

For people *and* green spaces: a thriving network for everyone



Strategy 2021-25





Introduction

From the Chair and Chief Executive
May 2021



For more than 60 years, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) has brought people together to create, improve and care for green spaces - be they local parks or community gardens, Local Nature Reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, school or hospital grounds to name just a few - recognising that this delivers multiple outcomes, not just for the environment, but for people and communities too.

Three years on from the launch of our previous strategy, our global society has made little progress in the race to tackle the climate and ecological emergency and, here in the UK, social inequalities have been exposed and exacerbated by a pandemic that has hit the poorest the hardest. Uncertain times lie ahead and the resources needed to overcome these many challenges are likely to be few and far between. Our 'multiple outcome' approach, by which we support people to take practical action that delivers for the planet, for their community and for themselves, will therefore be more important than ever.

So too will our ability to enable others and, while we will continue to deliver our own green space activities, we will do much more to support others to do this for themselves in their local communities. Central to this will be continued investment in the TCV Community Network, which currently supports over 1,600 independent local community groups and 30,000 volunteers caring for green spaces.

We are proud of our long history of connecting those who, too often, find themselves with least access to quality green space and we will do even more to reach those who stand to gain most from being outdoors, active and connected with others.

We are equally proud to be supported by local and national government, lotteries, private organisations, charities, trusts and landowners. As a national organisation that takes a local approach, we will continue to forge partnerships with organisations large and small, across sectors, to be both strategic and locally relevant in our approach.

Our incredibly dedicated team of staff and volunteers are an inspiration to us. We hope that their work, and this strategy, inspires you to work with The Conservation Volunteers to build a thriving network of people and green spaces.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tony Crook'.

Prof Tony Crook
CBE FAcSS FRTPi
Chair



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Darren York'.

Darren York
Chief Executive



Why TCV is needed

We live in challenging times. The climate and ecological emergency grows ever more pressing and the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on all our lives, exacerbating many pre-pandemic problems including poor mental health, social isolation and inequalities. The interrelated nature of these challenges means that they can't - and shouldn't - be tackled in isolation.

The **climate and ecological emergency** must **inspire action** at all levels of society

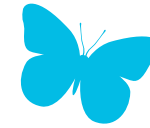


TCV's work to connect people and green spaces provides multiple benefits and cuts across many of the most pressing issues facing society.

Conservation volunteering is a simple model with many positive outcomes, which we have used to engage complex and varied audiences for over 60 years. The current external context makes our work particularly relevant in the 2020s.

The **climate and ecological emergency** must inspire action at all levels of society. There is widespread concern across society about climate change¹, but one in three Britons is still unaware the UK has a biodiversity crisis². Habitat management and nature-based climate change solutions such as tree planting are





already central to our work, and inspiring a connection with nature through our projects supports more pro-environmental behaviours³.

We are in a **national mental health crisis**; anxiety rates have soared in recent years⁴ while depression in adults doubled in 2020 during the pandemic⁵. Contact with nature, exercise, volunteering and social connection all improve mental health^{6,7,8,9}. We have co-led research on green social prescribing¹⁰ and our Green Gyms provide substantial evidence on the benefits of conservation volunteering to mental health¹¹. We will build on these approaches and address barriers to accessing quality green space so that everyone can benefit.

The unequal impact of the pandemic and continued disparities within our own sector^{12,13} have prompted us to make **diversity** a central strategic goal. We have strong participation

across many equalities groups and we work with many communities experiencing deprivation. We will increase involvement by under represented groups who have the most to gain from and least access to the benefits of nature¹⁴, and will better represent communities in which we work.

The economic recovery will dominate national concerns as the pandemic eases. 2.2 million people could be unemployed by the end of 2021, with young people most affected¹⁵. A green recovery could reduce unemployment and create a healthier, more resilient society. We have always facilitated people transitioning between careers, and we give young people early work-relevant experience – particularly those who do better outside the classroom. Our volunteers can also take on leadership and planning roles, addressing soft skill shortages¹⁶.

A green recovery could reduce unemployment and create a healthier, more **resilient society**

Our response to these factors will reflect key challenges and opportunities for *how we work*:

Growing importance is placed on **communities in the lead** as the sector seeks to address local need through projects embedded in longer term local aspirations. We are experienced in community-led programmes and we intend to deepen our engagement where we have a long-term presence. **Digital engagement** has also exploded in the pandemic, and we are expanding our online resources to support more communities to lead practical action locally.

All these trends occur against a backdrop of **fewer resources**, as funders see demand rise while their own incomes fall. We will continue to build strong partnerships, support our volunteers and drive improved quality across multiple outcomes to increase our impact. We will increase focus on unrestricted income to enable innovation and leverage funds, and will keep making the case for the investment needed to engage underrepresented groups.



Why TCV is needed

Environment

We face a climate and biodiversity crisis

TCV delivers

hands on, practical action - planting trees, increasing biodiversity and improving green spaces

Many people lack the opportunities and confidence to experience and connect with nature

TCV delivers

nature connections for those who need it most

Health & wellbeing

We face a mental health crisis and addressing physical inactivity is a national public health priority

TCV delivers

meaningful group-based physical activity reducing isolation and **improving health and wellbeing**

Communities

Communities need support to access their unique capacity and skills to effect positive change

TCV delivers

Community connections supporting and empowering communities to make change - creating community green spaces and networks that build a **sense of belonging**

Learning & skills

We need green jobs and new opportunities for training and skills - particularly for young people

TCV delivers

nature based learning and skills providing experience, training and qualifications in green spaces **for people of all ages**

Who we are



We are The Conservation Volunteers

We believe that green spaces are an essential part of healthy, happy communities

Our vision:

Healthier, happier communities **for everyone**

The opportunity to connect to nature on your doorstep and contribute to its protection should be available to everyone

Our mission:

To connect people and green spaces to deliver lasting outcomes for both

Outcomes

Environment

Green spaces are created, protected and improved, **for nature and for people**

Health & wellbeing

People improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, by being **outdoors, active and connected with others**

Communities

Communities are stronger, working together to **improve the places where people live** and tackle the issues that matter to them

Learning & skills

People improve their **confidence, skills and prospects**, through learning inspired by the outdoors

Goals

We have set three overarching goals to drive our decision-making to 2025. Alongside each goal, we have made a specific pledge to demonstrate the scale of our ambition and make a clear commitment for change by 2025.

Our annual business plans to 2025 will include further specific objectives and detailed plans for delivery through our operations, fundraising and communications.



For
people
and green
spaces

Goal 1:

We will deliver, demonstrate and promote projects that deliver multiple outcomes for people *and* green spaces.

We believe our activities have the greatest impact when they solve multiple problems and this has always been central to our approach. We will do more to ensure that all our activities maximise the possible outcomes for people *and* green spaces.

Success is making sure:

- Volunteers consistently report the positive impact they are having on people and green spaces
- We understand our impact better and use what we learn to constantly improve
- Partners, funders and supporters recognise our positive impact on individuals, communities and the environment

OUR PLEDGE:
5 million trees
- for people and green spaces

By 2025 we will have worked with volunteers and communities to grow our tree planting to 5 million trees.

Since 2015 we have significantly scaled up our tree planting activity and we are proud to commit to this more ambitious target. It represents the environmental work at the heart of our mission and will be delivered alongside a huge range of people-related outcomes. We commit to delivering this target as a demonstration of how involving communities and volunteers delivers our multiple outcomes approach.



A thriving network

Goal 2:

We will do more to support and empower others to connect people and green spaces and deliver lasting outcomes for both.

We will increasingly use our national reach and extensive expertise to support local activity and work with partners to expand the role of community volunteering in green spaces.

Success is making sure:

- Quality digital resources are available to support local groups wanting to deliver practical volunteering and connections to green spaces
- Our support package for community groups is developed to deliver support that is highly valued, informed by groups and available to all
- We are an active partner with wider networks, working effectively with the charity, corporate and public sectors, and by playing to our strengths we widen the benefits to people and green spaces

OUR PLEDGE:

5,000 community groups

- a thriving network

By 2025 we will support a thriving UK-wide network of over 5,000 community organisations.

We will support these community groups and other partners to connect people to green spaces and deliver lasting outcomes for both.



For
everyone

Goal 3:

We will support more diverse audiences to connect with green spaces.

Everyone deserves to have nature in their lives. We will create safe, welcoming spaces for people who face barriers to accessing green space, especially those who could benefit most, and make our activities relevant and accessible for communities in which we work.

Success is making sure:

- We fully understand the diversity of our volunteers and staff and we have plans in place that deliver year-on-year improvement in the diversity of our volunteers and workforce
- We choose to work with other partners that enable us to reach diverse audiences
- We have projects in place that address specific barriers and use the learning to influence all our projects

OUR PLEDGE:

**More diverse,
year on year**

- for everyone

By 2025 the work we do, and those we work with, will increasingly reflect the make-up of the communities we work in.

We will deliver year on year improvements by embedding an organisation-wide approach to greater diversity in our partnerships, projects, workforce, trustees, and volunteers.



How we will do this



Volunteers
at our
core

Volunteering is, and has always been, at the heart of our work and we will only achieve our goals through the engagement, commitment and expertise of our volunteers. Social, outdoor, physical volunteering in nature benefits the health, wellbeing, learning and skills of individuals, while improving the cohesion and resilience of communities and tackling the climate and ecological crisis.

We will continue to deliver our mission through the voluntary efforts of individuals and groups. Informal volunteering has increased during the pandemic, with people wanting to make a meaningful contribution to their community¹⁷, and across the country, people appreciate their local green spaces more^{18,19}. We will focus our efforts on making green space volunteering an option for as many people as possible, offering opportunities with TCV and our network. We will continue to broaden our offer to make it attractive to a wide range of people and will work even harder at listening to volunteers, improve how we do things and strive to ensure the experience works for volunteers, communities and our environment.



Grounded in our values

These values represent the common purpose declared by our staff. They represent their passion and commitment, which is essential to delivering our goals, mission and vision. After the pandemic, support for our teams' health and wellbeing is even more important. We will always listen to our staff and be proactive in asking how they are doing. We will build the opportunities for connection and support, which are essential to our individual and organisational resilience.



Make stuff better

Constantly asking ourselves if we can improve on what we do and how we do it. Having a continuous learning practice at the heart of everything we do. Being curious about what others are doing outside our charity and learning from partners, volunteers and each other.

Expanding our horizons to make things better.

Make a positive environmental impact

Our commitment to ensuring that everything we do contributes to building a sustainable planet. Making sure that our relationship with the natural world is at the heart of what we do and how we manage ourselves as a charity. Seeking opportunities to share our knowledge, skills and expertise with corporate partners, education, communities and individuals to maximise our impact and legacy.

TCV values

Crack on and muck in

Coming to work with a mindset as a team, getting the job done, and achieving what we set out to do. Being clear on our collective purpose and shared goals; overcoming obstacles constructively and sustainably to achieve our aims without causing harm or difficulty for others.

Be the best we can be

We are committed to role modelling the best of ourselves in all that we do and how we do it. Ensuring that how we work with others is as important as what we do.

Make a difference

We have a deep desire to ensure that everything we do in how we connect with individual volunteers, with communities, with partners, and with our environment, leaves a positive and lasting ripple effect.



Working with others

We know where our strengths lie and how to maximise these when working with others. We have strong partnerships with government, local authorities, the voluntary sector and private sector organisations spanning many years. We are committed to working with complementary organisations across different sectors to deliver multiple outcomes and achieve mutual ambitions. We will seek to learn about new ways of working and will identify partners who can help us to evolve to achieve our goals. We want our work to help deliver local and national strategic priorities and we will commit time to support relevant initiatives where we can add value.

Working with others we can support more diverse audiences to have the opportunity to connect with nature. Working with organisations with expert knowledge related to our desired outcomes will enhance the impact of our work. We will be led by communities in shaping and delivering green space improvements where they live for the benefit of everyone.

Making plans, measuring impact, securing resources

This strategy sets the direction for our work to 2025 and we are committed to achieving these goals and more. We will expand on our commitments and detail our methods to achieve these through annual business plans and reviews and our delivery will be rooted in our values. We will continue to improve our understanding of the impact of our work and will use this learning to improve what we do. We will better communicate this impact, celebrating the achievements of our volunteers to attract more to our cause and secure the partnerships and resources we need to deliver lasting outcomes for people and green spaces.



Our impact

12,580 regular volunteers deliver over
65,000 workdays and transform over
1,400 green spaces

Each year
TCV works with
83,000
people

We also deliver over **62,000** days of green space connections through occasional volunteering, training courses, nature engagement and education sessions

TCV's Tree Nursery in Northern Ireland is an invaluable contribution to native tree conservation. It is the only one of its kind in Ireland, relying exclusively on people power for growing climate-resilient native trees from seed through 760 volunteer workdays per year.

“Volunteering with TCV not only has a positive impact on the wellbeing of our employees and their teams, but it allows them to make a significant, positive difference to our natural environment and in our local communities.”
Michael Duncan, Head of Giving Programmes

We've planted nearly
1.5 million
trees in the last six years

In the last year alone, we've created and improved
over 300km
of footpath
– more than enough for a footpath from our head office in Doncaster down to London

In 2020 we supported
1,484
community network groups
to protect and improve their own community green spaces

“I cannot explain how profoundly the experience of interacting with nature has influenced and shaped our children. Stave Hill was a polluted urban wasteland forty years ago, now it is a hive of biodiverse interlocked habitats. It is no exaggeration to state that the woodland and the work within it by the Ecological Park has made a direct, immediate and significant contribution to the wellbeing of this area at a time when we have all have had to cope with additional stress and anxiety.”
Local resident

A extensive study by University of Westminster covering four years, has shown that TCV's Green Gym successfully targets those with the greatest physical and mental health need and significantly improves and then sustains their mental health.

97% of our volunteers rate their experience **good (24%)** or **excellent (72%)**

16% of our registered volunteers have a **disability**

18% of our registered volunteers are from a **minority ethnic background**

23% of our registered volunteers are in the top **20% most deprived UK areas**

And they –

- are **more connected to nature (93%)**
- have **learnt new skills (91%)**
- more connected to their **local community (81%)**
- Feel their **well-being has improved (93%)**

“I always feel slightly anxious about group activities but TCV make it easy for me, creating a friendly all inclusive environment... love it!”
TCV Volunteer

“I think the WildSkills programme will massively improve my prospects. I was looking to get into the sector for a while and didn't know where to start, but now I think I've got enough experience and knowledge down to apply for jobs.” **TCV WildSkills trainee**

“I love volunteering here and would recommend to everyone. Its a great way to stay healthy & fit and enjoy nature.” **TCV Green Gym volunteer**

- 1 <https://climateoutreach.org/reports/britain-talks-climate/>
- 2 <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ukbi-a1-awareness/>
- 3 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/590993389387760>
- 4 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/trends-in-generalised-anxiety-disorders-and-symptoms-in-primary-care-uk-populationbased-cohort-study/5A04D331090B1CFB889ECDA8B8250D51>
- 5 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>
- 6 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3>
- 7 <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/exercise-for-depression/>
- 8 <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2017/04/07/does-volunteering-improve-mental-health/>
- 9 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-relationships-and-community>
- 10 <https://www.tcv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/tcv-social-prescribing-potential.pdf>
- 11 <https://www.tcv.org.uk/greengym>
- 12 https://sustainability.unioncloud.org/resources/race-inclusivity-and-the-environment_report
- 13 <https://charitysowhite.org/>
- 14 https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Space-to-thrive_2019-A-rapid-evidence-review.pdf?mtime=20191018095850&focal=none
- 15 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52660591>
- 16 https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/115/Skills_shortages_bulletin_summary.pdf
- 17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-covid-19-re-contact-survey-2020-main-report/4-informal-volunteering-community-life-recontact-survey-2020>
- 18 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7399622/>
- 19 <https://www.cprelondon.org.uk/news/cpre-poll-of-londoners-shows-appreciation-of-green-space-during-lockdown/>



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The Conservation Volunteers



@TCVtweets

