COMMUNITY CLIMATE RESILIENCE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION: This gives an overview of a project to raise the resilience of local communities in response to the climate crisis and other pressures, which is being funded and led by members of the Network for Social Change.

OVERVIEW: It is hoped that this will become a 3–6-year project. Meanwhile initial funds of £96K have been raised for Year 1 (Oct '24 to Sept '25). Key elements of Year 1 will be:

i) Setting up a small project team and linking with a few partner organisations.
ii) A Design Workshop with partners and local community groups to specify aims for the whole project and for pilot initiatives to test out in Year 1 (see more below).
iii) Trialling pilot initiatives with local groups, and further research/scoping.

ORGANISATION: The Network for Social Change is a collection of individuals who come together to fund projects on issues including environment, social and labour justice, and human rights, in the UK and beyond (www.thenetworkforsocialchange.org.uk). Projects such as this one are developed and led by a small group of Network members. In this case we will be working with a part-time Project Director, Rebecca Gibbs of SCCAN and Cadence, plus admin support, and with a small group of partners who will do much of the project delivery.

ESSENCE OF PROPOSAL:

This project aims to increase substantially the capacity of local communities across the UK to sustain themselves and adapt in the face of mounting disruption from climate change and other factors. Our plan is designed to achieve proof of concept for a number of initiatives early on, and to share them on a much wider scale in Years 2 and 3, helped by other funders.

Marginalised communities will feel the brunt most, but none will remain untouched. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres commented recently, "the surging seas are coming for us all". It is clear that national and local governments are ill-prepared to meet the likely scale of disruption, and we believe that local community groups are best placed to raise resilience and adaptation capacity quickly - not only materially, but also emotionally and even spiritually. Strengthening social infrastructure can make a huge difference in times of crisis, as documented in Rebecca Solnit's book *A Paradise Built in Hell* and Adam Greenfield's more recent *Lifehouse*.

This project is therefore designed to contribute to a more general vision of community empowerment, care and togetherness, with a commitment to inclusive methods such as deliberative democracy. This will also contribute to linking climate action to improved wellbeing for all, connecting grassroots action to local and central government policies, increasing links across sectors and collaboration between communities. We recognise that the scale of the climate crisis, and other systemic issues such as social and economic injustice, cannot be rectified by any project, but it

looks clear that strengthening the *social infrastructure* of local communities is one of the most effective interventions which is realistically achievable.

BASIS FOR THE PROJECT: The proposal has built on three main sources:

- *Scoping Study:* The core group commissioned this from Roman Paluch and Sean Irving of Cooperation Hull. The fieldwork in Spring 2024 included extended interviews with representatives from 28 community groups, from which a valuable outline emerged of the kind of challenges, drawbacks, strengths and needs to be found across a range of organisations.
- Extensive conversations with several potential partner organisations and a range of others, including Gail Bradbrook of XR Being the Change Affinity Network.
- Research and pilot projects initiated by Alan Heeks since 2014 through the Seeding our Future project.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS: These will be key to the design and delivery of the project and the list may well evolve further. Currently the partners envisaged are:

Shared Future www.sharedfuturecic.org.uk
Specialise in engaging communities using deliberative and participatory democracy such as citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting.

Tipping Point www.tippingpointuk.org
A dynamic workers' co-op with organisers across the UK providing support and networking for climate action groups, through training, digital tools and microgrants.

Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) www.sccan.scot
Funded by the Scottish government, working to engage communities across Scotland. Developing a network of regional climate action hubs and a touring roadshow to reach people at the household level.

Cooperation Hull www.cooperationhull.co.uk
Sean Irving and Roman Paluch from Cooperation Hull conducted the scoping study for us in early 2024 (see above) and have continued to input into our thinking.

Peter Lefort www.peterlefort.com
Academic, systems thinker, network builder, formerly co-chair of Transition Network. Has convened and runs a community of practice for people working in climate adaptation.

YEAR 1 PLAN

From our exploration so far, it is clear that this is not a defined sector: there are thousands of organisations across the UK involved in aspects of community resilience, varying widely in scale, scope, and capacity. We have found widespread agreement that raising the level of resilience and adaptation capacity is urgent, but less clarity on how.

Hence we have concluded that the first major element in Year 1 should be a 2-day, in-person **design workshop** involving our partner organisations, along with representatives from local community groups, and our core team. Our intention is to hold this workshop in early 2025. Its aims will be:

(i) to specify a work plan for the rest of Year 1, which could include further research and scoping, and pilot initiatives;

(ii) identify who will implement this work: potentially much of it could be done by organisations and individuals attending this gathering;

(iii) sketch out aims and direction of travel for Years 2 and 3.

Our intention is to get further work underway in Spring 2025, so that this can inform our Year 2 proposal. Whilst any pilot initiatives or research we proceed with will not be decided until the design workshop, this is an **illustrative** list of possible trials and research under consideration:

1. A pilot training programme for 'catalytic enablers', some with a roving brief to work with a number of local groups, and a few from specific local groups. The aim is for them to enable local groups to expand their skillset, processes, scope (e.g. expanding from one or two issues to address the wider climate crisis) and motivation.

2. A try-out of convening a regional network of community groups working on resilience.

3. Sector mapping: this could cover both the range of networks, researchers, consultants and NGOs active in this sector, and also beginning a list of local community groups.

4. Supporting a local group to create a Community Resilience Plan: this would include an audit of skills and equipment in the community, assessing resilience against some emergency scenarios (e.g. flood, food shortages, power failure), and highlight where improvement was most needed. It might also trial the practical development of a basic resilience kit for households or community groups.

5. Work considering how emotional and psychological resilience is embedded in this work. This may include using Joanna Macy's *Work that Reconnects* to support local communities with the emotional impacts of the climate crisis.

6. A pilot research/development programme to assess and improve connections between the statutory services (e.g. Local Resilience Forums) and voluntary groups in the same area, choosing an area where the statutory bodies were open to cooperation, and provide funding for a process to engage them with local voluntary groups**.**

YEARS 2-3: DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Whilst we aim to develop this at the design workshop, our expectation is that Years 2-3 will involve a rollout of pilot initiatives to a wider range of local groups, plus potentially further pilots, and/or a larger in-person gathering of local groups. We will seek further funds from Network members and also be looking for potential co-funders before framing our Year 2 proposal.

STAYING CONNECTED: We will be setting up an email list for occasional updates, and a database of local community resilience groups. If you'd like to join either of these lists, let us know at the email below. Contacts from potential co-funders are also welcome. This overview is also accessible on Network for Social Change's website. You can contact Rebecca Gibbs and the core group on communityresilience99@gmail.com.