

Sowing Seeds of Change: Kent Community Foundation's inspiring Climate Journey



Josephine McCartney,
Chief Executive of Kent
Community Foundation

Interview with Josephine McCartney

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When Kent Community Foundation decided to embark on its climate journey, the commitment ran through the whole organisation, from staff to board members. In this interview, Josephine McCartney, Chief Executive of Kent Community Foundation, shares with us some of the enabling factors that kicked off the whole strategy and a few of the most significant steps taken until today.

How did it all start?

Embarking on such a climate journey came from a more comprehensive strategic reasoning of how, as [Kent Community Foundation](#), we could embrace fully and advance the 2030 Agenda in our context. Indeed, the attention paid to community foundations' role in finding local solutions to global challenges has been very high, thanks to UKCF's convincing power around the topic. We started to wonder how we could practice the "think global, act local" paradigm as a place-based grantmaker and what would make the most sense to focus on for our community. And one of the answers was the climate crisis! Furthermore, with the launch of the [Funders Commitment on Climate Change](#) in the UK by [ACF \(Association of Charitable Foundations\)](#), the overall national philanthropic discourse started to focus more and more on this topic: we felt we were not alone in this, and this gave us a further push to make our efforts more concrete when we entered our new strategy period in 2020.

What were some of the significant steps you took?

We used the Funders Commitment principles as a guide to implement our efforts, starting from our grantmaking. We set up a new line of funding, the [Fund for the Environment](#), that kicked off with £500,000 and is continuously growing. One of the first positive impacts was that we positioned ourselves also as environmental funders, and we managed to meet new grassroots realities and build new partnerships, expanding our reach and connections in the community.

Among others, we have supported for instance Custom, a community organisation working at the intersections of art, food, agroecology and activism; Brodgale Collections, that help preserve bees in their natural habitat, educate the public about the importance of bees and train local disadvantaged young people to help with the bees.

From the endowment management side, we already had a clear policy of negative screening and ethical investments, but we decided to move to a more sustainable and responsible portfolio. That meant, on the one hand, proactively assessing the risks and opportunities in investing in a post-carbon economy and the implications on our total returns policy. On the other hand, we set a clear mandate for our investment manager to prioritise environmental sustainability, using the ESG as a screening method. Of course, we paid particular attention to our donors and fundholders, in order to have them on board. We spent a lot of time in conversation with them, sharing the reasons behind this transition, the importance of aligning our investments with our actions, and the long-term impact of such a decision. We also paid particular attention to being open to exchange, listening, and addressing their concerns.

What were some of the key ingredients for the climate recipe for you?

Two come straightforward to my mind: our board and the team. The first one was very open, supportive, and proactive in shaping our climate strategy in the organisation's strategic plan. Indeed, there was a shared and clear recognition of the role that Kent Community Foundation could and should play in the community around this issue and the potential positive impacts for the area.

The team welcomed this new challenge with open arms. Having one of the staff members, Sophie Hosking, our Development Manager, championing and leading this kind of work was crucial. We were not an environmental funder at the time. Still, we could participate in trainings, such as the ECFI Cohort of the Climate and Philanthropy Learning Journey, and exchange with the community foundations field and the broader philanthropic system, connecting with peers embarking on such a journey. Those opportunities were crucial to building the confidence and knowledge to advance our work today and in the future.

What are you planning in the immediate future as next steps?

One of the most exciting things is that we are convening the very first Green Impact Forum on the 27th of March. Its aim is to bring together organisations and groups across Kent and Medway and inspire them to take action by integrating the climate lens. Leveraging on peer learning and hands on experiences, the Forum will empower and upskill those already delivering great initiatives within the voluntary sector, as well as acting as a catalyst for those who want to start and start small.

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