

Community Support Fund 2024 review

Feb 2024 – Jan 2025

The [Community Support Fund](#) is a dedicated small grant fund operated by [Fauna & Flora](#) to support member groups of the [Coastal Communities Network](#), and other Scottish community-based organisations (CBOs) that Fauna & Flora engage with. The grant fund was established in early 2019 to enable groups to meet specific locally-determined goals, with the overall aim of or progressing local biodiversity conservation and/or development of local groups with a biodiversity focus.

In 2024, Fauna & Flora secured £25,000 for the Community Support Fund, available to CBOs implementing locally-led conservation initiatives focused on both land and sea.

In 2024, the sixth year of running, the fund supported 10 projects (2 terrestrial, 6 marine, 2 multi-disciplinary) to a total of £24.5k.

This year the average value of requests was £2,500 each, compared to average grant levels of £4500 in 2023, £3000 in 2022 and £2500 in 2021.

The Community Support Fund will continue in 2025 with a total pot of £25,000, to be distributed to both marine, terrestrial and interdisciplinary projects. The Fund criteria, application form and examples of previous projects can be found [on the CCN website](#).



FIMRO materials on display at the Shetland Climate Festival 2024 © FIMRO

Successful projects in 2024

	Group	Project Title	Focus	Value	Status
1	COAST	Arran Waters Day/Ocean Day celebrations	Marine	£1,325	Complete
2	Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation	FIMRO leaflets and banner for the Shetland Climate Festival	Marine	£238.80	Complete
3	CLP Nature Action	Final Organisational Capacity Development Project towards wider Community Biodiversity and Habitat conservation, restoration and awareness	Both	£2,270	Complete
4	Edinburgh Shoreline	Blue Mussel Initiation Project	Marine	£5,000	Complete
5	CAOLAS	Mandatory training for CAOLAS employees and trustees for survey vessel and drone	Marine	£2,214	Complete
6	Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT)	Drone training and equipment to support rainforest and peatland restoration project	Terrestrial	£4,901	Complete
7	Friends of St Fittick's Park	Funding to initiate and establish a Coordinator role for the newly created outdoor classroom in St Fittick's Park. The project title is Learning Together in St Fittick's Park	Terrestrial	£4,000	Complete
8	Carna Conservation Initiative	Carna Hope Week, the way forward	Both	£2,750	Complete
9	Kintyre Coastal Network	East Kintyre Biosphere (Seagrass)	Marine	£1,200	Complete
10	Scottish Islands Federation	Travel to attend Nature of Scotland awards as nominees	Marine	£450	Complete



Colourful stalls at Arran Waters Day 2024 © COAST

Case study: Blue Mussel Initiation Project

The Project:

Edinburgh Shoreline, based around the Firth of Forth, were awarded £5000 for the Blue Mussel Initiation Project “Show Us Your Mussels!” in May 2024.

In times gone past, there were very healthy populations of blue mussels in the Firth, but there are no mussel beds left now and just a few patches remain. This project aimed to better understand the dynamics of what is happening with blue mussel populations around the Forth before restoration can be considered in future.

The grant was spent on a citizen science project enabling community groups and individuals around the Forth to identify areas where mussels still exist and track changes month by month.

Edinburgh Shoreline developed a methodology and a guide to allow local volunteers to walk their chosen piece of coastline at low tide and spot blue mussels, at any stage of development. Through training and regular communication, they were encouraged to revisit their chosen sites to observe and report changes through Autumn, Winter and Spring. Web pages were set up to allow participants to upload and see their own and other results to encourage them to continue.

The result has identified a number of areas where young mussels exist in encouraging numbers, however very few larger mussels were found.

Community engagement has been excellent, and Edinburgh Shoreline have identified a number of key geographical areas, with supportive volunteers, to explore in more detail as their blue mussel work continues.

Key Learnings:

- Providing feedback and regularly sharing results online is a great way to reassure volunteers that they are doing the right thing, they can see the level of involvement of others, and they feel motivated and confident to continue – it doesn't work well to ask them to feed into a vacuum – they need an ongoing, affirming, feedback loop.
- The quirky "Show Us Your Mussels!" project name drove amusement but also interest and drew people in.
- The recommended position marker of What Three Words has been unpredictable, with GPS coordinates proving to be more reliable. This approach will be used in future.
- Edinburgh Shoreline are considering survival trials for their next "Above and Below" project, using tiles and rope. This project has given a very good indication of where to consider for these trials.
- The areas where mussels are not present are now known and Edinburgh Shoreline may include one or two of these as focus areas for their water quality initiative.
- Initially, exact locations were displayed on an online map, but after being alerted to shellfish being collected for food, these were removed to help protect those mussels that still survive.
- Use of a ruler or coin is invaluable in indicating size in photographs.
- Spat are difficult to spot and even harder to count!
- Many community groups and individuals really have 'adopted' their patch and got to know it very well. Even small changes are noticed. Having supportive volunteers who regularly visit the same patch and begin to understand it is proving to be hugely valuable.
- It's noted that blue mussels may benefit from sewage - or may have in the past and this was often where blue mussels were found on sewage outfalls which may have been a good food source.

Next steps:

Edinburgh Shoreline have successfully secured funding from the Elgol Fund for Nature to mobilise their new "Above and Below" project from 2025-2027. This will allow them to continue blue mussel work and will introduce a water quality element, which may begin to improve understanding of the differences between areas with blue mussel presence and absence.

This Community Support Fund grant helped in fundraising efforts, as Edinburgh Shoreline had an emerging project in development that they were then in a position to offer on a larger scale to a new funder.



Blue Mussels in the Firth of Forth (coin for sizing). © Edinburgh Shoreline

Case study: Learning Together in St Fittick's Park

The Project:

Friends of St Fittick's Park (FOSFP), based in Aberdeenshire, were awarded £4000 to initiate and establish a Coordinator role for the newly created outdoor classroom in St Fittick's Park, in July 2024, as a pilot project.

As part of its effort to protect all of St Fittick's Park from industrial development, FOSFP wanted to expand its engagement with local people, whose interest and support are vital to continuing public stewardship of the park. Their outdoor classroom was intended as a setting for this engagement, as well as an opportunity to build partnerships with biodiversity-focussed groups and organisations who can share knowledge about resident plants and animals, and a tool to form relationships with local authority staff responsible for the health and wellbeing of the surrounding community. Working within the context of events and activities hosted by the classroom, this project piloted having an outdoor classroom coordinator in place, to build capacity for the group to do all these things.

The piloted Coordinator role accomplished several FOSFP objectives:

Visibility: Setting up a website for the classroom, publicising activities on social media and through local leafletting, promoting the classroom at events both locally and more widely, and actively seeking opportunities for collaboration with nature and wellbeing-focused groups and organisations.

Functionality: Created administrative processes to manage the classroom more easily, including a booking system, procedures and checklists. Actively gathered learning from other projects and locations, and brought it back to the park.

Credibility: By providing a consistent and responsive point of contact, the Coordinator initiated activities and improved communication with the groups FOSFP hopes to work with.

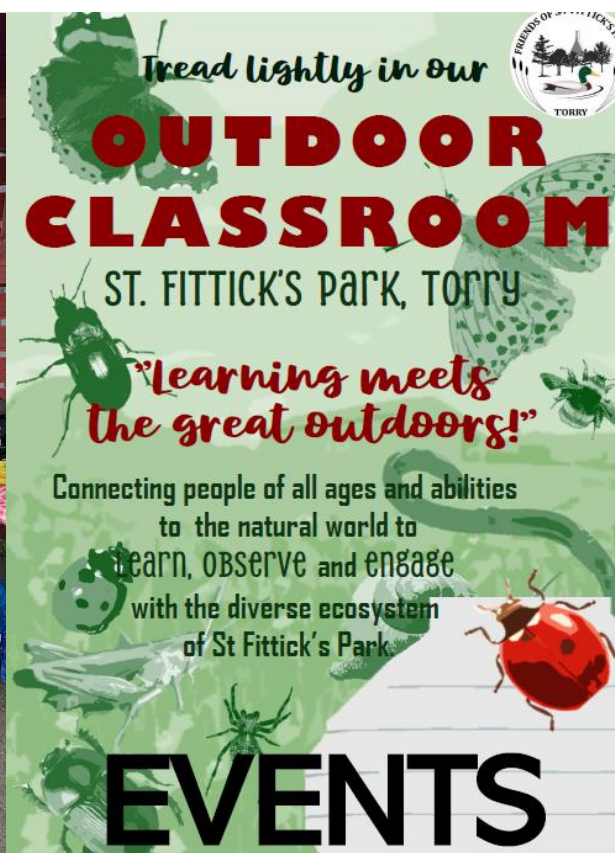
Key Learnings:

- The above activities will provide the basis for ongoing and future projects in the classroom and the park. They rely on the generous contribution of time and expertise from the volunteers from collaborating organisations.

- Not all of the outcomes of the project were achieved and this is largely down to volunteer capacity and the many demands on local people. Building new and creative interdisciplinary partnerships may be a key way forward.
- The Coordinator role was invaluable to building the structures necessary around the new outdoor classroom, and to evidence the value such a role would bring.

Next steps:

FOSFP applied for a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to continue the coordinator role through 2025 and were awarded funding in December 2024. This Community Support Fund grant was instrumental in demonstrating that the classroom coordinator could effectively advance FOSFP objectives.



St Fittick's Park outdoor classroom © Friends of St Fittick's Park