



Evaluation of the work of Climate Action Stokesley and Villages 2019 - 2024

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Coast and Vale Community Action
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Contents

Acknowledgements

	Page
Part One: Background and Introduction	1
Part Two: Evaluation Activity	3
Part Three: Findings from annual reports, website and social media	4
Part Four: Findings from Interviews	6
Part Five: Findings from the Survey	9
Part Six: Findings from the Focus Group	16
Part Seven: Impact - What has been achieved?	19
Part Eight: Reflections	20
Part Nine: Options	22

Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Questions

Appendix 2 Focus Group Questions

Appendix 3 Survey Questions

Acknowledgements

This report has been written by David Stone, Strategic Development Manager at Coast and Vale Community Action (CaVCA).

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Thank you to everyone who gave generously of their time to answer questions and to offer insights into the work of Climate Action Stokesley and Villages (CAsaV).

Interviewees

Councillor Ron Kirk, Great Ayton Parish Council
Councillor Derek Simpson, Rudby Parish Council
Councillor Heather Moorhouse, North Yorkshire Council
David Tonge, Co-Ordinator, North Yorkshire Climate Coalition
Simon Bowens, Yorkshire Campaigns Organiser, Friends of the Earth
Jos Holmes, Climate Change Strategy Manager, North Yorkshire Council
Chris Jones, Associate Assistant Headteacher, Stokesley School
Joanna Whitwell, Creative Director, Labman Automation Ltd
Andrew Whitwell, Managing Director, Labman Automation Ltd
Mel Healy, The Discovery Centre (community library), Great Ayton
Tracey Flint, Service Improvement Officer (Waste), North Yorkshire Council

Focus Group participants (CAsaV volunteers)

Barry Warrington (Steering Group/Transport Group lead)
Wendy Smith (Food Group lead)
Caryn Loftus (Co-ordinator/Steering Group)
Jenny Earle (Food Group lead)
Bridget Holmstrom (Steering Group/Nature Group lead)
Mark Lewis (Energy Group)
Kate Gibbon Publicity)
Spenser Tate (Energy Group lead)
Pete Smith (Waste Group)

Part One: Background and Introduction

In October 2024 Climate Action Stokesley and Villages (CAsaV) invited Coast and Vale Community Action (CaVCA) to conduct an impact assessment of its work. The assessment was commissioned by North Yorkshire (NYC) and funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund. CAsaV requested an evaluation of activity to date based on qualitative and quantitative data, with a particular focus on behaviour change, coupled with recommendations for the way forward. It particularly wanted this work to help identify what it should focus its limited volunteer time on and to help it engage with a more diverse group of residents. This report is the output of that work.

About CAsaV

CAsaV is a voluntary group, created in July 2019, following the Annual General Meeting of the Stokesley and Villages Community Partnership, to support the work of the Partnership in helping the area tackle the climate emergency. In February 2022, following the dissolution of the Partnership, the group decided to become an unincorporated organisation, supported by the Friends of the Earth Climate Action network, known from March 2023 as the Local Action Groups network. As part of this network CAsaV has access to support and resources from Friends of the Earth.

The aim of the group, as stated in its governing document, is “to help the communities in Stokesley and the surrounding villages to take action on climate change by supporting and developing local initiatives to reduce carbon emissions or adapt to the changing climate.”

The group has a vision for a net-zero carbon area by 2030 where it will have :

- reduced the use of energy in the area and increased the use of renewable energy
- saved the unique natural environment that is local to the area and planted more trees
- increased the availability of sustainable food
- reduced the use of petrol/diesel vehicles
- minimised waste

A steering group is responsible for the management and administration of CAsaV. Five themed sub-groups (Energy, Nature, Food, Transport and Waste) are responsible for taking forward local action and initiatives in pursuit of the vision.

The area covered by CAsaV is approximately 300 square kilometres and has a population of around 17000.

Stokesley and Villages faces many of the same challenges of reducing CO₂e as other rural areas across North Yorkshire and the UK, with a wide range of property types with poor energy efficiency and minimal public transport.

About CaVCA

CaVCA is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. We work to help communities thrive because we believe people and places matter. Our strategic vision is of thriving communities which are independent, entrepreneurial and connected. Our mission is to support, develop and empower communities; help people and communities to feel a sense of collective agency – so they believe in their ability to work together to make a difference; and to promote co-operation and common goals aimed at improving lives for everyone. The way in which we deliver this mission is by bringing people together, providing access to facilities and resources and building confidence, aspiration and entrepreneurial skills. By doing this we help to support a local economy that works for local people, we build the foundations for growing aspirations, and we grow resilient people and communities. Our work is people-focused, place-based, dynamic (it adapts and changes) and collaborative, based on the building of strong relationships and encouraging the sharing of power.

About this evaluation and report

The evaluation of CASaV's work contained in this report is based on the insights, information and perspectives gathered during interviews with stakeholders, an online survey and an online focus group with key CASaV volunteers, as well as information in CASaV's annual reports, website and social media, including quantitative data on some of CASaV's activities such as its Foodshare initiative, tree planting, apple pressing events and repair cafes.

From these it has been possible to gain an impression of CASaV's progress and development from 2019 to 2024, identify those areas of activity in which it has been particularly effective, identify areas of activity in which it has been arguably less effective, and understand some of the factors that have shaped its development so far as well as some of the factors that will influence its future development. Following on from this it has been possible to suggest a number of ways in which CASaV might want to develop its activity over the next five years.

Although the evaluation and report were commissioned by North Yorkshire Council the report's primary audience is CASaV itself and the aim of the author throughout has been to produce something that will be of genuine use to CASaV and its members as they seek to chart a way forward and to build on their undoubted successes so far.

Part Two: Evaluation Activity

The programme of research used to conduct the evaluation was co-designed and agreed with CASaV co-ordinator Caryn Loftus. It consisted of analysis of the CASaV website, newsletter/update, Facebook page, and annual reports together with interviews with key stakeholders, an online survey and an online focus group with key volunteers.

When analysing the website and newsletter/update we were looking at how effectively they displayed the depth and range of CASaV's activities, how well they demonstrated the impact CASaV is having and what its successes are, how easy they make it for readers to get involved in CASaV and how effectively they inspire them to take action.

In considering the Facebook page we asked ourselves how effectively it promoted CASaV's work, how well it helped people to take action on climate change and how it encouraged people to get involved in CASaV's work.

The annual reports were used to get a sense of the year-on-year progress and impact of the group.

Our interviews enabled us to get perspectives of CASaV from a range of different angles. We spoke to elected members of the parish and county councils, the co-ordinator of the North Yorkshire Climate Coalition, North Yorkshire Council's Climate Change Strategy Manager, the Associate Assistant Headteacher of Stokesley School, the Managing Director and Creative Director of local business Labman Automation Ltd, the Manager of the Discovery Centre (Great Ayton's community library), and the Service Improvement Officer (Waste) of North Yorkshire Council. Eleven interviews were conducted. Interviews were based on the same set of questions for all interviewees but there was sufficient flexibility and informality in the process to explore areas not specifically covered by the pre-prepared questions.

The online survey was particularly useful in terms of understanding which of CASaV's means of communication were most effective in terms of reach and in terms of inspiring action, the age and gender characteristics of the people CASaV was reaching, the types of actions people took as a result of CASaV's work, the geographical reach of CASaV, what types of CASaV activity people were noticing and what other activities respondents felt CASaV should undertake.

The focus group enabled us to get to know the individuals behind CASaV a bit better, delving into the reasons why they felt an evaluation was necessary at this time, what changes they felt had happened in Stokesley and nearby villages over the past five years as a result of CASaV's activity, what activities they felt were and were not having an impact, what they felt might have been done differently over the last five years given the benefit of hindsight and what ambitions they had for the next five years.

Part Three: Findings from annual reports, website and social media

Annual reports

We considered three annual reports which covered the periods July 2019-June 2022, July 2022-June 2023 and July 2023-June 2024. The first of these covered a longer period than a year since it included the period prior to the group becoming an unincorporated constituted association during which it operated as part of the Stokesley and Villages Community Partnership.

The annual reports reveal a group successfully establishing an unincorporated community association with clear outcomes and a strong organisational structure. Regular public meetings, maintained online during Covid 19 lockdowns, and a pro-active publicity strategy, using social media, press releases, a monthly email update, website and a monthly climate column for the Darlington and Stockton Times, have been effective in engaging new people and maintaining interest. There is no data on membership in the annual reports but membership of the Facebook group has increased from around 300 in 2022 to 620 at the time of writing, subscribers to the email update have increased from 200 in 2022 to 400 in 2024, and website visits have increased from 800 in 2022 to 2,160 in 2024. In the 2023/2024 report the production of leaflets describing actions people can take on climate change and biodiversity loss is mentioned but there is no information on how many were distributed or whether anyone took the actions described.

The 2019/2022 and 2022/2023 reports list a number of successful grant funding applications although there is no information on how the funding was used and what was achieved as a result. There is no information on grants in the 2023/2024 report.

A good range of lobbying and campaigning activity is described in the reports but there is no information about what changed as a result. That does not mean that this activity was without success and some of the things that were achieved came out of the interviews we conducted with stakeholders (see Part Four of this report.)

The Achievements section of each report contain a huge amount of activity and convey an accurate picture of a very busy group, embedded in its communities and providing an impressive array of opportunities to get involved. However, it is not always clear what many of the activities did achieve and how they contributed towards the achievement of CASaV's five outcomes.

Website

CASaV has an attractive and easily navigable website organised around its sub-group themes. Opportunities for taking action (links to leaflets describing ways to tackle climate change, information on repair cafes, a link to sign up to the mailing list, recycling at the Co-op) are prominently displayed on the home page as is a diary of events offering multiple ways of getting involved. The description of the group under the heading "About Us" at the bottom of the home page might benefit from being placed at the top of the page for the benefit of the first-time visitor.

The Energy, Food, Nature, Transport, Waste and Zero Carbon pages have a lot of information on what CASaV has been doing in each of the thematic areas, as well as information and links to other sources of information. There are also opportunities to take action and get involved although on some of the pages these are a little swamped by all the other information. These pages feel text heavy and might benefit from being broken up by more photos and videos.

The News page highlights forthcoming events, the Books page promotes the group's book bank, and the Events page is taken up with the events diary and details of past meetings. There might be scope for streamlining or merging the News and Events pages.

Social Media

CASaV is active on Facebook, X and Instagram. It has a Facebook group with 619 members, an X page with 14 followers (which seems to have been used recently primarily to promote the repair cafes) and Instagram page (Climate Action SaV) with 104 followers to which it last posted in April last year.

The results of the online survey suggest that social media was the least effective means of engagement in terms of numbers reached, although it was the most effective in terms of translating engagement into taking action. Only 15 people out of 39 respondents (38.5%) said they had seen CASaV's social media but of these 14 (93.3%) had taken action as a result.

Membership of the Facebook group has grown steadily over the past five years but the presence on X and Instagram seems to have been less successful.

Part Four: Findings from Interviews

Eleven interviews were conducted with stakeholders including local business Labman Automation, Friends of the Earth, elected representatives of parish and county councils, council employees, North Yorkshire Climate Coalition, Stokesley School and Great Ayton community library. Interviewees were asked to describe their roles and the nature of their connection to CASaV, what they thought CASaV does well and what it could do better, to what extent they thought CASaV had changed local people's behaviour, to what extent they thought CASaV had influenced their organisation and other organisations, and how they thought CASaV should develop its work in the future.

What CASaV does well

Interviewees felt that CASaV was very good at engaging with the community by providing frequent and wide-ranging events and activities which give local people an opportunity to get involved. The Repair Cafes, seed swaps, having a stall in the market, regular public meetings especially those with guest speakers and some of the Nature sub-group's activities were seen as particularly valuable in terms of raising awareness, stimulating discussion and having an impact.

CASaV was also seen as a good source of knowledge and expertise, a great conduit for local climate action, a forum for ideas, and an effective channel of information. Many interviewees praised CASaV's communications, its passion and enthusiasm, its ethos of sharing, its enthusiasm, and its commitment.

It was also felt that CASaV did an excellent job of maintaining a high profile in the local community through its activities and more widely through the monthly climate column and through its effective networking and good connections with decision-makers.

Several people commented on how well-organised CASaV is and how "switched on" its key volunteers are.

Taking surplus food to deprived communities in Teesside was mentioned several times as being a particularly valuable activity.

What CASaV could do better

The most common thing that interviewees felt CASaV could do better was reaching out to a wider proportion of the population. Linked to this was a view that CASaV could do more to reach those people who are not already active or interested in climate change and to turn initial engagements at events and activities into a longer-term commitment to getting involved and taking action. New people were needed to take CASaV's work forward.

A number of suggestions were made as to how more people could be reached including holding meetings in Great Ayton and some of the other villages, inviting speakers more regularly to meetings, working with Stokesley School to get students involved, sourcing some marketing and social media expertise, and reaching out to younger people and their parents through primary schools, youth clubs, and scouts and brownies groups.

One person thought CASaV could do more to evaluate its activities, another wanted CASaV to be more involved in Friends of the Earth's campaigning, training and events, and one person thought CASaV should try to get more funding to further its work.

How much has CASaV changed local people's behaviour?

Responses varied from "quite a bit" to "a tiny amount." Most interviewees felt it was difficult to say, and one person said it was difficult because there was no baseline data and there had been no monitoring of behaviour change over time. Those who felt that there had only been a small amount of behaviour change thought that it was nonetheless valuable as change is incremental and every change, no matter how small, counts.

The types of behaviour change people thought had happened included changes in people's thinking, people becoming more vocal, raised awareness and changed attitudes. There were also a few examples of very specific changed behaviour – people putting up swift boxes as a result of a Swift Action event, people using the seed share and a high take up in Stokesley, Great Ayton and nearby villages for North Yorkshire Council's Local Energy Advice Demonstrator.

How much has CASaV influenced your organisation?

Everyone interviewed thought CASaV had positively influenced their organisation.

One parish council had been influenced to create wild areas on the land it managed, another had become involved in the Living Leven project.

A community library had developed an environmental policy, cut down on waste and started recycling more.

One council officer cited CASaV's involvement in the creation of the North Yorkshire Climate Change strategy, its support for North Yorkshire Council's work on climate and its good relations with elected members. Another mentioned North Yorkshire Council's practical support for Give and Take events and CASaV's support with consultations which in turn inform policy. North Yorkshire Council elected members talked about CASaV's influence on decisions regarding cutting grass verges, its support for the council's energy and retrofitting work, and the fact that the council's Climate Champion is a local councillor.

CASaV had influenced activities in Stokesley School, helped develop the North Yorkshire Climate Coalition and helped it to influence policy makers, secured the support of local business Labman Automation Ltd and was used as an exemplar of effective community engagement by Friends of the Earth.

How much has CASaV influenced other organisations?

Interviewees were less certain about CASaV's influence on other organisations but it was felt that they had changed some local community venues' approach to waste, improved some local cafes' recycling habits, persuaded local retailers, in particular the Coop, to support the redistribution of surplus food that would otherwise go to waste. It was also mentioned that CASaV had helped develop the community garden at Yatton House, a day centre in Great

Ayton for people with learning disabilities and had supported other climate action groups with their activities, for example with developing repair cafes.

It was also thought that CASaV had influenced Stokesley School, community-focused organisations in Great Ayton, North Yorkshire Council and parish councils.

How should CASaV develop its work in the future?

Interviewees all felt that CASaV was doing a good job and should continue.

The most common area for development talked about was communication - getting the message out to a wider audience and involving those who are not yet involved. It was felt that more should be done to reach the working age population, less advantaged people, and school age children.

Many interviewees thought CASaV should develop more projects that generate active involvement, like the repair café, nature activities, taking surplus food to Teesside, and the transport day in Stokesley showcasing electric vehicles.

Others wanted CASaV to maintain or increase its influencing and campaigning work, network more with other climate action groups in order to share knowledge and resources and become more involved with national Friends of the Earth campaigns.

Part Five: Findings from the Survey

An online survey was launched on 1 December 2024. It was promoted at CASaV events as well as on the CASaV website and social media. It closed on 10 January 2025 and had 39 responses. It asked respondents whether they received the monthly CASaV email updates, had visited the website, had seen CASaV on social media, had seen CASaV's column in the Darlington and Stockton Times, or had seen or taken part in any of CASaV's events and activities. Respondents answering Yes were asked if they had taken any action as a result and what that action was. Further questions asked what additional activities respondents would like locally in relation to climate change and how CASaV could make it easier for people to get involved. Finally, information was gathered on age, gender, and where people lived.

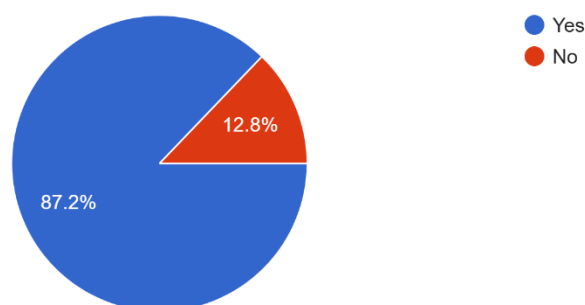
Survey responses can be viewed in detail here https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Jg-YPpra9MNR7mKpOrJmLKf8DodBVn9sdfS_CRZlBck/edit?gid=1799497646#gid=1799497646

Monthly updates

34 people (87.2%) received the updates. 28 of these (82.4%) took action as a result.

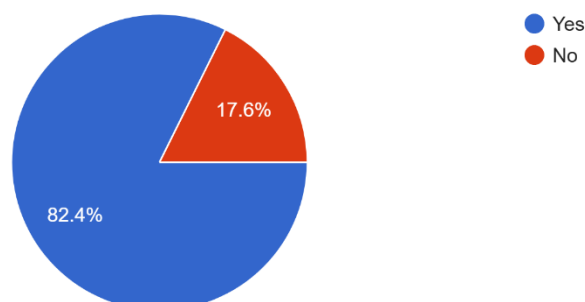
Do you receive the monthly email update from Climate Action Stokesley?

39 responses



Has anything you have seen in the update led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

34 responses



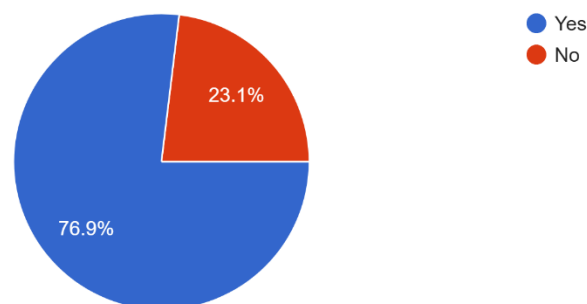
Actions people took as a result of reading the update included repurposing of insulating material to lag pipes and water tanks, getting involved in a community garden project, improving house insulation, changing to an electric vehicle, boiling less water in the kettle, turning down the gas central heating, recycling soft plastic at the Co-op, writing to the local MP, taking part in repair cafes, installing swift boxes and buying more things second-hand.

Website

30 people (76.9%) had visited CASaV's website. 22 of these (73.3%) took action as a result.

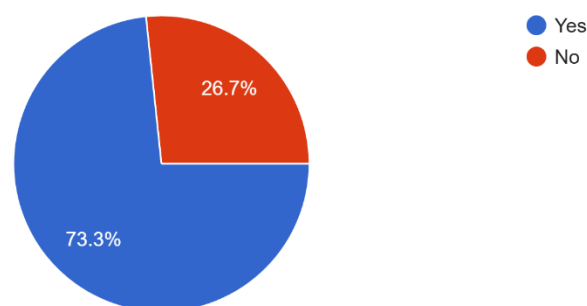
Have you ever visited the Climate Action Stokesley and Villages website <https://climateactionstokesleyandvillages.org/>?

39 responses



Has anything you have seen on the website led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

30 responses



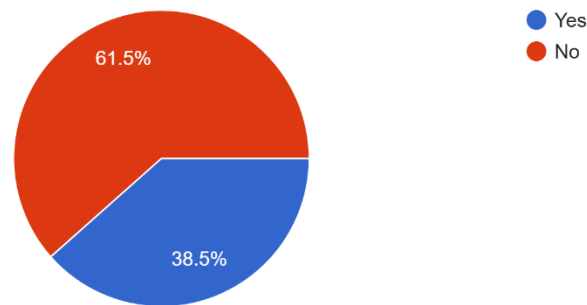
Actions people took as a result of seeing the website included reducing food waste, setting up recycling in classrooms, using their diesel car less, eating less red meat, planting trees, writing to the local MP, installing solar panels, recycling more, attending repair cafes and starting to use oat milk.

Facebook, X and Instagram

15 people (38.5%) had seen CASaV's social media. 14 of these (93.3%) took action as a result.

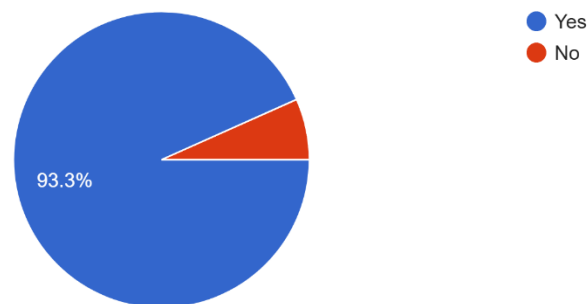
Have you seen Climate Action Stokesley and Villages on Facebook, X or Instagram?

39 responses



Has anything you have seen led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

15 responses



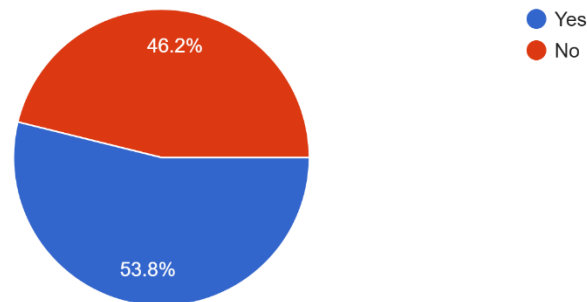
Actions people took as a result of seeing CASaV's social media included introducing reuse ideas to Scouts groups, planting trees, rewilding parts of a garden, attending the repair cafe, signing a petition, promoting green books at the library, recycling more, cutting down on food waste, attending a green fair, walking and cycling more for short journeys and raising awareness of CASaV events.

Monthly Climate Column

21 people (53.8%) had seen the monthly Climate Column in the Darlington and Stockton Times. 10 of these (47.6%) took action as a result.

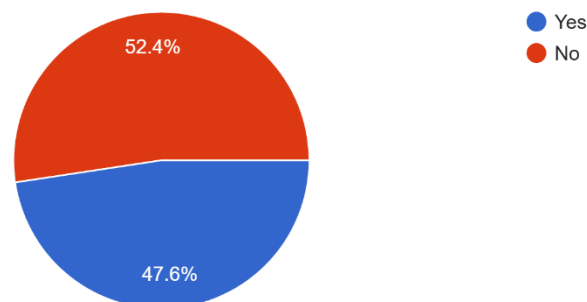
Have you seen the monthly Climate Column in the Darlington and Stockton Times?

39 responses



Did anything in the Climate Column lead you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

21 responses



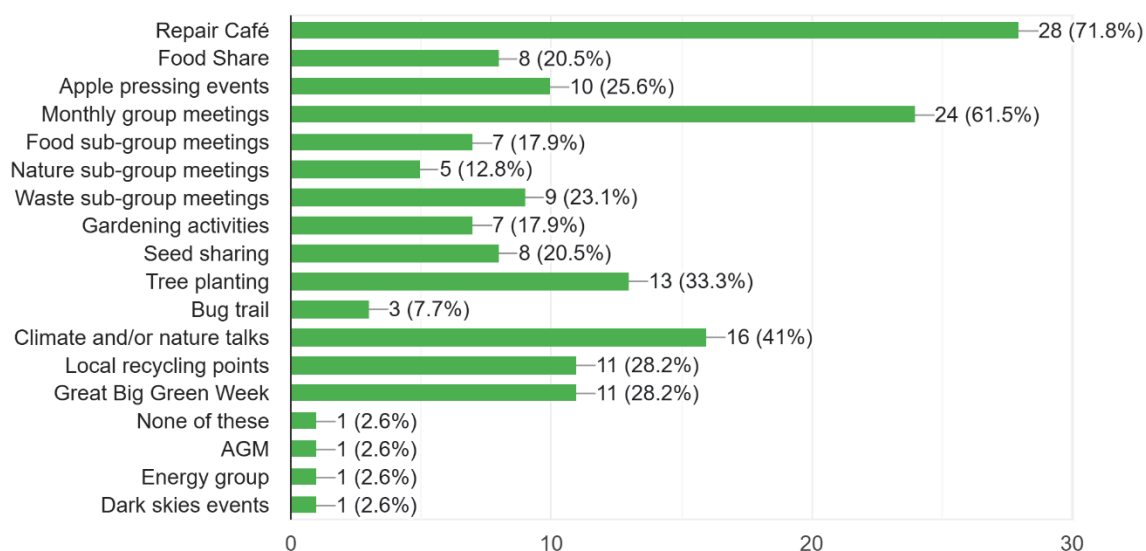
Actions people took as a result of seeing the Monthly Climate Column included recycling more, making draught excluders from scrap materials, volunteering as a repairer at the repair cafe, reusing materials, writing to the local MP and reducing energy use.

Taking part in or noticing CASaV events and activities

Only one person (2.6%) said they had not noticed or taken part in any of the CASaV events and activities listed and of those who said they had 33 (84.6%) had taken action as a result.

Have you noticed or taken part in any of the following in Stokesley and nearby villages?

39 responses



Additional activities

31 people responded to the question asking what additional activities CASaV should consider.

Suggestions included: holding more meetings online; getting more people involved and reaching out beyond white, retired, middle class people; more campaigning and influencing those in positions to make changes at a local and national level (four people mentioned this); going into schools and offering talks (two people); delivering “how to make” sessions covering alternatives to commercial washing liquid, washing powder and cleaning products; using warm places for people to dry their washing; encouraging less intensive agriculture; protecting green spaces from development; hosting a talk on what happens to all of our recycling; emphasising the critical nature of the climate crisis; developing a community energy generation project (two people); providing activities which reduce the financial cost of taking climate action; offering more talks at monthly meetings; more habitat protection and rewilding; following up tree planting events and removing old tree guards; encouraging people to think more about their personal impact and consumer choices; continuing support for the North Yorkshire Climate Coalition; more energy saving/emission reduction projects; more housing retrofit activity; more dialogue with the local farming community; more attempts to create dialogue with climate change sceptics (two people); building links with schools in seriously challenged areas of Middlesbrough; making Great Ayton plastic free; persuading the Co-op to stock more organic produce; encouraging more use of

renewable energy; encouraging biodiversity by reducing grass cutting and growing more native wildflowers on more public land; asking shops to prepackage smaller amounts of food; encouraging more sharing of transport locally, campaigning for more public transport, cycle lanes and more active travel (two people); setting up a one stop shop for retrofit advice; organising community resistance to greenwashing; encouraging garden sharing; cleaning up roadside litter thrown from cars; more publicity about food waste; and putting pressure on the council to recycle leftovers.

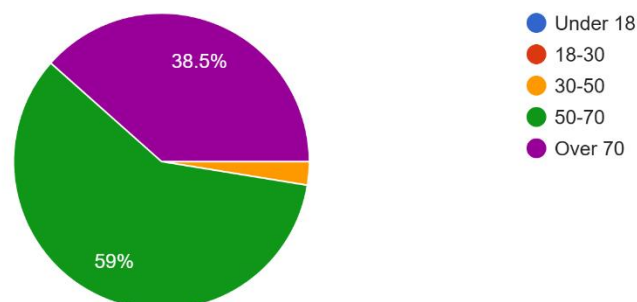
Making it easier for people to get involved

24 people responded to this question. Suggestions included measuring local actions in terms of carbon reduction as a percentage of global or national CO₂ output, being more political and engaging a wider range of people to campaign for climate action initiatives, doing more to attract younger people, maybe starting a youth group, holding more meetings and events outside Stokesley, increasing publicity and securing better support from North Yorkshire Council. Nine people thought that CASaV was doing enough already and that it was easy to get involved. One person wanted more hours in the day!

Age of respondents

Age - how old are you?

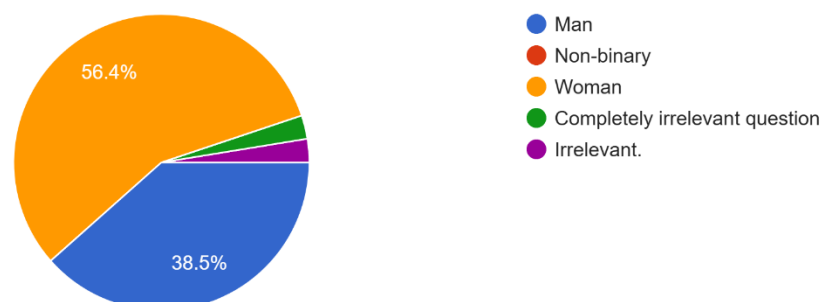
39 responses



Gender of respondents

Gender - how do you identify?

39 responses



Which village or town do you live in?

12 people said they lived in Stokesley, 7 in Great Ayston, 3 in Hutton Rudby, 2 in Easby, 2 in Great Busby, 2 in Swainby, 2 did not say, 2 in Osmotherley, 1 in Ingleby Barwick, 1 in Thirsk, 1 in Northallerton, 1 in Great and Little Broughton, 1 in Seamer, 1 in Skutterskelfe and 1 outside the area.

Part Six: Findings from the Focus Group

An online focus group was facilitated on 9 January 2025 by David Stone, with key CASaV volunteers Barry Warrington (Steering Group/Transport Group lead), Wendy Smith (Food Group lead), Caryn Loftus (Co-ordinator/Steering Group), Jenny Earle (Food Group lead), Bridget Holmstrom (Steering Group/Nature Group lead), Mark Lewis (Energy Group), Kate Gibbon (Publicity), Spenser Tate (Energy Group lead) and Pete Smith (Waste Group). The group's discussion was structured around five questions: Why did you feel that it was necessary at this point to have an assessment of the impact you are having? What has changed in Stokesley and Villages over the past five years as a result of CASaV's activity? What do you think is working less well? Looking back over the last five years what do you think you might have done differently? What do you want to achieve over the next five years?

Why did you feel that it was necessary at this point to have an assessment of the impact you are having?

The group felt an assessment was necessary to understand better the progress or otherwise CASaV has made so far and to help chart its course over the next four or five years. Because many of the key volunteers felt they were working at maximum capacity it was important to know which activities were having the most impact so that people could use their time to the best effect. It was also important to know which activities were having less impact and if there was anything else CASaV should be doing.

The group wanted to know where it had done well and where not so well, and it wanted the efforts of key volunteers to be recognised and appreciated.

It was not felt that a full-blown impact assessment was necessary but rather a qualitative assessment of what the group has achieved and an appreciation of the pressures it is under.

What has changed in Stokesley and Villages over the past five years as a result of CASaV's activity?

The group felt that CASaV had developed and maintained good relationships with parish councils, town councils and North Yorkshire Council. It was a great achievement that a local councillor had volunteered to become the Climate Change Champion in North Yorkshire Council as a result of his connections with CASaV. CASaV had also been instrumental in engaging local people with the local authority's efforts around retrofit, pushing transport issues higher up the local authority's agenda and increasing awareness of the value of cycling by, for example, lobbying for the Endeavour Way cycle route.

It was also thought that CASaV had helped educate local people about nature and how to take care of it through wildflower and nature walks, tree planting events, bughouses, guerilla planting, seed giveaways, and monitoring the impact on air quality of heather burning on the moors.

The group talked about its well-attended and well-liked regular events and in particular its repair cafes which were seen as a good way of engaging new people. The repair cafes had also helped to develop links with local company Labman and its employees.

It was also mentioned that through the Foodshare scheme surplus food is being intercepted and distributed to people who need it.

What do you think is working less well?

The group thought it could do more to keep CASaV's issues top of the agenda of those with the power to shape policy and take decisions. It was felt that it was not possible to have an impact globally, but that by having a local focus opportunities could be created for people to take action and feel more optimistic about the future.

It was felt that CASaV had not been very successful in reaching younger people, although that had something to do with the demographic of the area. It was recognised that young working people with children don't have the time to attend meetings, and although schools want to work with CASaV it was not clear that CASaV has the capacity to do that.

Although events and activities are popular and well-attended it was thought that not enough was being done to convert attendance at events into active participation in the delivery of CASaV's work.

Looking back over the last five years what do you think you might have done differently?

One person in the focus group felt that because climate change and climate action are such broad headings CASaV had tended to do whatever fitted under those headings because they felt right. It was not possible to look back and say something was a mistake particularly because CASaV had actually achieved a lot in quite a short space of time.

There was a view that there could have been more of a focus on individual villages and towns and that working across the piece might have diluted impact. A more local focus with a more local identity might have worked better. Calling the group Stokesley and Villages had not helped.

Although it was felt that allowing key volunteers to follow their interests and set up groups around these interests might have led to CASaV's resources being spread too thinly, it was also felt that a variety of themes and activities had provided more opportunities to reach more people.

One focus group member questioned whether CASaV had done enough to engage with the farming community.

What do you want to achieve over the next five years?

The group talked about the need to clarify its goals.

It showed a strong desire to reach out to more people and to turn the initial interest shown by members of the public attending events into a longer-term commitment - more volunteers were needed because there was so much to do. Focusing more on events and activities rather than meetings, identifying which activities draw in most people, developing closer links with nearby Teesside and finding a way of following up on people who came to events and activities were put forward as ways of attracting new volunteers.

Working with and maintaining good relationships with larger organisations, such as North Yorkshire Council, to help them achieve their climate action goals, particularly on energy, was seen as important.

There was an appetite for campaigning more vociferously (“not just being nice people doing nice things” and “being a bit more irritating without breaking the law”) and gaining a higher profile so that the press and media come to CASaV when a climate story was in the news.

Continuing to do small things that made volunteers feel better was also seen as important in terms of volunteers’ well-being.

It was felt that CASaV could do more to let people know about what other players like the local authorities, churches, Women’s Institute, local businesses and schools are doing to tackle climate change. This would reduce the pressure on CASaV to do everything.

Part Seven: Impact – What has been achieved?

The period covered by this assessment and report (2019-2024) has seen a strong, well-run and influential unincorporated community association emerge from the now disbanded Stokesley Community Partnership. That is a significant achievement and it would not have happened without the time, hard work and persistence of a small number of committed volunteers passionate about helping people in their local communities to take action to mitigate the effects of climate change and to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Over the past five years CASaV has developed a high profile in the communities it serves, through a comprehensive programme of public meetings, community events and promotional activity using both social and mainstream media. CASaV has made itself a trusted, respected and valued organisation in its communities, raising awareness of climate change and the actions people can take in response to it. Every day its Foodshare initiative collects 40-60 kilograms of food surplus worth around £250 (amounting to £78,000 annually) from local retailers and distributes it to those in need. It has supported the planting of 8,200 trees. Over six apple pressing sessions, and through lending apple pressing equipment to other groups, it has pressed 8,250kg of apples producing 3,195 of juice. Its repair cafe repaired 740 items in 2024, the highest number of repairs for any repair cafe in the UK (as recorded by Repair Cafe International Foundation's Repair Monitor <https://www.repairmonitor.org/>).

By cultivating strong links with local authorities at parish, town and county council levels, both with officials and with elected members, CASaV has influenced policy development and decisions. Examples include changes to the way Great Ayton Parish Council maintains the local land it has responsibility for (incorporating no mow and wild areas), contributing to the development of North Yorkshire Council's Climate Change Strategy, and playing a part in a local councillor's decision to become North Yorkshire Council's Climate Change Champion.

Another achievement is that CASaV has influenced the work of other climate action groups, advising on the development of initiatives such as repair cafes, playing a positive role in the formation, development and lobbying activity of the North Yorkshire Climate Coalition, and being viewed as an exemplar of community engagement within the Friends of the Earth Local Action Groups Network.

We also found tangible evidence of CASaV influencing people in local communities to change their behaviours in relation to climate ranging from people turning their heating down or signing up to North Yorkshire Council's Local Energy Advice Demonstrator initiative to inspiring teachers and students to run their own COP style mini-conference to look at sustainability issues or local shops taking part in refill schemes and other measures to reduce waste.

Finally CASaV has succeeded in creating and maintaining a community of people locally who share a commitment to tackling climate change, supporting nature and supporting each other.

Part Eight: Reflections

CASaV is an excellently run community group made up of committed volunteers, which is clearly having an impact on its local communities, inspiring people to take action and change their behaviour, and exerting an influence far beyond what might be expected from an organisation of its size and with limited resources. The evidence for this has been found through the online survey, interviews with stakeholders and in discussion with key volunteers in the focus group.

The main challenge found in conducting this review was that it was not possible to measure impact in a more robust way. This was because the vision and outcomes set at an initial ideas gathering meeting in 2019 and followed ever since (“for a net-zero carbon area by 2030 where we will have reduced the use of energy in the area and increased the use of renewable energy, saved the unique natural environment that is local to the area and planted more trees, increased the availability of sustainable food, reduced the use of petrol/diesel vehicles, and minimised waste”) were not accompanied by any baseline data or any subsequent systematic gathering of data with which to gauge progress towards the outcomes. CASaV has used the Impact Community Carbon Calculator from the Centre for Sustainable Energy to calculate local emissions but this was not available in 2019 and changes to the way this tool calculates emissions make comparisons over time problematic. However, simply because something has not been measured does not mean that it has not taken place.

It is interesting and significant that the vision and outcomes do not seem to flow directly from the object in CASaV’s constitution which is “to help the communities in Stokesley and the surrounding villages to take action on climate change by supporting and developing local initiatives to reduce carbon emissions or adapt to the changing climate.” This object is an accurate description of what CASaV does (although might benefit from additional wording to reflect the work on protecting nature.) A vision and outcomes that did flow directly from this object might read something like “We have a vision of local communities in which people are more able to take action and participate in initiatives that reduce energy use and increase the use of renewable energy, to produce and consume food in a more sustainable way, to decrease the use of petrol/diesel vehicles, and to reduce waste.” This places the emphasis on the creation of opportunities to take action and the creation of initiatives, for which it would be relatively simple to produce baseline data and to gather data to gauge progress and which would more accurately reflect CASaV’s work.

Interviews, the focus group and the online survey indicated that there were areas which the group could develop to improve its effectiveness. There is a need to find ways of engaging with people under the age of fifty and to reach out to the villages in order to become less “Stokesley-centric.” Reaching more people and turning initial contact into longer-term commitment could in turn help to lessen the pressure on existing volunteers.

While conducting this evaluation three things emerged that although slightly outside the original brief are worth mentioning.

Firstly, there seems to be a tension in the dynamic of the group between being seen to be “nice people doing nice things” and a desire to campaign more stridently and to have the group make more of a nuisance of itself. Our guess is that this is a tension that exists within most climate action groups and is an indication of the commitment of those in the group. It is probably possible to be and to do both.

Secondly, there was an impression that many volunteers felt that they were doing as much as they could and that they would like, if possible, to do less. This sort of fatigue is not uncommon in community and voluntary groups. CASaV members should try to remember how much they have already achieved and that they are part of a much bigger picture, a global community trying to tackle a massive global challenge, but within which every individual action has value. Volunteers should feel free to contribute as little or as much as they can and should not feel obliged to do everything. A proactive plan for engagement and recruitment could help address this.

Thirdly, through its many activities CASaV has contributed to the community well-being of the places it serves, bringing people together and demonstrating what can be achieved through collaboration.

Part Nine: Options

This section contains a number of options for the CASaV Steering Group to consider as CASaV moves forward. They are not recommendations as it is for CASaV itself to decide what courses of action are best for the group and for the communities it serves.

Continue unchanged

In considering any decision regarding the future direction of an organisation there is always the Do Nothing option. On the face of it CASaV could simply carry on as it has done for the past five years and could continue to deliver activities that help to combat climate change, contribute to local and national campaigns and have some sort of impact, even if it is not easily measurable.

However, this would not address the issues identified in this report which, if addressed, would potentially make CASaV an even more effective organisation, ease the pressure on volunteers and enable CASaV to have and to demonstrate an even greater impact.

Reaching more people and getting them actively involved

The results of the survey and what was said during interviews and the focus group indicate that CASaV is not reaching people under the age of fifty as well as it might. Consideration could be given to how to engage younger age groups. This would seem to point to closer collaboration with local schools and putting on events and activities that are specifically aimed at families with school age children. Collaboration with Scouts and Brownies groups could also be explored. CASaV could also use its connections to local businesses to reach people of working age.

Consideration should also be given to holding more events in villages.

There was discussion in the focus group about how, although things like repair cafes were very successful in terms of attracting numbers, this was not being translated into attracting new active volunteers. Thought needs to be given to how to make the most of these engagements with the public and to actively recruit while events are taking place.

Measuring Impact from now on

To measure its impact from now on CASaV could review and redraft its vision and outcomes as well as the object in its constitution. The new object, vision and outcomes should result in new wording that more accurately reflects what CASaV does and enables simple collection of baseline data as well as data that measures progress towards outcomes. Some alternative wording is outlined in Part Eight: Reflections but this is just for illustrative purposes. Any new wording should be developed in consultation with members and stakeholders.

CASaV may find this Impact Toolkit from Community First Yorkshire useful

<https://www.communitysupportny.org.uk/resources/your-organisation/impact-toolkit/>

The Toolkit is based on NPC's Cycle of Good Impact Practice

<https://www.thinknpc.org/starting-to-measure-your-impact/>

Developing case studies

Some impact cannot be demonstrated by counting and measuring things. This is particularly true of changes in people's behaviour. The online survey contains many instances of people taking action because of CASaV's work. It would be useful to develop a number of case studies that tell the story of how a person has changed their behaviour after coming into contact with CASaV and how they have benefited. These could be written but could also be short videos, photos, sound recordings or a combination of these. A similar approach could be taken to telling the stories of places that have changed because of CASaV's work. CASaV's website does already feature some retrofitting case studies and the story of the floodplain meadow. The monthly updates have also included some stories about people and their involvement in CASaV. This should be built upon.

Organising the work differently

Currently the sub-groups are thematic. There might be scope for organising the sub-groups differently so that they are based around tasks and/or geographies. This might help share the workload more evenly and might increase the focus on impact since it is the tasks that achieve the impact not the themes. Task headings might include Publicity, Events, Lobbying and Campaigns, Recruitment, Outreach. CASaV itself will have a better idea of what would work best. Geographically based groups would enable a focus on those villages where engagement is currently low. This would have to be carefully thought out to avoid a proliferation of sub-groups and an unreasonable demand being put on people's time.

Some thought also could be given to ensuring there is the right balance between community-focused activities and lobbying/campaigning.

Telling the story

More could be made of the achievements of CASaV so far. CASaV's story – focusing on the impact it has had – should be given a prominent space on the CASaV website and a leaflet telling the story, with actions to at least sign up to the update but also to volunteer should be produced and distributed at events.

Plan

Having considered this evaluation and discussed these options CASaV should consider drafting a simple action plan for the next five years (to be reviewed annually) with an outline of activities, desired outcomes and steps to ensure progress towards outcomes is monitored.

Focus on what people enjoy doing and what they are interested in

Finally, focus group participants spoke about how CASaV had developed around what people were interested in and what they were passionate about. This approach has clearly worked. The enjoyment that people get from their involvement with CASaV is part of its success and it should continue to be integral to its future work.

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Please describe your role

How are you connected to CASaV?

What do you think CASaV does well?

What do you think Climate Action Stokesley and Villages could do better?

To what extent do you think CASaV has changed local people's behaviour?

To what extent do you think CASaV has influenced your organisation?

To what extent do you think it has influenced other organisations?

How do you think CASaV should develop its work in the future?

Appendix 2

Focus Group Questions

Why did you feel that it was necessary at this point to have an assessment of the impact you are having?

What has changed in Stokesley and Villages over the past five years as a result of CASaV's activity?

What do you think is working well in terms of having an impact and what do you think is working less well?

Looking back over the last five years what do you think you might have done differently (given the benefit of hindsight)?

What do you want to achieve over the next five years?

Appendix 3

Survey Questions

Do you receive the monthly email update from Climate Action Stokesley and Villages?

Has anything you have seen in the update led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

What was/were the action/actions you took?

Have you ever visited the Climate Action Stokesley and Villages website?

Has anything you have seen on the website led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

What was/were the action/actions you took?

Have you seen Climate Action Stokesley and Villages on Facebook, X or Instagram?

Has anything you have seen led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

What was/were the action/actions you took?

Have you seen the monthly Climate Column in the Darlington and Stockton Times?

Did anything in the Climate Column lead you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

What was/were the action/actions you took?

Have you noticed or taken part in any of the following in Stokesley and nearby villages? (Tick all that apply: Repair Cafe, Food Share, Apple pressing events, Monthly group meetings, Food sub-group meetings, Nature sub-group meetings, Waste sub-group meetings, Gardening activities, Seed sharing, Tree planting, Bug trail, Climate and/or nature talks, Local recycling points, Great Big Green Week, None of these, Other)

Has participation in any of these activities led you to take any action, no matter how small, to reduce your impact on the environment?

What was/were the action/actions you took?

What additional activities would you like to see happening locally in response to climate change?

What could Climate Action Stokesley and Villages do differently to make it easier for you to get involved?

Age – how old are you? (under 18, 18-30, 30-50, 50-70, over 70)

Gender – how do you identify? (Man, Non-binary, Woman, Other)

Which village or town do you live in?