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#### Welcome

#### from the Chair of the Board

This past year has seen great growth for FEL Scotland and we are thrilled to share some key highlights of our work, driven by our commitment to empowering communities through sustainable and active initiatives.

In our efforts to support active travel and healthier lifestyles, we've now established five secondary school hubs, helping students and the wider school community embrace cycling and active travel with confidence. The sight of young people riding to school and exploring their local area continues to be an inspiring measure of our success.

A highlight of the year was the expansion of our Bike Buddies programme, distributing free bikes to young people who need them. This is a cruical step to improving active travel in Clackmannanshire.

We are also pleased to continue our partnership with NHS Forth Valley, working to improve both patient and staff well-being through access to bikes and walking programmes. Our collaboration has helped reinforce the physical and mental benefits of active journeys for all.

This year also marked the launch of our Climate Action Hub, a new and vital initiative that joins the Scottish Government's network of hubs across the country. This programme aligns perfectly with our vision, providing the knowledge and resources needed to empower our communities in the fight against climate change.

As always, our work would not be possible without the incredible support of our partners, funders, and community members. Together, we are building a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

Thank you for being part of our movement for change.

Lynne McNaughton, Chair of the Board of Trustees



#### **Executive Summary**

The past year has been transformative for FEL Scotland as we deepened our impact across communities in Forth Valley and beyond. Through initiatives like the Active Schools Hubs, Bike Buddies programme, and the Climate Action Hub, we empowered individuals to embrace healthier lifestyles, sustainable travel, and climate-conscious living.

## **Key Outcomes**

Distribution of **200 bikes to children in Clackmannanshire**, a 700% increase in ebike loans, and the successful launch of the **"Growing a New Future"** programme, fostering sustainable food production and green employability skills. **Our partnerships** with NHS Forth Valley, schools, and local organisations further amplified our reach, delivering measurable benefits for physical, mental, and environmental well-being.

We **supported 223 communities** through our various project activities. This included everything from fundraising support to delivering cycling, cooking, and other thematic programmes.

Just under **10,000 people benefited** from our many activities, which included everything from fundraising support to delivering cycling, cooking and other thematic programmes.

We improved **access to cycling** through free bikes, bike repairs, bike loans, and training.

We helped **improve the confidence of participants** in active travel, food growing, and cooking, creating a significant impact across our communities.

We supported 159 people with training and funded 56 community groups to take forward their own climate action projects.

In 2023-24 we built on 35 years of experience to create positive, tangible climate action in our communities. Our partnerships and innovation allow us to help our communities move towards the future they deserve.





#### **Active Schools Hubs**

#### **Funder: Paths For All's Smarter Choices, Smarter Places**



The 2023 autumn term saw the fifth anniversary of FEL's active school hub in Lornshill, and the addition of two new schools to our roster. Balfron and Larbert High Schools were added, with dedicated FEL Project Officers in each hub, bringing our total offering to five schools across Forth Valley.

Through a regular programme of activity, FEL officers work with the whole school community. They offer a variety of Active Travel methods, and a wellbeing component called Healthy Minds that can be cooking, bike maintenance, and games that inspire communication. By providing an alternative to classroom-based learning our officers are able to deliver activity that encourages cycling and walking every day. This is beneficial for mental and physical health, and social well-being of all students, staff, and the wider community.

The challenges presented by each school are diverse, meaning that an individualised approach must be taken each time. Our officers approach each of these challenges with creativity and consideration, as well as the support of the wider FEL team.

At Alloa Academy funding was secured to purchase specialised side-by-side bicycles which meant every student in the school had a chance to cycle. At Bannockburn High School we worked with young people who have newly arrived in Scotland through refugee resettlement programmes to assist them in settling into school life. Language was a barrier but a series of nature walks helped the children to feel more comfortable in their new surroundings.

A huge benefit of our Active Schools Hubs offering is the ability to add value to the offerings at each school in the form of our highly skilled officers. They are able to engage children on an individual basis, creating relationships and trust where that may otherwise prove difficult. We found that typically low attendance at one school was improved significantly with the delivery of our programme.

Our programme is replicable, and in 2024-25 we will increase our hub network from five to eight schools. We aim to have hubs in every secondary school in Clackmannanshire by the beginning of the next school year, and to increase hubs in Falkirk and Stirling where possible.

## **Facts & Stats**

400 sessions

producing 5000 engagements

**2** new programme sessions: skateboarding & geocaching

11 S5 pupils trained

as walk leaders through the Health Walk leader pilot scheme at Balfron High

**9% of student body** cycling to school at Lornshill Academy. UK average is 1.6%

**91 students engaged** on 55 led rides

**194** students engaged on 67 led walks

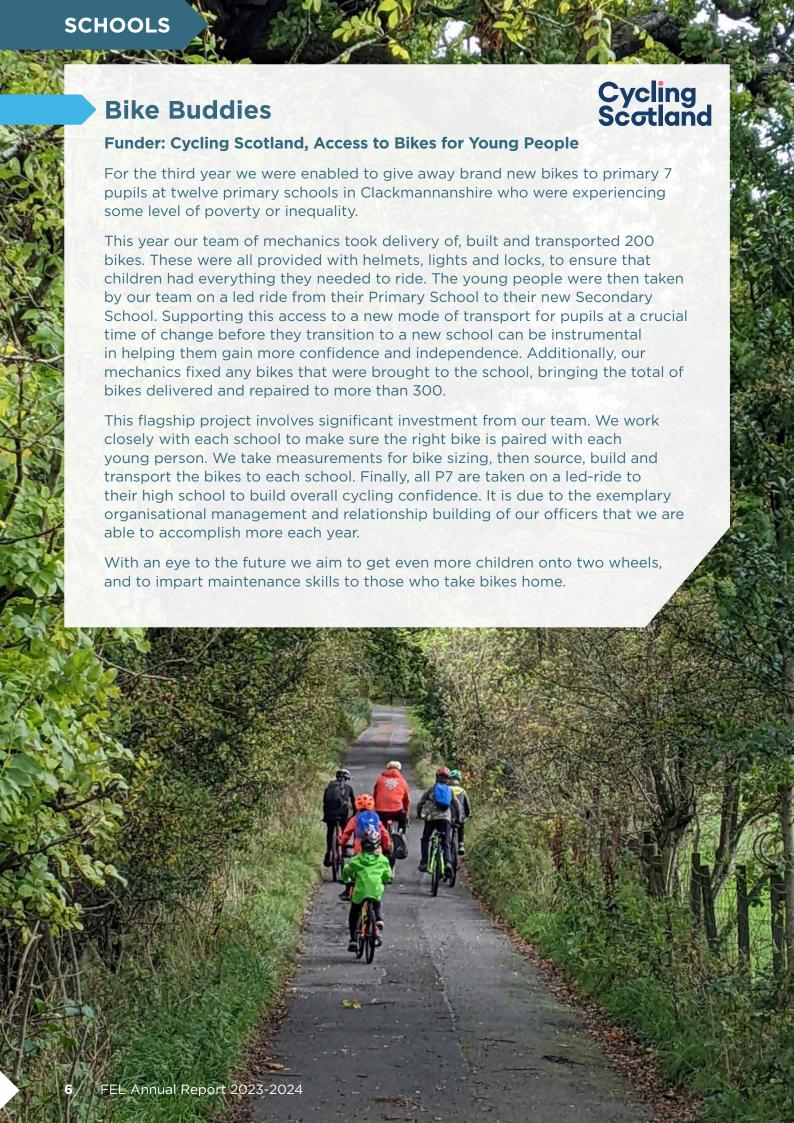
**77** students engaged on 59 Healthy Minds activities

**35** students engaged on 55 bike maintenance classes

29 pop-ups with 2454 students engaged

34 bikes serviced for free

**221** students skateboarding in 29 sessions



#### **NHS Forth Valley**

## Funder: NHS Forth Valley and Paths for All, Smarter Choices, Smarter Places





This was our 6th year of working with the NHS and we delivered activity both at Forth Valley Royal Hospital (FVRH) and Stirling Health and Care Village (SHCV). Our team delivers hands-on activity, such as led-rides, and also coordinates and supports a range of activity for staff and patients to undertake independently. These include:

**Ebike library:** staff and patients have access to our public ebike library. We have seen a demand from staff for commuting and from rheumatology patients who have benefited from the enhancement an ebike provides to their physical activity. This contributes to our understanding of social prescribing.

**Step Count Challenge:** 115 teams made up of 542 staff took part this year, walking a total of 165,113,704 steps in spring and autumn.

Mental Health led-rides: our officer leads a ride around the local area, working on both cycling confidence and basic bike skills. These rides are alternated between FVRH and SHCV to benefit the most people possible.

**Cycle Leader** training to participants who have been attending these rides regularly. This is a wonderful way of implementing leadership skills, building up self-confidence and ability, and empowering our participants.

## Case Study

#### **Rheumatology Patients**

One patient, who received a longterm ebike loan from us, has given up rheumatology medicines entirely, saving the NHS around £1000 a month.

Even patients who haven't entirely moved away from medicine have benefited from the ebikes. Cycling is a gentle exercise that takes the pressure off of their knees, is accessible, and gives a mental health boost as well as increasing fitness.

Two patients who previously cycled but had since felt unable to do so due to their conditions found their stride again since receiving an ebike. One patient lost two stone in weight by cycling more than 500 miles over the loan period. Another patient told us that the ebike loan allowed them to get out into nature once again and get back into wildlife photography.

## Dianne was one of the patients who received a bike loan:

but I am not an experienced cyclist but I am slowly gaining my confidence cycling around my local area. As an enthusiastic wildlife photographer, I have been cycling to some of my favourite locations rather than taking my car. I have found that I see and hear so much more while cycling around the countryside, which I would otherwise miss when driving in a noisy car. If something catches my eye, I can

easily park the bike and quickly get my camera ready.

I have also noticed a big improvement in my overall fitness and



stamina since I began cycling. It is very hilly where I live so the ebike allows me to cycle around areas I would not have tackled in the past. I am really pleased how my health has benefitted and I am so pleased and grateful to be part of the loan scheme.



## eBike Rescue and Repair

**Partnership activity** with Transition Stirling



FEL ran a pilot project to see if there could be a business case for rescuing ebikes, keeping them from landfill, and putting them through the workshop by experienced mechanics to bring them back to a saleable condition. Six ebikes were rescued from previous Energy Saving Trust funded projects, with the aim of repairing them and putting them back into circulation.

This pilot project aimed to understand the market demand and logistics involved in ebike resale. The project identified that there was limited value in recovery and repair of lower value ebikes, due to the higher labour and parts costs. However, running this project with higher quality ebikes which have been designed for disassembly, such as the models which make up FEL's ebike library, could provide improved access to ebikes at lower price points and provide an opportunity for future learning and development.

As part of this project, we also linked in with Circular Communities Scotland to host an open house around ebike repair and servicing. Mechanics from Bikeworks Fife came along to share their knowledge of servicing and repairing ebikes from brands other than the Bosch and Shimano models our mechanics are familiar with. Attendees on the day came from a range of third-sector organisations across Scotland.

**Case Study** 



**Barnardos Gearing Up** 



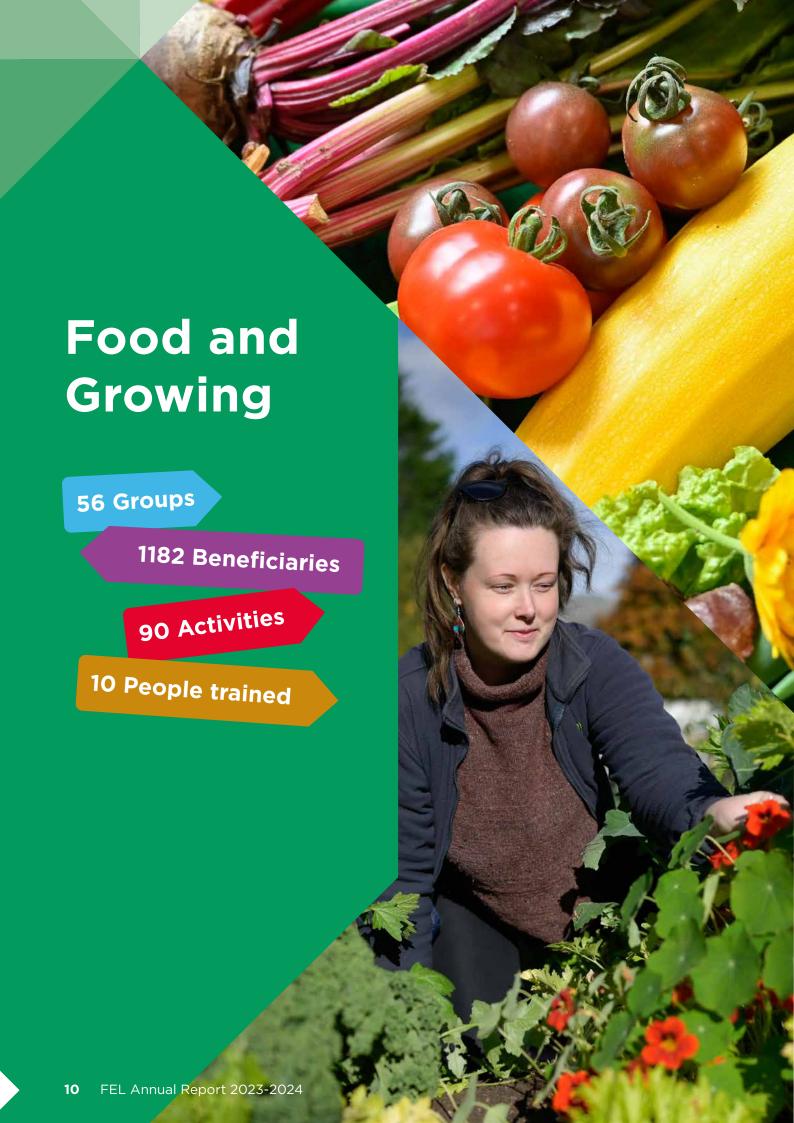
#### **Funder: Cycling Scotland, Access Bikes**

Working with Barnardos care experienced young people, we deliver six-week programmes giving access to the outdoors. The groups are taken on road routes, and are also given the chance to try mountain biking with our highly qualified ride leaders. At the end of the programme,

participants keep their bikes and cycling accessories. This is one of the tangible ways in which FEL caters to individual requirements to build lasting change and meet people where they are.

**ff** I really enjoyed the programme! Today out on my confidence is much higher now. I can't wait for a few of us to get out more on our new bikes.

COMMUNITY



#### **Forth Valley Food Futures**



This year, we played a central role in advancing Food Partnerships' goals, fostering collaboration between Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Councils, NHS Forth Valley, Sustainable Food Places development fund, local organisations, and community members to create more resilient and sustainable local food systems.

By prioritising strategic partnerships FEL supported a broad range of initiatives, from addressing food insecurity to promoting sustainable food practices. Key activities included launching the Forth Valley Food Futures website as a comprehensive resource for local residents, organising impactful events like "Gather Around Good Food" to deepen community engagement, and implementing educational programmes to raise awareness of sustainable food practices.

The Partnerships' successes would not have been possible without the collaboration of stakeholders and key board membership organisations. Together, these partners have strengthened the local food infrastructure and laid the groundwork for region-wide Food Action Plans.

One direct success of this action plan was that Clacks Good Food won a Sustainable Food Places Bronze award, recognition of the work done to tackle poverty and access to good food in the county.













## Facts & Stats

**26** workshops and events with 1182 beneficiaries

**5** Community meals with 161 participants

17 Cooking and Growing workshops with 131 participants

1 Food Summit with 35 participants

4 Network Gatherings with 68 participants

14 Community Renewal Fund groups involved

**10** Garden Buddies volunteers

**6** Community growing projects

11 Falkirk Food Partnership board members from 8 organisations

**5** Partnership meetings

**56** Groups engaged

19 New groups

(over 50% increased engagement)



#### **Growing a New Future**

Funder: Scottish Government, Low Carbon, Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF); Clackmannanshire Council, Clacks Good Food

In 2023, Clackmannanshire Council secured £500,000 from the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) to pilot an urban vertical farm on a post-industrial site in Alloa. The project, "Growing a New Future," engaged over 700 people through 46 events between August 2023 and July 2024. FEL Scotland led community engagement, supported by £10,000 for eight hydroponic growing towers, fostering education on food security and climate adaptation.







## **Key Outcomes**

#### Community feedback emphasised four priorities:

**Affordable Produce:** Produce should be cheaper than in supermarkets, with priority access for food banks and community initiatives.

**Learning Opportunities:** The vertical farm must host public tours and educational workshops.

**Engagement Activities:** Collaboration with community growers and hosting workshops on cooking, nutrition, and sustainable growing.

**Environmental Benefits:** Promote biodiversity with wildflowers, tree saplings, and soil remediation initiatives.

## **Hydroponic Towers**

The towers are installed in 5 schools, 2 community hubs, and 1 college. Notable impacts include:

**Lornshill Academy:** Initiated a lunchtime Crop Club and integrated towers into science and cooking classes.

**Alloa Hub:** Frequent community engagement with positive feedback, especially on growing herbs.



We used a growing hydroponic tower to see the difference between fertilised (seaweed) and unfertilised plants. I think growing towers are great and will help feed people in the future.

Reggie Kiff, S1 (12), Alloa Hub

#### **Lessons from York Visit**

A visit to Grow it York provided insights on water testing, organic nutrient use, and community-centred strategies like food pantry engagement.

The initiative demonstrates strong community interest in affordable, sustainable local food production and education. Engagement activities and hydroponic towers are fostering widespread learning and biodiversity efforts. Future goals include scaling production, enhancing accessibility, and collaborating with local growers to strengthen Clackmannanshire's food ecosystem.

If I didn't know anything about plant growth before I did this. Now I know about the stages of plant development and when the crops are ready to be transferred to the tower by checking their root growth. My next idea is to set up a time lapse camera so we can see how much growth happens each week.

Lexi Paterson, S3 (14), Lornshill Academy







## **Key Outcomes**

**FVSC Workshops:** Cooking sessions with Forth Valley Sensory Centre involved 3 youth programmes and a community meal, engaging multiple age groups.

**Spring Seed Gathering:** Inspired new gardeners, particularly children, to grow food, with adults sharing gardening insights.

Collaboration with Falkirk's Mental Health Association and Sustainable Thinking Scotland: Created recipe booklets and videos for food bank recipients, expanding community resource access.

**Thrive Workshops:** Supported 16 women through cooking and wellbeing sessions, fostering employability and social connections.

**Westfield Park:** Youth engaged in fun, hands-on food activities, promoting openness to new foods.

#### **Rainbow Muslim Women's Group:**

Culturally sensitive workshops focused on Ramadan traditions, emphasising community-centered nutrition.

These efforts demonstrate measurable impacts in capacity building, health improvement, and community participation, setting the stage for broader engagement and outcomes in 2024/25.

### **Spark the Change**

**Funder: UK Shared Prosperity Fund** 



This winter project provided carbon calculations and essential thermal imaging surveys to community groups and their buildings. By conducting thermal surveys at locations like Tamfourhill Community Hub, Limerigg Village Hall, and Slamannan Bowling Club, the team identified hidden structural and heat loss issues, directly aiding funding applications for retrofitting efforts.

These thermal imaging services not only revealed costly issues before renovation but also positioned communities to pursue significant energy-efficiency improvements. The project's success highlights thermography's value as a community resource, with plans to expand this service in the coming year to further assist local groups in reducing energy waste and operating costs.

Spark the Change is one of the ways in which FEL is looking to the future. Community groups and councils may soon be asked to provide analysis on their environmental impact, and we are helping them to get ahead of this request. The data also allows them to identify the biggest gaps in their energy use and look for means to address those issues.



# Health Inequalities and Community Wellbeing



Funder: Health and Social Care Partnership, Health Inequalities and Wellbeing Fund, Falkirk Council

The Health Inequalities and Communities Wellbeing Fund supported a variety of impactful programmes focused on community engagement, skill-building, and promoting well-being across Falkirk



## **Key Outcomes**

**Supper Club at Falkirk Baptist Church:** Delivered a 12-week series of weekly community meals featuring vegetarian dishes like Veggie Burns Night Supper and Middle Eastern Mezze. Guests engaged in games, conversations, and learned about local activities, with numbers increasing over time to provide meaningful experiences.

**Willow Lodge Care Home:** Conducted informal cooking sessions to develop skills for independent living among residents transitioning out of care.

**Kersiebank Men's Group:** Introduced cooking from scratch sessions alongside activities like football and walks to build healthy eating habits and skills among members with minimal prior cooking experience.

**Pantry Networking Event:** Facilitated a learning exchange at Stirling Community Food, highlighting the role of food pantries in reducing waste and addressing climate change.

**Foss Community Meals:** Delivered meals with Friends of Scottish Settlers, sharing culturally diverse cuisine and fostering connections with organisations offering volunteer opportunities.

**Caledonia Community Meals:** Hosted a meal prepared by service users, featuring vegan, glutenfree pea and mint soup. Twenty-five participants engaged in active travel and community growing discussions.

**Wellbeing Event:** Supported Braveheart at Howgate Centre and provided FEL staff with updated Cycling Scotland training.

**National Veg Summit:** Represented Falkirk projects at a national level.

**Couch to Cycle App:** Upgraded the app to improve beginner cycling confidence, endurance, and fitness.

These initiatives addressed health inequalities, promoted sustainable practices, and built skills across diverse community groups.

8 groups 287 beneficiaries 30 activities

FEL Annual Report 2023-2024



# Forth Valley and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Climate Action Hub



**Funder: Scottish Government** 

FEL is responsible for delivering the Climate Action Hub covering the Forth Valley and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park regions. The Climate Action Hub empowers local communities to respond to climate challenges through awareness, capacity-building, and hands-on projects.

A major feature of the Hub's launch was its Seed Grants programme, which offered small grants between £250 and £1,500. These grants funded diverse projects focused on raising climate awareness, strengthening partnerships, and fostering sustainable practices tailored to each community's needs.

In 2023-2024, nearly £70,000 in Seed Grants supported 56 community initiatives. Projects funded by these grants include creating community gardens, promoting sustainable travel, and hosting educational events around eco-friendly practices. FEL organised several launch events this year across the region, drawing hundreds of attendees who took part in activities like upcycling workshops and information sessions on sustainable choices.

This initiative is part of Scotland's broader effort to reach Net Zero by putting communities at the forefront of environmental action. The Hub's outreach also amplifies local voices and inspires people to get involved in climate resilience efforts for a fair and sustainable future.

#### Case Study

## Safer Communities Youth Action Project

Our seed funding has significantly advanced ongoing efforts in environmental improvement, conservation, and climate change mitigation, especially by engaging young people and strengthening partnerships.

£1500

#### **Key successes include:**

Community Black Spot Cleanup and Pollinator Planting: In partnership with Weld Wild, local schools, and the Tamfourhill Community Hub, areas plagued by litter were revitalised with pollinator-friendly plants.

**Bird and Bat Habitat Creation:** The Youth Action Group constructed and installed bird and bat boxes around local woodlands, enhancing local biodiversity.

#### **Canal Clean up with Scottish Canals:**

Over three sessions, young volunteers, in partnership with Scottish Canals, removed waste from the canal by canoe, contributing to the Upstream Battle campaign by Keep Scotland Beautiful.

#### **Community Mural and Art Initiatives:**

Collaborating with Falkirk High School and primary schools, young participants contributed to a mural made from recycled bottle caps. This creative project doubled as an educational experience on recycling and involved a community-wide clean up effort. The mural will be unveiled on June 6th.

#### **Climate and Biodiversity Awareness**

**Day:** Held at the Falkirk Wheel, this day featured hands-on workshops on pollution, active travel, and carbon footprint reduction. Local P7 students from Easter Carmuirs Primary School participated as part of their ongoing climate project.

### **Tullibody Community Garden**

#### Little Seeds Big Plans: £625

"Our intention was to supply seeds and compost along with advice, to other groups and organisations on how to grow on their own sites and in their own gardens. This gives other groups the opportunity to build a sustainable fairer future by giving them opportunities to use the community garden for learning and build up connections while developing our garden into a fully organic environmentally site. We hope to make the connection between growing plant-based foods and awareness of climate change."

"Demonstrating 'climate friendly' gardening is a must for us. This is how to garden without single use plastic; reducing use of plastic pots by reusing and recycling suitable other containers thereby reducing waste; managing pests by encouraging beneficial insects and other 'climate friendly' means to remove need for artificial insecticides and improving soil through natural methods so that artificial fertilizers are not needed."

"The funding enabled us to run a 'grow your own food' session and not only show people how easy it can be to grow vegetables but be able to give them packs to take home with them. We also have made links with local schools to support them to grow vegetables and fruit within the school grounds. We made the community more aware of climate change and its effects, as the focus of our project was on sustainability and fairer community, but while undertaking events and future sessions we have and will bring awareness by discussing in a practicable way."

"Following our event, we will now have a group of local people growing and sharing the food they grow. We have also been able to link with other organisations and have plans for future joint events."



### **Looking Ahead:**

#### **Shaping a Sustainable Future**

FEL Scotland is focused on making an even greater impact on communities across Forth Valley and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. Building on our innovative, systems-based approach, we will expand, adapt, and deepen our programmes to help communities adapt to a changing climate.

## Community Active Travel

In the coming year, we will grow our Active Travel network, increasing the reach of our Active Schools Hubs to eight secondary schools, ensuring every young person has access to the skills, bikes, and support they need to embrace sustainable travel. We will scale up our free Community Ebike Library, making high-quality bikes accessible to more families.

#### Climate

Our Climate Action Hub will accelerate grassroots projects, empower climate leadership, and pioneer pilot initiatives in community energy, retrofit, and nature-based solutions. These efforts will position Forth Valley as a leader in climate innovation, amplifying our community voice within Scotland.

## Food and Growing

On the food and growing front, we are proud to lead the Community Wealth and Health Building agenda through the development of a Regional Food Partnership which will focus on integrating sustainable food systems. From piloting vertical farming in Clackmannanshire to reimagining tree planting through "Trees for Goals," we'll harness local resources to enhance resilience and prosperity.

Through new partnerships, internships, and training opportunities, FEL Scotland will expand pathways to green jobs, equipping individuals with the skills to drive change and champion sustainability. At the heart of everything, we remain committed to creating healthier, more connected, and climate-resilient communities.

