole community, not just the loudest voice
- c. Trust that local people will have a high level of influence over decision making.

2. Resources:

- d. Specialist knowledge and expertise to support the community
- e. Knowledge brokers that make research relevant and easy to understand
- f. Recognising that community-led projects require a lot of time (from community members free of charge, to build relationships and to implement).

3. Methods and skills:

- g. Trained facilitators and a range of traditional and experimental engagement methods.

4. Planning Mechanisms:

- h. Well-structured and organised engagement activities with achievable outcomes
- i. Involving people as early as possible in the process so they shape logistics as well as outcomes.

5. Communication:

- j. Keeping everyone in the loop and evidencing that their ideas have been listened to and actioned
- k. Allowing ample space for feedback, not just face-to-face, so more people feel comfortable participating¹⁶.

¹⁶ (What Works Scotland, 2015)

Adding to this, a Scottish Community Alliance report outlines conditions that help empower local people to take part in community-led development:

- **Subsidiarity:** making sure that decision making stays as close to the community that will be impacted as possible
- **Self-determination:** ensuring that local people are the ones to determine their boundaries and the types of organisational structures that best work for them
- **Local by default:** control over resources and services should be at the local level wherever possible
- **Equality and fairness:** measures should be put in place to overcome barriers to local improvement¹⁷.

The 2019 Scottish Government Report, 'Community-led Design Initiatives: Evaluation' defines community-led design as a process that encourage community members to be involved in the decision-making process and play a role in shaping the development of their local area. This report, alongside others in the review, emphasised the importance of 'design events' for this process. These can be understood as any kind of engagement event, where community members are invited to engage and deliberate on the design and implementation of interventions or projects. They can sometimes be referred to as charrettes, which are defined as a public workshop or meeting to plan the design of something or work to overcome a problem.

The report identified a number of practices conducive to successful design events, such as using external, professional facilitators, as opposed to events run by local volunteers, members of the public, or public service employees¹⁸. Community members may view external facilitators as beneficial due to the expertise and credibility they can provide. They can also give communities a sense that their aspirations and projects are being taken seriously by local governments or funding bodies.

¹⁷ (Scottish Community Alliance, 2016)

¹⁸ (The Scottish Government, 2019)

Facilitators have professional experience in stakeholder management, being able to temper expectations, reduce bias and navigate constructive challenges. Furthermore, they can help to channel local skills and knowledge and encourage less confident participants to contribute, building people's confidence to participate over time¹⁹. This can help empower communities and community-led initiatives, by allowing for knowledge sharing and transfer, and helping communities work better together²⁰. Over time this can increase the capacity of community members and groups to manage their projects independently, decreasing the reliance upon external input²¹.

2.3.2 Community Anchor Organisations and Development Trusts

Community Anchor Organisations are community-led organisations, generally public or third sector, that work across communities towards a community-led vision. The literature suggests that Community Anchors are well placed to support individuals and community groups to work towards desired projects and outcomes such as developing active travel infrastructure. In Scotland these anchor organisations often take the form of Development Trusts^{22 23}, which are community-led organisations that combine community-led action with an enterprising approach, often with some paid members of staff. What Works Scotland note that Community Anchor Organisations are often present in places where other forms of help or intervention are not:

“The work of community anchors, and their activists, volunteers and staff, very much begins with their local commitment to and role in community-led place-making... they are likely to be working in the gaps where the state (withdrawal) and the market (market failure) currently do

¹⁹ (The Scottish Government, 2019)

²⁰ (AI Waer, 2017)

²¹ (Didham, 2007)

²² (What Works Scotland, 2018)

²³ (Preston, 2009)

not venture, and to start by focusing on making a difference in their community or place. This, then, is a highly challenging context within which to work." (p.11)²⁴

In the Scottish context, these Community Anchors or Development Trusts often have a focus on land or asset ownership. An example of this is the Isle of Gigha, off the west coast of Kintyre. In 2002, community members, via the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust were able to purchase the island for themselves for £4 million with funding from the National Lottery and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the island has been run by the trust for the past 21 years. The success of this community-led buyout has been attributed to several factors, namely:

- A willingness of residents to support the buyout and management due to personal investment and gains
- A predisposition to community-led development due to the rural, isolated nature and independent spirit
- The Development Trust being comprised of local islanders with a continuous presence, giving the project a public face
- Informal venues (i.e., the pub) providing opportunities for conversation, idea sharing and knowledge exchange in a comfortable and familiar setting²⁵.

Although not specifically active travel focussed, the Gigha examples highlights how Anchor Organisations help to achieve community aspirations through the formalisation of community groups and mobilisation towards a common and beneficial purpose. It is worth noting the close-knit, isolated community aspect that helped to push forward the community-led action may be harder to replicate or scale-up in larger or more fragmented communities.

More broadly, from the literature, community land or asset ownerships via development trusts is a relatively common form

²⁴ (What Works Scotland, 2018)

²⁵ (Didham, 2007)

of community-led development in Scotland. Vercher et al. suggest this is due to much of the land in Scotland historically being privately owned, and communities now wishing to reclaim ownership from estates²⁶. Indeed the 2015 Community Empowerment Act expanded upon the community right to buy, providing communities more options when wishing to purchase land. This in turn can be a lucrative option for communities to reduce reliance on external funding, who may be able to use the land to generate revenue through tourism for example²⁷.

In the active travel context, Development Trusts can support the implementation of community-led active travel infrastructure. The Huntly and District Development Trust (HDDT) based in the town of Huntly in Aberdeenshire were awarded funding from the Climate Challenge Fund. With this they carried out community consultations to address the issue of rural transport and develop active travel solutions via the 'Room to Roam Green Travel Hub'. This includes an e-bike hire scheme and information on cycling and walking routes in the local area, as well as creating a community cycling group. The project has been viewed as a success due to the broad reach of communications throughout the consultation process, although it was noted that a lack of physical presence in the town, due to no suitable locations being identified, contributed to the loss of some awareness of the project:

"The project has enabled new relationships between various community groups and organisations to grow. This has been very positive, and we hope these will continue to develop and future collaborations will occur."
(p.21)²⁸

²⁶ (Vercher, 2020)

²⁷ (Dinnie, 2018)

²⁸ (HDDT, 2016)

2.3.3 Strategic planning, including use of temporary solutions

What Works Scotland suggests that successful community-led development requires careful strategic planning. Because community-led development is by name led by community members themselves, there can often be gaps in knowledge or skills. Ensuring the process is comprehensively planned out is therefore key. The following considerations are suggested as helping to contribute to community-led planning and development:

- Identify the key issues or goals and requirements needed to meet them
- Decide on achievable mini objectives (avoid being over ambitious and over promising)
- Set out a plan of action for each stage (ensuring actions are fit for purpose)
- Ensure each part of the process is justified
- Establish people's level of influence from the beginning²⁹

In terms of active travel infrastructure in particular, Lawlor et al. expand on the need for a well strategised approach, by suggesting that piloting temporary active travel within communities is a useful strategy. This approach works to demonstrate potential benefits to the wider community, generate evidence and support, and ensure that potentially limited resources are not wasted by unsuitable interventions³⁰.

Examples of this include the Pocket Places programmes run by Sustrans Scotland. Pocket Places projects use a collaborative design approach to co-create small-scale improvements and active travel solutions in communities around Scotland. Pocket Places projects are applied for and led by community groups and allow their ideas to be brought to life “through innovative street trials, enabling people to see and feel the

²⁹ (Faulkner, 2020)

³⁰ (Lawlor, 2023)

change on foot, by bike or by car and then refine the changes before they are made permanent” ³¹.

2.4 Challenges and constraints to community-led processes in Scotland

Community-led projects come with challenges that can inhibit the success of delivering projects.

2.4.1 Inequalities in participation

In their paper, ‘Equality in community engagement: a scoping review of evidence from research and practice in Scotland’, Lightbody & Escobar³² highlight several barriers to participation that are present in Scotland:

- **Practical:** a lack of knowledge or understanding of community-led processes, or physical barriers such as travel, childcare, or access
- **Personal:** a lack of confidence or language difficulties
- **Socio-economic:** those without permanent residences, those working multiple jobs
- **Motivational:** scepticism, mistrust, and decision fatigue

Their research focuses on broader community-engagement processes, rather than specifically ‘community-led’ projects. However, their findings are likely to be even more applicable to these projects due to the deeper involvement from the community in community-led projects.

Given the challenges to participation, they highlight that more educated, wealthier and retired people may be more likely to participate in community-led processes. They suggest that organisers should co-design engagement processes with

³¹ (Sustrans, 2023)

³² (Lightbody and Escobar 2021)

communities. This suggestion is also applicable to community-led projects where co-designing the processes through which communities can lead infrastructure projects could enable wider participation.

2.4.2 Funding constraints

Evidence from the literature suggests that the funding landscape can also pose a particular barrier to successful community-led projects.

External (often government) funding is crucial for the majority of community-led projects, however, bottom-up community empowerment can be hindered by top-down funding restrictions. This includes short timescales and administrative demands³³. Community-led projects are generally more organic, iterative processes where ideas, designs and plans evolve over time. This can clash with funders' restrictions on delivery:

“In order to gain the resources required, community group leaders reported a need to adapt their projects’ aims and ambitions to meet the requirements of the funders. This, it can be argued, fundamentally undermines the concept of a “community-led” project, as the direction of the project is largely being led from the top down by the funders” (p.165) ³⁴

For those in community groups, chasing and securing funding and then managing the funding within its remits can be a time-consuming task sometimes distracting from the initial goals of the community group³⁵. This task often falls on volunteers who may not have experience of grant management³⁶.

Public funding is beneficial to community groups, where the funds cannot be generated themselves. This often comes with

³³ (Creamer, 2015)

³⁴ (Creamer, 2015)

³⁵ (Preston, 2009)

³⁶ (Creamer, 2015)

requirements around demonstrating accountability and, whilst important, these are often focused on monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities which can sometimes overlook more nuanced changes or improvements. Those community groups or projects that most closely align with government/public body aspirations at the time can be more likely to receive funding, both in the first place and repeatedly^{37,38}. Adding to this, Al Waer et al. note that often wealthier communities, with more time, education and resources at their disposal, can dominate funding and grant applications³⁹.

Managing a community group's aspirations and (potentially conflicting) visions within the confines of funding expectations can create multiple challenges. Working within a fixed funding or policy context can often inhibit progress or severely limit what can be achieved by communities, reducing their feeling of leadership or empowerment. There is often a mismatch in timing between annual funding rounds and longer-term aspirations of community groups. This means anything achieved cannot be maintained or extended by the local community after the funding round has finished⁴⁰.

Becoming a community enterprise such as a Development Trust and focussing on land or asset ownership is a more difficult, but potentially more lucrative route that renders community groups less reliant on external funding. For example, in Orkney and the Western Isles, community-owned wind turbines generate revenue for the benefit of developing the community. This though can lead to organisations becoming more 'professionalised', moving away from their grass-roots beginnings⁴¹.

To begin to address some of these challenges, a 2016 independent review of the Rural and Island Communities Ideas into Action (RICIA fund), produced some key recommendations

³⁷ (Preston, 2009)

³⁸ (Hurth, 2009)

³⁹ (Al Waer, 2017)

⁴⁰ (Al Waer, 2017)

⁴¹ (Dinnie, 2018)

to improve community-led projects, with an emphasis on what funding organisations can do to help. Recommendations included:

- Taking the time to comprehensively review the successes and challenges of the projects from previous funding rounds to allow for better and more effective use of future funding
- Providing long-term (multi-annual) funding where possible, to allow communities to propose more ambitious projects
- Offering flexibility in funding so that community leaders have “the freedom to shape their activities, or to decide on which projects are funded, and at which time, in order to best meet their local priorities” (p.2-3)
- “Allowing the option for groups to apply for funding for running and revenue costs to enable them to keep operating” (p.3)
- Make it clear to community groups that creativity and innovation are encouraged, even if that means that milestones or timescales need to be adjusted to accommodate it⁴².

2.4.3 Remoteness and reliance

The disconnect between communities and centres of decision making, especially in rural areas in Scotland, can sometimes lead to too large a burden being placed on communities. Whilst independence and autonomy are crucial for community-led processes, a level of external support is required (e.g., from funding and professional facilitation, as outlined above.).

Dinnie & Revell note that local authorities in Scotland are limited in the funding and resources they can provide to communities and must generally follow national government priorities in planning and funding allocation⁴³. As a result, community-led development is highly reliant on commitment

⁴² (SRUC, 2022)

and willingness from local participants, often in voluntary positions. They note that this can be particularly pronounced in rural areas, given the remoteness of some Scottish communities from where their local authorities are centred. For example, the Highland Council “covers a geographic area the size of Belgium, whilst Argyll and Bute would be served by ten councils, were it in Finland.” (p.4).

This can lead to several challenges, including:

- Balancing conflicting viewpoints, priorities and personalities can be tricky, especially if a facilitator is not present
- Often the loudest voices dominate, and the process can fall short of including all views
- On the contrary, attempting to be *too* inclusive of all suggestions can put a strain on budgets, particularly if the organisations lack budget management experience.
- Maintaining enthusiasm and momentum can also be a challenge. This can be exacerbated by external delays such as council approval or funding delays⁴⁴.

Reliance on the community for delivering projects also raises the possibility that community members themselves will be held responsible for less satisfactory outcomes. Lawlor et al. state that community members involved in, or leading development processes may feel unable to complain if the project or intervention was viewed as less successful. Additionally, they may be concerned that other members of the community may blame them for any shortfalls or aspirations not met⁴⁵.

2.5 Summary

This review has mapped out the existing literature surrounding the topic of community-led infrastructure. In summary, this research suggests that:

⁴⁴ (The Scottish Government, 2019)

⁴⁵ (Lawlor, 2023)

- There is no singular method, process or approach of ‘community-led’ development or delivery that emerges as the most desirable or successful in all contexts and situations. It is dependent on each community’s structure, demographics and unique requirements and aspirations.
- There is scope for increased levels of community involvement and influence within the Scottish planning context, to foster local empowerment and create more inclusive development processes. There are a number of funds and programmes available to support community-led active travel infrastructure in Scotland.
- Design events and external facilitation are two of the most commonly used ‘tools’ within community-led development in Scotland. Community Anchor Organisations and Development Trusts also make up a crucial part of the community-led landscape in Scotland, often focussed on land or asset management to help develop active travel solutions in local communities.
- Key conditions of effective community-led development include:
 - Early and continuous communication between stakeholders
 - Ensuring local knowledge and skills are fostered and put to use
 - Making information and engagement as accessible as possible
 - Providing follow-up support to communities - recognising the community-led process is iterative and ongoing.
- The top-down funding that many community groups rely on can create challenges, such as restrictions on project ambitions and timeframes. Additionally, managing external funds can be an added responsibility for community group members who may lack professional experience. Challenges also arise regarding local access to community-led projects, with social and practical barriers creating inequalities in participation.

There are significant gaps in the literature when it comes to the following:

- The typical processes involved in community-led projects working on active travel infrastructure (rather than other types of local development)
- Outcomes associated with community-led approaches, such as quality or value for money compared to other delivery approaches.

3. Research Findings

To build on findings from the literature review, we conducted research with a range of active travel stakeholders via in-depth interviews and an online survey. The findings of this research are presented here.

Firstly, participants in the research are outlined, followed by an exploration of participants perceptions of what 'community-led' means. The third section explores the benefits that participants feel community-led projects bring, alongside examining the extent to which community group members feel that these benefits have been present in their projects. The fourth section explores the factors conducive to the success of community-led projects, followed by a discussion of the barriers to success.

3.1 Participants in the research

3.1.1 Active travel professionals

Interviews were carried out with five people working within the active travel profession based in Scotland. Interviewees included:

- Principle Urban Designer (Sustrans)
- Programme Coordinator (Sustrans)
- Senior Grant Advisor (Sustrans)
- Senior Development Officer (Paths for All)
- Senior Development Officer (Paths for All)

These interviewees had been involved in community-led projects in a variety of ways including supporting funding applications, administering funds, delivering community engagement and supporting with the design and delivery of infrastructure.

3.1.2 Community groups and additional stakeholders

Interviews were carried out with three members of community groups/organisations that had been involved in the delivery of active travel infrastructure in Scotland. One interview was conducted with a local authority employee in a communities team that had supported with the delivery of community-led active travel infrastructure.

11 people responded to the survey, from 10 different community groups/organisations. Most respondents had been part of their community groups for extended periods of time (2+ years). Respondents' community groups were largely based in accessible small towns or large urban areas. Some community groups remits had a specific focus on improving local active travel or paths. Other groups had a wider focus on improving their local communities – including community trusts, community councils and community centres. More information about survey respondents can be found in the [methods section](#).

Community group members in the research had been involved in a range of different projects including building new rural paths, path upgrades, creating pocket parks, re-designing roundabouts and improving pavements.

3.2 Perceptions of what 'community-led' active travel infrastructure means

Across active travel professionals there were different definitions of what constituted a 'community-led' project. Some felt they were those where a community group or organisation took a leading and decisive role over the project. This was often described as being in partnership with local authorities or organisations such as Sustrans. This was seen as distinct from

projects where the community had fed into the project – but not taken a leading role.

This largely corresponded to community group members definitions of community-led infrastructure. Most felt that community-led active travel infrastructure is when the community or community groups have identified a need or issue and pursued it, generally by applying for funding. Community group members also considered projects community-led when groups raise the funding themselves, and when the projects focus on local issues that may have been overlooked by local authorities.

“I suppose it’s anything that the community decides they want to do that nobody else is going to do for them. Basically, things that the council maybe want to do but haven’t got any money, things that people from the community are standing up, waving their arms, and saying, we’d like this.” *Community group member interviewee*

All active travel professionals also felt that community-led projects were those that originated from the challenges, experiences, and aspirations of local people – that had not been addressed by local authorities or other bodies.

“Community-led is a project that there’s a clear need and wish from the community for a thing to happen, and that might be a tiny little thing that’s preventing a section of the community from being able to use a path... it’s a project that’s been identified at a community level by people living within the community, who know their areas really, really well, they know what they need.” *Senior Development Office, Paths for All*

Some active travel professionals did not have clear distinctions between projects involving community engagement and projects involving community partners. Instead, they felt that community-led projects were distinguished by the time and

resources invested in involving the community within the project. These were generally projects with long timescales which focused on going beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to hear from as many people in the community as possible. They had a focus on empowering the community and building a legacy which may lead to community groups taking more of a lead on future projects.

This theme also ran throughout community members responses. They agreed that a project can be considered community-led when the needs and priorities of everyone within the community are at the forefront of designs, rather than an ‘afterthought’. Furthermore, importance was placed on community members being involved at all stages of the process and their local knowledge being respected, rather than ‘top-down’, fully realised designs being presented to them.

“Where local people have had adequate time to look at proposals, where their views are considered and acted on” *Survey respondent*

Another key differentiator between community-led and conventional approaches described by one active travel professional is the level of drive, passion and emotional attachment that community members invest in projects. This was seen as distinct from a more top-down, detached, approach to the design of places and spaces.

“I think with a kind of more conventional delivery model, what you’ve got is folks that it’s their job and they leave it at the end of the day...they’re not necessarily emotionally attached to it. Even if they are, it’s probably not as much as a volunteer who’s put all their life’s work into it.” *Senior Grant Advisor, Sustrans*

3.2.1 Funding streams

Active travel professionals highlighted a range of funding programmes available for community-led projects. These

tended to be those that interviewees had worked on directly, rather than highlighting wider funding available. This included funding sources provided by Sustrans, such as the ArtRoots project, which offers community groups funds to develop art projects in their local area. The Sustrans Co-Design programme, which offers funding for shorter-term 'Pocket Places' projects, and the Street Design Programme, which constitute larger scale projects carried out to improve residential streets, were also mentioned. These funding sources all require applications to be made to Sustrans. In particular the Co-Design applications are scored on "the level of commitment" and are generally more successful when there is an established partnership between the community group that are applying and the local authority.

The 'Places for Everyone' fund, also administered by Sustrans, has been open to applications from community groups. This has more strict eligibility criteria based on whether the projects are able to adhere to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stages. Community groups applying to this fund also have to meet a number of eligibility criteria alongside an expression of interest which are judged according to the deliverability of the project.

"They have to be eligible to actually enter the programme to apply to begin with, and then when they kind of do their expression of interest, what we're looking for is a scope that's actually deliverable by a community group in our experience" *Senior Grant Advisor, Sustrans*

The Ian Findlay Path Fund administered by Paths for All and supported by Transport Scotland was also highlighted. This fund is available to community groups to help improve usability and accessibility of paths. One interviewee also mentioned that community groups can access funding that local authorities cannot, such as National Lottery funding, to support projects.

3.3 Realisation of anticipated benefits: evidence from practice

3.3.1 Ownership, empowerment and cost savings

One of the key benefits of community-led infrastructure mentioned by active travel professionals and community groups is an increased sense of ownership and a feeling of empowerment within communities. Multiple people commented that community-led projects are more likely to be accepted by local communities as they have not been “pushed upon them”.

“Community-led projects, you’re by and large taking the community with you, so you don’t tend to meet too much resistance”. *Community group interviewee*

Some participants felt this sense of ownership could lead to better levels of usage of the infrastructure and more of a willingness to maintain the infrastructure, as community members feel it ‘belongs’ to them.

“The level of support we’ve had in the community has been phenomenal. We have volunteer days probably once a month and we regularly get quite a crowd of people out in all kinds of weathers, helping us to maintain bits and pieces of the path, helping us to do bits and pieces of the path, building bits and pieces of the path.”

Community group interviewee

One active travel professional suggested that community-led projects can have a higher social return on investment⁴⁶ due to

⁴⁶ [Social return on investment](#) refers to a way of measuring the amount of value from a service, by quantifying social, economic and environmental value outcomes in monetary terms.

sense of empowerment communities can feel by coming together to improve their local area. Community group members said these projects can give a sense of pride and empowerment to those working on them. This could have knock-on effects and lead people to feel empowered to take on more active travel projects with the skills they have learned or to advocate for other changes in their areas.

“I’ve seen places where they’ve put in a couple of hundred metres of path and gone, actually we can do this and then gone on to build more around the community because they’ve learned that wee bit from the small path they’ve done and from the work that [we] have done with the capacity building.” *Senior Development Officer, Paths for All*

As a result of using local skills and volunteer time, some community group members commented that there could be a cost benefit to community group projects. However, this project was not able to investigate comparisons of financial data from different approaches to infrastructure building to confirm this.

“They probably work out as a hell of a lot cheaper, given the huge amount of volunteer time that goes into them. If this was being delivered professionally it would have cost, I was going to say twice as much but probably three or four times as much, particularly when you start bringing in all the outside consultants” *Community Group Interviewee*

3.3.2 Facilitating community involvement and utilising local knowledge

Several active travel professionals commented on how much more effective engagement and consultation can be in a community-led project. This is largely due to local knowledge and local connections of community group members. This was reiterated in interviews with community group members.

In turn, this can lead to more support and enthusiasm for projects when community groups and members are at the forefront. Active travel professionals also pointed out that feedback from engagement is less likely to be misinterpreted or even ignored, when compared to projects that are not community-led, but involve community engagement.

“If it’s a community-led consultation...it can be a social thing. So word of mouth is really important when it’s a community-led one. Everybody knows what’s happening in a community if the local leaders are the people who are really excited about it, and the buzz has got up that there’s a thing potentially happening, rather than it’s a council thing that’s been imposed.” Senior Development Officer, Paths for All

Furthermore, in having such effective engagement, local knowledge can be utilised to improve projects. This may be through ensuring that proposals address local needs, highlighting issues with designs or suggesting improvements based on everyday experience.

“Community-led infrastructure projects have the advantage of being targeted on identifying a solution to a situation that is real and experienced and owned by the community.” Survey respondent

3.3.3 Community groups perceptions of ownership and control on their projects

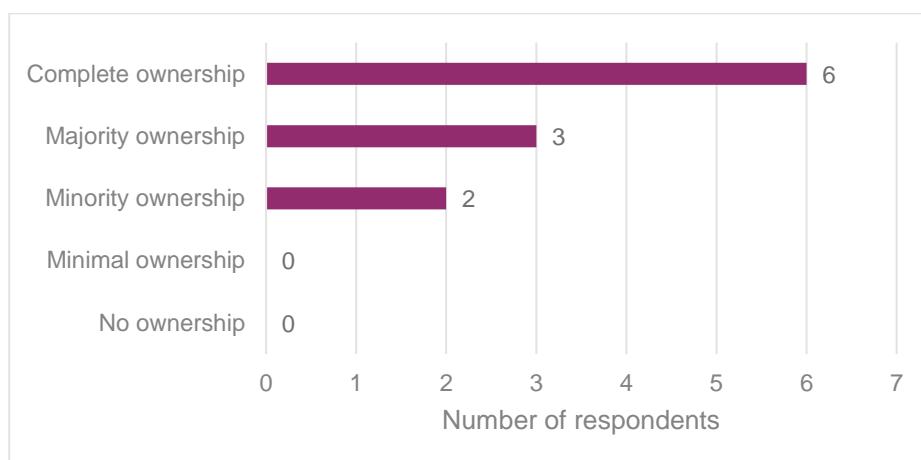
Through the survey, we gathered community group members views on different aspects of ownership and control over the projects they had been involved in. This helps to confirm whether some of the benefits anticipated above have been felt by community members in community-led active travel infrastructure projects.

The majority felt that their community groups had both a good level of ownership and control over their projects. However,

perceptions of the level of ownership and control by the wider local community were more mixed.

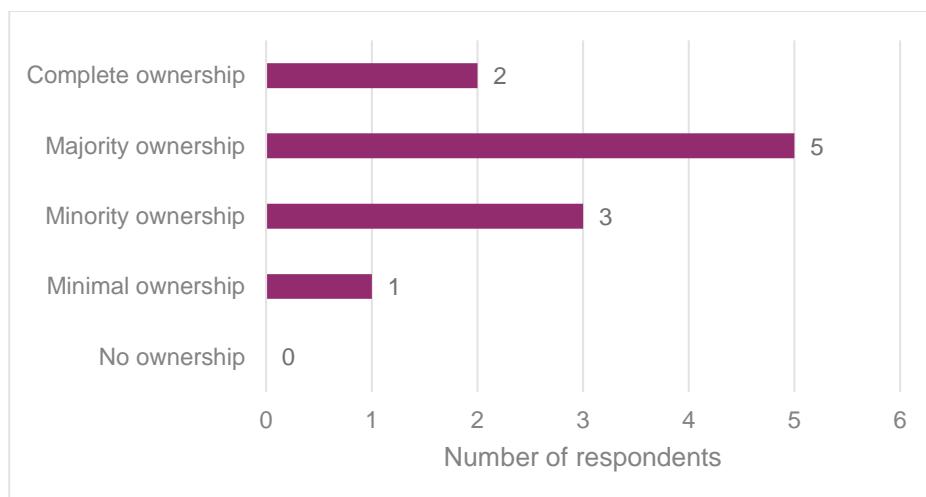
Six out of 11 survey respondents felt that their community group or organisation had complete ownership of their projects. No respondent felt that their community group or organisation had minimal or no control.

Figure 1. To what extent do you feel your community group or organisation had ownership of the project(s) you have been involved with?



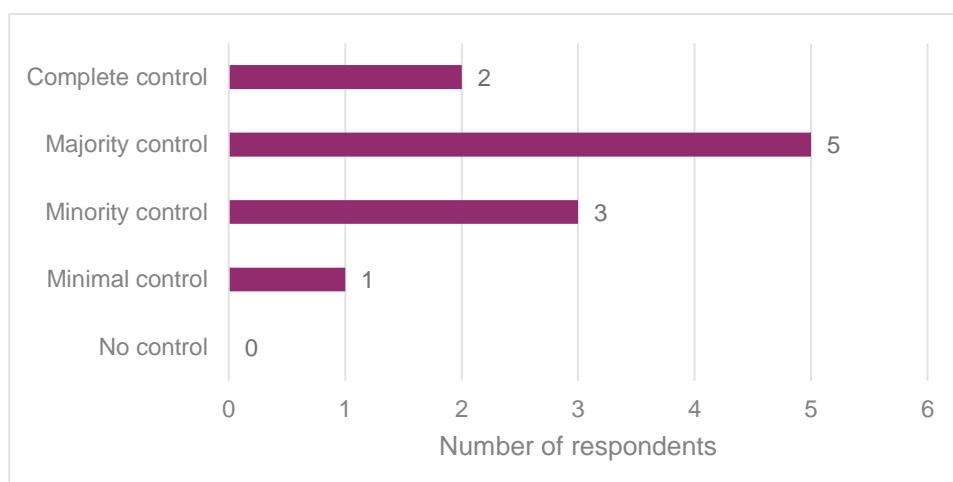
When asked the same question in relation to the wider local community, nearly half of respondents (five out of 11) felt the local community had had majority ownership, with two answering that it was complete ownership. This suggests that perceptions about the potential of community-led projects to create a sense of ownership are born out in practice.

Figure 2. To what extent do you feel the wider local community had ownership of the project(s) you have been involved with?



When asked about control of their projects, seven out of 11 respondents felt their community group or organisation had either complete or majority control. Only one respondent stated that their community group/organisation had had minimal control. This supports views that community-led projects offer community groups control over projects.

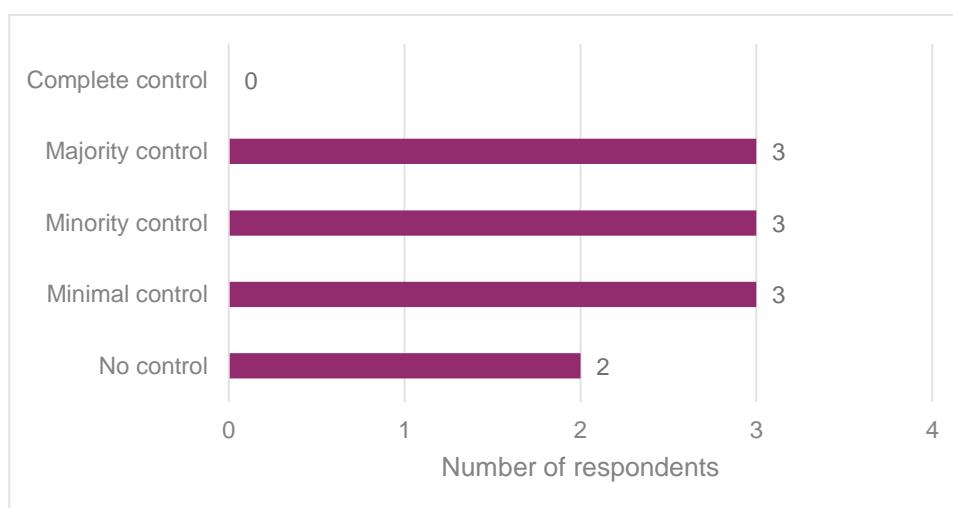
Figure 3. To what extent do you feel your community group or organisation had control of the project(s) you have been involved with?



Responding to the same question, but with regards to the wider local community, six out of 11 respondents felt the community

had only had minority of minimal control, no respondents felt that the community had had complete control. This somewhat calls into question active travel professionals' views about the potential of community-led projects to facilitate meaningful wider community engagement.

Figure 4. To what extent do you feel the wider local community had control of the project(s) you have been involved with?



Comments from survey respondents generally focused on experiences where they felt negatively about the level of ownership and control they had over projects. Respondents generally agreed that the standards and expectations put in place by the funding bodies for their projects was the main reason community groups and members felt constrained (see section 3.5.3 Specifications and governance, for further discussion of this).

Furthermore, the lack of specific expertise amongst community groups meant that in some cases, they were reliant on stakeholder partners, which limited their control and sense of ownership. This tended to be around specific design skills, funding knowledge or legal acumen.

“We do not have the experience or expertise to have greater control. We are largely in the hands of the consultants...It is clear that we could not do anything

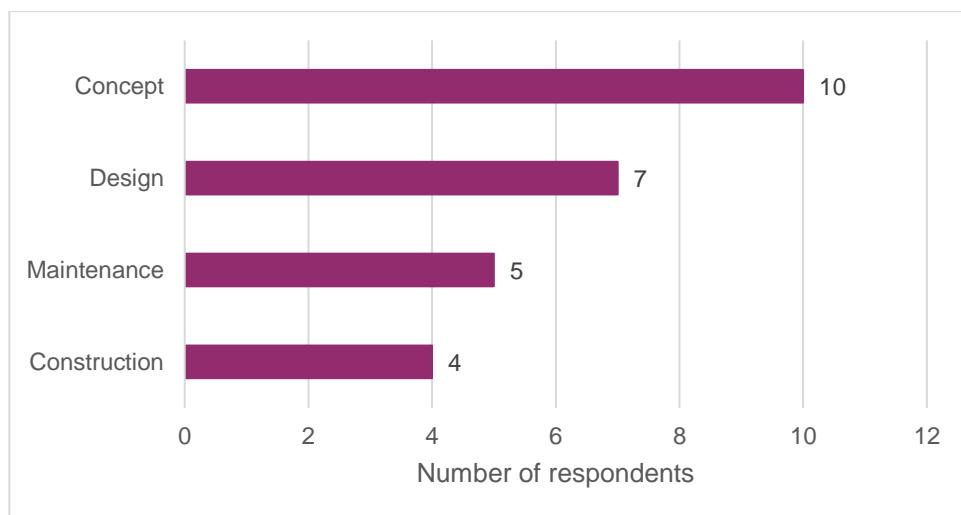
tangible without either [them] and the funding." Survey respondent

One survey respondent felt that they had little control over the project, as they lacked the involvement in the design and delivery process. This was supported by another respondent who felt that the ambition built through the community in the engagement process was diminished by consultants at detailed designs – reducing their sense of control.

"The contract we work to has us as nominal "partners" as a community group at the consulting stage, but that role disappears at the delivery stage, when the Council takes over. As such I believe we have relatively little control over the design and delivery process." Survey respondent

The diminishing involvement of community groups in later stages of projects (design, delivery and maintenance) was reflected in survey respondents' answers to a question about what stages of active travel infrastructure they had been involved in. Nearly all respondents said they had been involved in concept stage, however only four said they had been involved in construction.

Figure 5. What stages of active travel infrastructure development have you been involved in to date? Please select all that apply.



3.3.4 Contribution towards active travel outcomes

Survey respondents were asked about how they thought the projects they'd been involved with spoke to a range of outcomes associated with active travel set out by Transport Scotland. This includes factors such as increasing safety, accessibility, and frequency and improving attitudes.

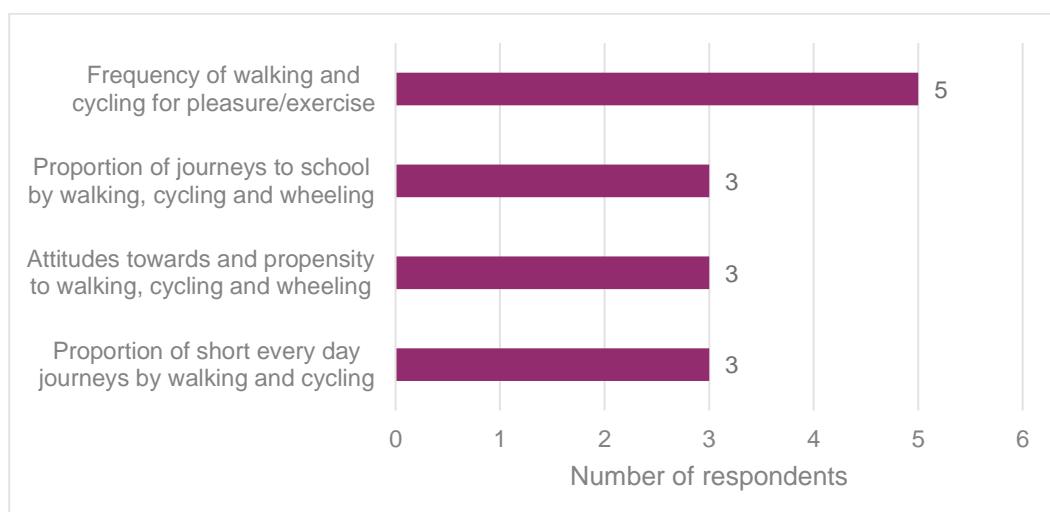
Of the projects that respondents had been involved in, *'increasing the number of people choosing walking, cycling and wheeling in Scotland'* was viewed as the most common outcome that had been most supported by their projects – selected by seven out of 11 respondents. This was followed by *'ensuring that delivery of walking, cycling and wheeling is promoted and supported by a range of partners'*.

Figure 6. Would you say that the infrastructure project(s) you have been involved with have been successful in supporting any of the following active travel outcomes targeted by Transport Scotland? Please tick all that apply.



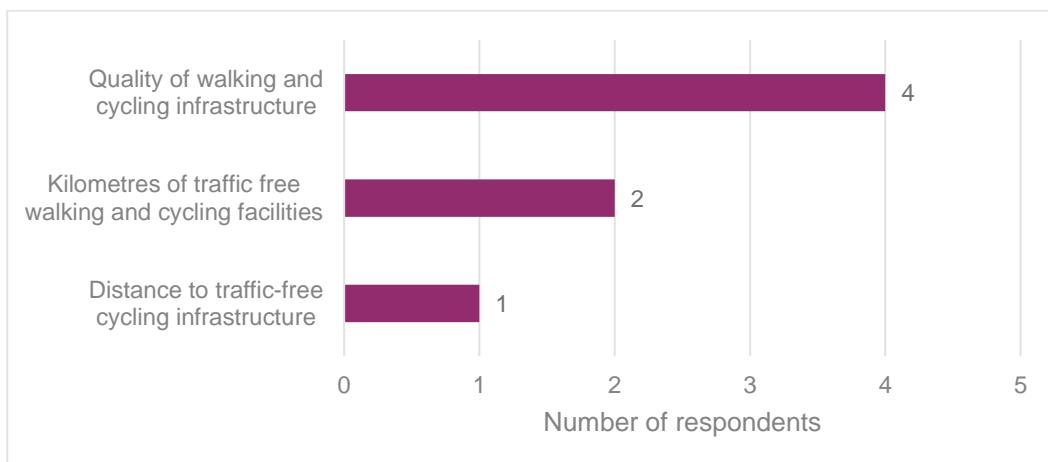
Of the indicators for 'increasing the number of people choosing walking, cycling and wheeling in Scotland', five respondents felt that their projects were increasing the *'frequency of walking and cycling for pleasure/exercise'*.

Figure 7. Which of the following indicators for 'Increasing the number of people choosing walking, cycling and wheeling in Scotland' have been improved through your project(s)? Please tick all that apply.



Four respondents felt that the '*quality of walking and cycling infrastructure*' was improved through their projects.

Figure 8. Which of the following indicators for 'Making high quality walking, cycling and wheeling infrastructure available to all' have been improved through your project(s)? Please tick all that apply.



In terms of making walking, cycling and wheeling safer and more accessible for all, '*perceptions of safety of walking, wheeling and cycling*' and '*perception of community involvement in walking, cycling and wheeling initiatives*' were the most selected as having been improved by their projects.

One respondent provided the specific example that their project has delivered a traffic-free active travel route that is accessible to all and links a residential area to the town centre, and a wider active travel network.

Figure 9. Which of the following indicators for 'Making walking, cycling and wheeling safer for all' have been improved through your project(s)? Please tick all that apply.

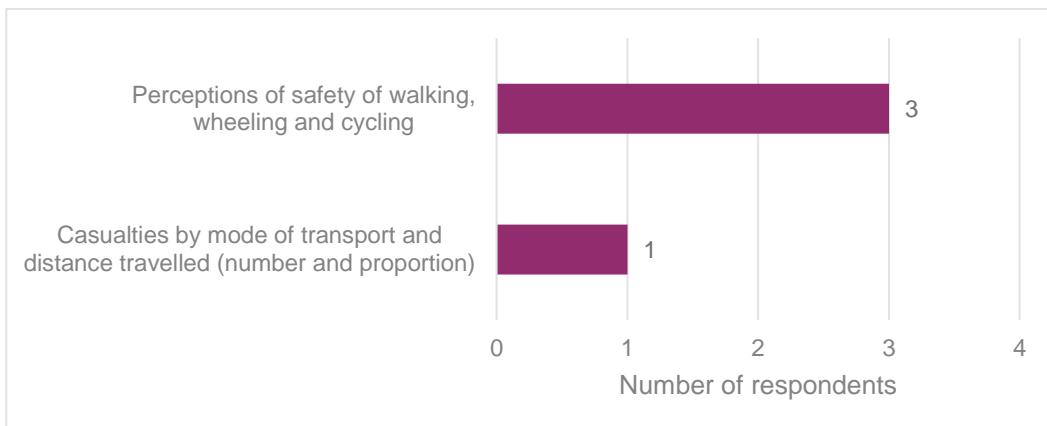
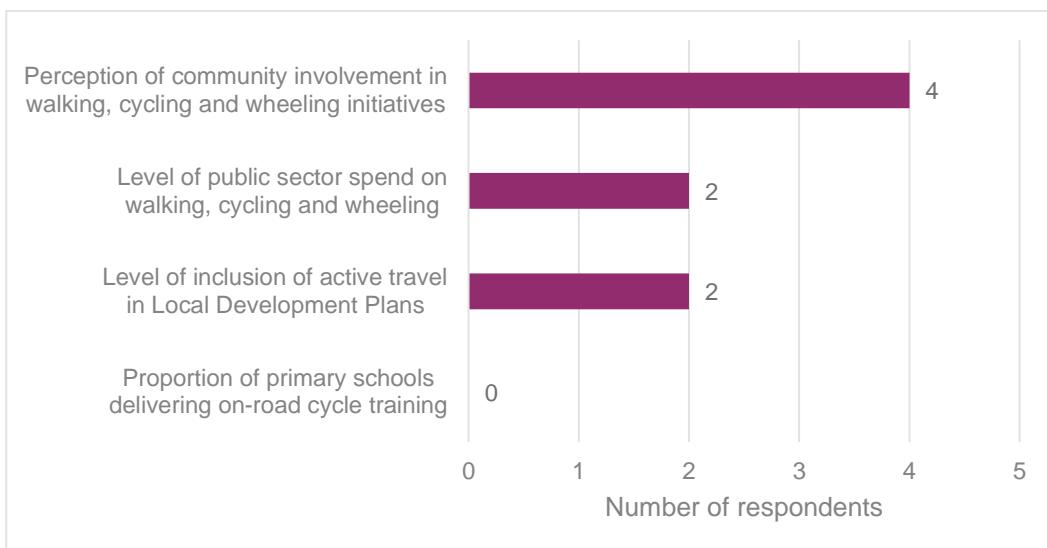
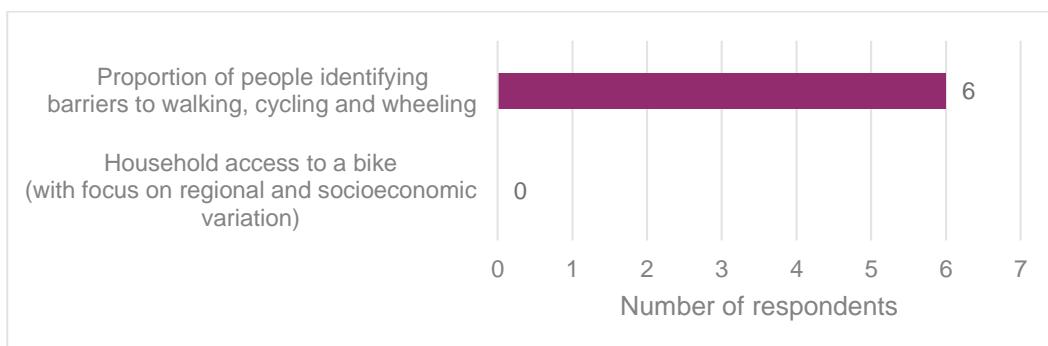


Figure 10. Which of the following indicators for 'Making walking, cycling and wheeling available to all' have been improved through your project(s)? Please tick all that apply.



Six respondents reported that the '*proportion of people identifying barriers to walking, cycling and wheeling*' was improved through their projects.

Figure 11. Which of the following indicators for 'Ensuring that delivery of walking, cycling and wheeling is promoted and supported by a range of partners' have been improved through your project(s)? Please select all that apply.



Taken together these results suggest that community-led projects may deliver a range of key outcomes related to active travel. However, this project did not look into monitoring or evaluation data on community-led projects that would have provided evidence of impact across these outcomes.

3.4 Factors conducive to the success of community-led projects

3.4.1 Relationships, skills and resource

Active travel professionals largely agreed that creating partnerships to support and empower community members and groups throughout projects is crucial to successful schemes. Interviewees commented that partnerships (usually between community groups, a local authority and an organisation like Sustrans) are most successful when each member understands the pressures and constraints of the other members and can therefore support in different areas.

“For example, you might get partnership projects where everyone is aware that the local authority is under a lot of pressure, don’t have a lot of money, don’t have a lot of capacity. So community groups understand that, so they’re quite happy to do the legroom to get funding for projects but they need that bit of support from the local authority to help spend it.” *Senior Development Officer, Paths for All*

Working with different professionals as partners and facilitators can help support community-led projects by providing professional knowledge of various best practices, helping to navigate challenges such as bureaucracy, inclusive design standards or objections. Active travel professionals described that Grant Advisors can be well-placed to facilitate processes of relationship building, identifying skills gaps and anticipating risks that may need support. These are largely activities that can happen at the beginning of projects, as Grand Advisors assess applications.

Some community group interviewees spoke about the vast number of skills held within their groups. This included skills in writing funding application, project management, digital skills, contract management and finance. However, this was not universal across community groups, and some described needing the support of others, particularly in design and delivery stages. Several community group members commented upon positive working relationships with stakeholders including local authorities and community councils, who had supported their projects in different ways.

“The local council has been very supportive really, I think because they recognise that we’re doing things which in the past they would have done, and that they should be doing, so they do support their Path Groups by giving out equipment for repairing paths, etc.” *Community group interviewee*

However, as highlighted previously, others said that receiving external support had limited the control they felt over their projects.

One of the most important factors for success from a community groups perspective was having motivated volunteers with time. As [figure 12](#) shows, this was the second most popular choice among survey respondents when asked 'what factors or conditions do you feel are conducive to the success of community-led active travel infrastructure projects'.

3.4.2 Understanding the community and facilitating inclusive engagement

Active travel professionals commented on the importance of conducting background research and working with community members and groups to get a comprehensive understanding of the specific community they're working in and its different social dynamics. Processes like 'stakeholder mapping' can be useful at facilitating this.

In addition, active travel professionals highlighted the importance of inclusivity in community-led projects, to ensure all community members have equal opportunity to contribute. Avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach and providing different avenues for consultation and feedback means that successful community-led projects can reach further into the community to include a wider selection of people.

"It's kind of the ability to go beyond the usual suspects as it were and capture a broader range of people that you know will have an interest, and will have a view about what could, and couldn't, and shouldn't happen, but maybe a bit more encouragement for them, or opportunities to see this is something of value to them."

Principle Urban Designer, Sustrans

3.4.3 Project timeframes

Active travel professionals all commented on the fact that longer-term community-led projects (lasting a year or more

from inception to delivery) are generally preferred. Whilst short-term projects can deliver ‘quick-wins’, these can sometimes be of a lower standard or quality either in the design of the intervention, or the physical intervention itself, due to a more limited design, construction and installation timeframe.

Longer-term projects allow time for a more collaborative process, where stakeholders such as community groups, local authorities, designers and the wider community can develop relationships and work together to tailor a project to the local area. Longer-term projects also provide more flexibility, allowing for time to deal with challenges such as securing planning permission. In addition, working to a longer timeframe means that objections to plans or designs for example, can be figured out with the community overtime.

“That’s the value of a long project, a project over a year, so you don’t end up tripping up by someone coming in at the last moment and saying, ‘actually, I hate all this, go away’, which can happen.” *Principle Urban Designer, Sustrans*

However, a few participants had concerns about projects dragging on for too long. One active travel professional noted that projects that are ongoing for a year or more can cause consultation fatigue and stakeholders may lose interest. This was reiterated by one community group member who said that their “ethos has always been you need to make something happen within a year, or two years, because otherwise things don’t... people lose interest, people move on, people have lots of other things to do; volunteers have got a certain amount of time”.

3.4.4 Access to funding

‘Access to financing’ was the most frequently selected answer by survey respondents when asked about factors conducive to the success of community-led active travel infrastructure projects. ‘Access to multi-year budgets’ was the most common

answer to the applicable aspects of financing. *'Having a sizeable budget'* was the second most popular answer.

Figure 12. Which of the following factors or conditions do you feel are conducive to the success of community-led active travel infrastructure projects? Please select all that apply.

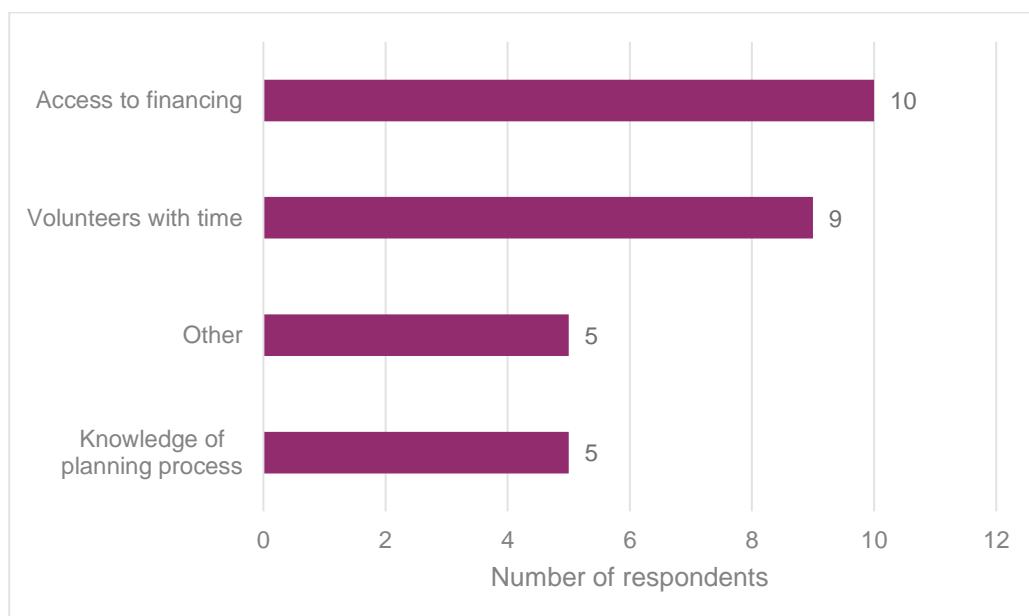
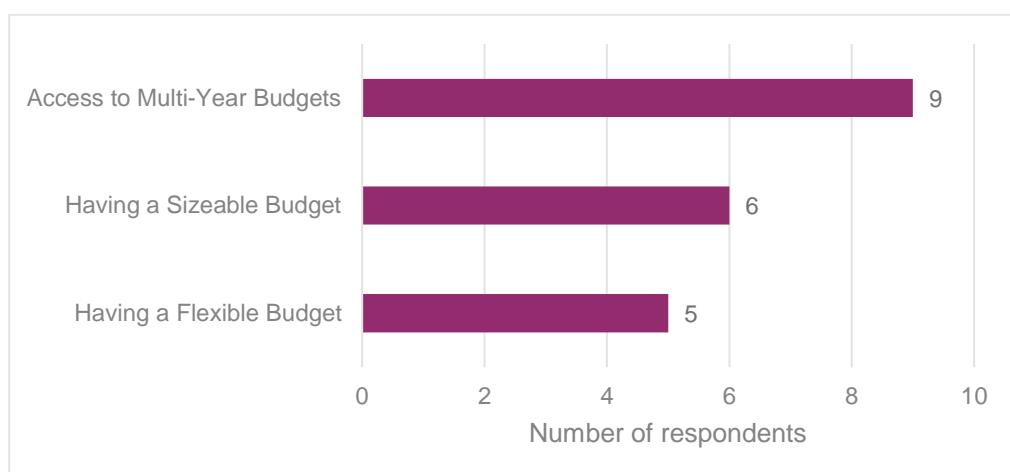


Figure 13. Please select the aspects of Financing which apply:



Access to funding was also commented upon by community group members in interviews. Comments focused on offering enough money to finance whole projects, the need to simplify processes to access funding and the need for grant schemes that supplied funding upfront. This reflects many of the recommendations drawn out in the literature review.

“You haven’t got any financial backing, so you need grant schemes that will give you the money upfront - you produce an invoice, they give you the money, instead of having to pay for something and then get paid back later.[...] The People’s Postcode Lottery just put £25,000 in our bank when we applied for it, absolutely brilliant, because then you’ve got some money to start paying for things.” Community group interviewee

3.5 Barriers to the success of community-led projects

3.5.1 Landownership and permissions

In rural areas, both active travel professionals and community group members mentioned that land ownership constraints are a key barrier to carrying out successful community-led active travel projects. This is less of an issue in urban areas, where local authorities often own the land and are generally willing to allow community groups to carry out active travel projects that will improve the area.

“Every issue that we’ve come across can be overcome with the right information and advice, apart from landowners suddenly saying no. So landowner permission is the main reason that projects fail, that landowners just decide they don’t want a path going across their land and there doesn’t seem to be any

sanction against a landowner just changing their mind.”
Senior Development Officer, Paths for All

Whilst local authorities have the statutory powers to circumvent these issues, local community groups often lack the influence and authority needed, meaning projects can stall or fail completely. The length of time from application to getting a decision was also seen as a large barrier to community groups applying to them.

“You have to be a local authority, so a council or a national park, or something like that, to be apply to apply for a Path Order. Councils don’t have any resources available to do this sort of thing, so trying to get them to take this on board is very difficult indeed.” *Community group interviewee*

Landownership issues can also form part of a wider range of barriers that can impede community-led active travel projects, especially in more rural areas in Scotland.

“It’s simply too many hurdles, too many considerations. So it could be...say along the stretch of your route, you’ve got cattle here, and they you’ve got a flood risk here, an angry landowner here, and there are just so many different considerations, that each one of them in themselves is causing a barrier...and we have plenty of locations in Scotland where there’s no alternative route. So even if you identify those constraints, there’s no way to work around them, and that can often stop projects as well.” *Senior Grant Advisor, Sustrans*

However, some active travel professionals and community group members mentioned that having community groups at the helm of projects can be beneficial when facing land ownership issues. Members may be familiar with the landowners, and local connections and knowledge can be used to come to an agreement.

3.5.2 Skills and resource

Issues such as a lack of specific skills or technical knowledge, project scopes and timeframes and resource limitations can affect community-led projects in different ways.

Both active travel professionals and community group members commented on the constraints of timeframes and staff availability, noting that many local authorities are facing cuts and cannot commit sufficient time to supporting community-led projects. This leads to community groups struggling with issues such as land ownership, as mentioned above. Furthermore, deadlines such as needing to finish a project within a financial year can lead to rushed projects or a lack of sufficient support from local authorities.

“looking at the local authority – it’s getting more difficult to get peoples’ time, as staff numbers are cut back, and it’s difficult to get the right input at the right time to keep projects moving. We will get there but it can take a lot of badgering to actually get at the response you need, or get somebody to come along to a meeting.” *Community group interviewee*

Resource could also be an issue within community groups themselves. Community-led projects often rely on a small number of very committed community members, which can put pressure on these people and impact the project if they leave or cut down the time they dedicate. One active travel professional felt you could “quite easily burn people out”.

“I’ve recently retired, so I had the time to do it, and I know how massively time consuming these things are. You’ve got to be aware that they take a lot of time, and you’ve got to have the time to put into it; it’s maybe not a full-time job but certainly a part-time job.” *Community group member*

Whilst longer-term projects were cited as a criterion for successful projects, too big a scope for a project can also

cause challenges. Active travel professionals comment that community groups may not fully understand the level of time and resources required to lead an active travel project, and if professional partners are struggling for time or resources as well, projects can flounder due to a lack of direction. Several active travel professionals commented that when working with community groups at the outset, it is important not to over promise, and to manage expectations so that the project scope is achievable, and people are not disappointed and are aware of the challenges they may face during the process.

“What people want is beyond what we can give them. So you sort of go, what would you like? And they say, we would like x, y and z. And then you go, actually we can only give you a smaller bit of that.” Programme Coordinator, Sustrans

Furthermore, active travel projects require a range of specialist skills that may not be available within community groups. One active travel professional mentioned that they felt the degree of autonomy a community group was able to have over a project is dependent on what existing skills and knowledge the group has about developing infrastructure. Another mentioned that they felt projects needing civil engineering works or projects on roads would be challenging for community groups to lead on – due to the skills necessary to navigate process involved in that.

This was mirrored in some comments by community group members who said that a reliance on using consultants undermined their feelings of control and ownership – especially when they felt consultants did not understand the needs of the community.

“It seems to work better if local people just stand up and say, we’d like to do this, have a quick meeting, put out a few surveys, get some post-it notes stuck on a few maps as to what people want, and then just get on with it. Because some of these projects seem to spend huge amounts of money, and time, on bringing in professional

people to consult with instead of putting the money into the project.” *Community group interviewee*

3.5.3 Specifications and governance

A commonly discussed barrier by community group members was that funders’ infrastructure specifications can be too prescriptive and not adaptable enough for different areas or terrains – especially in rural areas.

“The specification they tend to look for when installing paths, in particular, are quite often a spec that we consider is not appropriate for a rural type environment. When you’re looking at building paths at 2.5m wide of tarmac, it doesn’t often fit into the rural sort of setting that we’re dealing with; it’s probably too intrusive and quite expensive as well and difficult for us to put a funding package together to meet that specification.” *Community group interviewee*

Some community groups also felt there were too many deliverables or governance processes tied to certain funding streams. This was seen as a barrier for community groups due to the time and resource and effort needed to complete these.

“You don’t need equality reports, you don’t need all fancy types of reports and things - I’ve got a list here - green infrastructure flood management proposals. Really? Do we need that for something like this path that we’ve built? Signage and line markings. It’s a whin dust path, we’re not going to put give-way signs, and things like that, along a path like that. Lighting proposals, it’s out in the countryside, we’re not going to put lights on it.”

Community group interviewee

These challenges also link to the issue raised regarding the technical skills needed among community groups, as this is another bureaucratic hurdle which local communities may need to rely on external help to overcome.

“The increasing amount of governance measures also risks taking community project management beyond the capacity, experience or competence of volunteers”

Survey respondent

3.5.4 Financial constraints and inequalities in funding allocation

Financial challenges can play a major role in impacting the success of these projects. Funding application processes can be complicated, highly competitive and time consuming which can lead to community groups being overwhelmed or unsuccessful in securing funding due to a lack of experience or knowledge. Funding schemes with quick turn arounds on applications were also a challenging, as one community group member stated that *“funding often comes and goes very quickly before community groups have had time to apply”*.

“The funding landscape is changing constantly, policies are being updated constantly, local development plans are being updated constantly, and it’s practically impossible for even professionals to keep our heads on all of that, let along somebody who’s a volunteer.” *Senior Grant Advisor, Sustrans*

One active travel professional commented that projects that are most successful tend to be those that have full funding secured from the outset, and do not require additional applications or match funding. This avoids needing to navigate multiple funding channels or application processes.

“you can either spend practically your whole project making funding applications to like a cocktail of different funders, but if you had a lump sum agreed early in the project with very, very few conditions attached to it, you don’t have to worry about it and you can focus on the project design, and the project delivery.” *Senior Grant Advisor, Sustrans*

Once funding has been secured, often, there are stipulations with how and when the funding can be used, all of which can impact the timescale, quality and autonomy of the project and the community groups leading it. This was highlighted both by active travel professionals and community groups.

Lastly, active travel professionals expressed the view that funding allocation can often be skewed to more affluent areas, as populations there are generally likely to have more time and more skills to secure the funding in the first place - leading to an increase in inequality.

“You look at the east end of Glasgow where there’s large problems with deprivation and things like that, in contrast to what we have in Aberdeenshire, we’ve got lots of single parent families who’ve obviously got kids. They’re working full time, maybe done have the same skills. It’s very, very hard for them to take the lead in community-led projects without having professional support.” *Senior Development Officer, Paths for All*

4. Conclusion

Through this research, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding about what works in delivering community-led active travel infrastructure. Using desk-based research, interviews and a perception survey, we gathered information which addressed this central research question.

Several core components of what makes a project ‘community-led’ were shared across the literature review, interviews and survey. This included that issues and solutions have been identified and driven forward by community groups or community members. They are often those funded by grants that community members themselves have applied for and secured. Community members must also have a high degree of decision-making power and influence throughout the project.

The literature review highlighted that the principle of communities being able to influence decision making has featured in Scottish policy discourse for some time. However, there is no standardised model for how to facilitate this. Given this, there is potential for more robust models of community-led active travel infrastructure to be developed for practice. This could be co-designed with community groups, active travel professionals and local authorities to ensure it meets the needs of these stakeholders.

One of the primary benefits of taking a community-led approach is an increased sense of community ownership over infrastructure and empowerment of the community groups and members taking part. Individuals who look part in this research thought that because of this, infrastructure is less likely to face local resistance, have better usage, and are more likely to be maintained by the local community. Other benefits included that community-led projects are more likely to address local needs and can facilitate effective wider community engagement.

There emerged several criteria conducive to the success of community-led projects. The importance of fostering productive and supportive partnerships was identified in the literature review, interviews and survey. As community-led projects typically involve a range of stakeholders (community groups, local authorities, funding bodies, landowners), it is crucial that these partners work together, whilst ensuring that the needs of the community are at the forefront. These partners can come together to effectively share skills and expertise where needed, especially when these aren't held by the community. These processes can often be facilitated by grand advisors, who can work with community-groups in the initial stages of projects to identify skills gaps and risks in the process where community-groups may need support. However, whilst this was acknowledged by some community groups, other felt that their lack of skills in areas such as design and the need to invite external partners and consultants to be involved had diminished their sense of control over projects.

The need for early and continuous engagement with community members was highlighted as another criterion - enabling them to have a sense of control over every stage of the project. This links to the fact that using local knowledge is a crucial factor contributing to the success of community-led projects. Building on this, longer-term projects (with a reasonable scope) were repeatedly said to be more beneficial, giving communities and other partners longer to work together to develop detailed plans and implement appropriate infrastructure.

The key challenges facing community-led processes were consistent amongst the literature review, interviews and perception survey. Navigating funding landscapes was highlighted as a major barrier. Funding applications require a lot of time and skills which may be limited within community groups. Furthermore, there are often caveats that come with funding, such as how quickly the money can be spent, which makes carrying out longer, more in-depth, projects harder. Lack of up-front funding also means that it can be difficult for

projects to make progress whilst waiting for funding to come through.

General bureaucratic issues, especially surrounding the resources that local authorities have, was another challenge consistently raised. Additionally, dealing with (potentially multiple) landowners is a challenge in Scotland, and often, community group members are not equipped to deal with the legal demands of landownership disputes. This ties into an overarching challenge of the need for specialist or technical skills within community groups (i.e. planning applications, funding knowledge, legal acumen etc.) meaning they are often reliant on external help which can undermine feelings of autonomy and ownership.

It is important to note that the factors that are conducive to success all require a lot of time and skill from community members. Thus, there is a risk of both 'burn out' of volunteers and 'engagement fatigue' within the community on long-term projects. This can also lead to barriers to participation, making community-led projects inequitable. From the literature review and interviews with active travel professionals, it seems community-led projects are skewed to more affluent areas where wealthier residents may have more free time and specific professional skills.

The literature review highlighted the additional challenges that remote Scottish communities may face due to their isolation from stakeholders. However, this did not come up during the interviews or survey. This may be because projects in these areas are less common, and the interviewees themselves had not worked any. This may be a sign that currently community-led projects are less likely to happen in more remote, and potentially less affluent communities.

4.1 Recommendations

The following are a selection of recommendations to improve the development and delivery of community-led active travel infrastructure projects in Scotland, based on the findings from this research.

Funding:

- Simplify and standardise funding application processes to make it more accessible to a wider range of community groups.
- Where possible, make multi-year funding available to facilitate longer-term projects.
- Provide upfront funding and limit the need for match-funding.

Partnership working:

- Retain a focus on partnership approaches to community-led infrastructure. However, it must be ensured that this does not detract from communities' control and ownership at all stages of the project. This could be done by:
 - Enabling communities to have self-determination over the structure of partnerships and how partners are involved in their projects.
 - Ensuring that there's a strong focus on relationship building between partners.
 - Ensuring that partnerships focus on upskilling, empowering and support with technical challenges. This includes challenges like funding applications, planning permission and landownership disputes. Through this work, over time the need for partners involvement may reduce as community groups increase their ability to overcome these challenges independently.

Equity:

- Understand patterns of where community-led projects are being funded currently, from an equity perspective. This

would provide insight into how equitable current funding provision is and guide work to resolve this.

- Co-design more equitable models of community-led infrastructure development that overcome practical, personal, socio-economic and motivational barriers to participation by community members.

Monitoring & Evaluation:

- Carry out standardised monitoring and evaluation of community-led active travel infrastructure projects in Scotland in order to build an evidence base to further understanding of 'what works' and identify areas to improve. This could be facilitated by:
 - Developing a set of criteria for what constitutes a 'community-led' project.
 - Developing frameworks for monitoring and evaluation of community-led projects, across different programmes. This could be led by Transport Scotland, whilst organisations administering grants could work with community-groups to collect monitoring and evaluation data on their projects.

5. Methodology

The project was conducted as part of the Scottish Research Programme for 23–24 (SRP9) and funded by Transport Scotland.

5.1 Literature Review

The literature review was the first research activity completed. This detailed gathering relevant evidence from existing literature about community-led active travel infrastructure. The first stage of the literature review included developing a range of search strings to scan for relevant journal articles and grey literature using, Google, Google Scholar and JSTOR, based on the following research questions:

Models & Best Practice	1. What accepted models of 'community-led' infrastructure development and delivery exist?
	a. Is there a distinction between 'community participation' and 'community-led' in infrastructure delivery?
	b. What are the hallmarks of community-led models of delivery?
	c. What models of community involvement seem to be most prevalent in the Scottish active travel context?
	d. How can community-led infrastructure projects be distinguished from more 'conventional' infrastructure project delivery?
Benefits	2. What are the benefits of community-led infrastructure projects, compared to those developed using other delivery models?
	a. Do these benefits differ depending on the model or definition of 'community-led' that is used?
Outcomes (other models)	b. Who experiences these benefits?
	3. What outcomes and impact are associated with community-led infrastructure projects, in comparison to other models of project delivery?
	a. Who experiences these outcomes?
	b. What insights are available from the literature on the quality of infrastructure delivery taking a community-led approach, compared to more conventional approaches?

	c. What insights are available from the literature on the value for money of infrastructure delivery taking a community-led approach, compared to more conventional approaches?
Challenges	4. What are the challenges and disadvantages of community-led infrastructure projects, compared to those developed using other delivery models?
	a. Does the literature reveal any commonly reported pitfalls of community-led models? b. Who primarily experiences these disadvantages?
Criteria for success	5. Are there identified criteria or conditions that facilitate the successful delivery of community-led active travel infrastructure over the short and long term?
	a. What are these criteria or conditions? b. For projects successfully using a community-led model, what sort of time, skills, and resources are involved? c. What factors influence the success of community-led projects?

The identified documents were then narrowed down to the most relevant, with documents being excluded if they did not either cover active travel or Scotland. This process was kept track of in a database which included document titles, authors, summary, search string used and inclusion/exclusion decision.

The chosen documents were then read in detail, with key findings being noted and grouped according to the research questions. In some cases, the interviews with active travel professionals led to additional documents (especially internal Sustrans reports) being identified. These were also included in the literature review at a later date.

5.2 Interviews with active travel professionals and community groups/organisations

The second phase of this research consisted of stakeholder interviews to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions of community involvement and ownership among communities taking part in active travel infrastructure projects.

Interviews were first conducted with active travel professionals. This was intended to help describe the broad landscape of active travel infrastructure delivery, how community-led projects sit within this and their experience of working on community-led projects. Individuals were chosen who work across different funding programmes, with opportunities for community involvement. Interviewees included:

- Interviewee 1 – Principle Urban Designer (Sustrans)
- Interviewee 2 – Programme Coordinator (Sustrans)
- Interviewee 3 – Senior Grant Advisor (Sustrans)
- Interviewee 4 – Senior Development Officer (Paths for All)
- Interviewee 5 – Senior Development Officer (Paths for All)

These constituted the first round of interviews. Following this, a second round of interviews took place with

- People who take part in community-led infrastructure projects as a member of a community group
- People who experience community-led infrastructure projects as another local stakeholder or active travel professional.

Individuals to interview were largely identified through the interviews with active travel professionals. Thus, contacts were sought from projects they had worked on or heard about. The interviewees represented a range of active travel professionals, community group representatives and one local authority worker:

- Interviewee 6 – Community group member
- Interviewee 7 – Local Authority worker
- Interviewee 8 – Community group member
- Interviewee 9 – Community group member

Interviews took place between October 2023 and March 2024. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interview

took place using Microsoft Teams, they were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo. Codes were derived using a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches. All analysis was checked by another member of the Research and Monitoring Unit (RMU). The analysis was then written up and included in the main body of the research findings.

5.3 Survey of community groups or organisations

To collect further data on the perceptions of community involvement and ownership among community groups a perception survey targeted at individuals who have taken part in a community-led infrastructure project as a community group member or representative was conducted.

The survey was an online survey built in JISC and included a selection of open and closed response questions; it ran for 1 month. A prize of a £50 shopping voucher was offered as an incentive.

The survey was distributed using several means including:

- A mailout to Places for Everyone community partners
- Direct emailing of community groups identified in interviews with active travel professionals
- Distribution to interviewee contacts, to pass on to relevant individuals.

The 11 responses to the survey were analysed using Microsoft Excel (quantitative) and NVivo (qualitative). All analysis was checked by another member of RMU. The analysis was then written up alongside the interview findings.

Information about survey participants community groups can be found in the tables below.

Table 1. How would you describe your role in the community group or organisation?

Role	Count
Communications	1
Development Manager	1
Director	1
Fundraiser	1
Project lead	2
Project Officer	2
Secretary	1
Trustee	2

Table 2. How long have you been involved in the community group or organisation?

Years	Count
Between 1 and 2 years	1
Between 2 and 5 years	4
More than 5 years	6

Table 3. Where is your community group based?

Area	Count
Accessible Rural Area (population of fewer than 3,000 people but within a 30 minute drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more people)	1
Accessible Small Town (between 3,000 to 9,999 people and within 30 minutes drive of either a Other or Large Urban Area)	5
Large Urban Area (More than 125,000 people)	3
Remote Small Town (between 3,000 to 9,999 people with a drive time of over 30 minutes from an Other or Large Urban Area)	2

5.4 Limitations

The limited time available to carry out this project meant that fewer interviews were carried out than initially planned. In addition, due to time constraints, the perception survey could only run for one month, ideally, the survey would have been run for longer in order to allow for more responses to be collected. Further avenues to distribute the survey were also being explored, however ultimately could not be taken due to time constraints.

This project also planned to examine existing monitoring and evaluation data. This was limited due to the lack of available and robust monitoring and evaluation data; thus the decision was taken to not include this data within this report.

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