V!TAL SIGNS

2021

Quartet Community Foundation

Climate and communities:
a fairer, greener future in the West of England

Introduction

Mobilising 1.1m people for climate action

We're all now more aware of the urgent need to take local action on climate change. Our four West of England local authorities and the West of England Combined Authority have all declared a climate emergency. They are taking steps to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Achieving this important target requires fast-paced change for us all, individually and collectively. According to a University of Bristol study, many of us are ready for bold steps but can feel confused and overwhelmed about how to translate big global goals into local community action.[1] We know we want a fairer, greener future but how do we play our part in supporting the change we need?

Applying learning from the Covid crisis

We've learnt a lot from the Covid crisis that is relevant for tackling the climate emergency. We've seen the power of working together towards a common goal and that caring communities can quickly mobilise to support people at risk. But we've also seen how the crisis has exposed and worsened deep inequalities in our society. Neither the virus nor its consequences have affected people equally. Those with fewer resources and facing greater disadvantages have borne the brunt, and unless we tackle these inequalities, the same will be true in the future.

Our voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector has been essential in getting support to people who need it, especially those worst affected by the pandemic. VCSE organisations are still busy running vital services and managing the impact of Covid restrictions on the people they help. They're also dealing with the impact on their staff, and their organisation's income.

Demand for their services is rising, and capacity to focus on the climate emergency may be limited. But the VCSE sector will be a crucial partner in building a fairer, greener society. Now is the time to give VCSE organisations the resources they need to build resilience to future crises, both within organisations and out in our communities.

Working together

So what is our role as funders, as philanthropists, as people who care? We're asking ourselves these questions here at Quartet. There are many excellent local initiatives working to improve our environment and support local action on the climate emergency. We are keen to understand how we can align to shared goals and collaborate with others for greater impact. We don't have all the answers but we've begun our own journey to reflect on the environmental impact of everything we do. You can read about what we're doing on page 12.
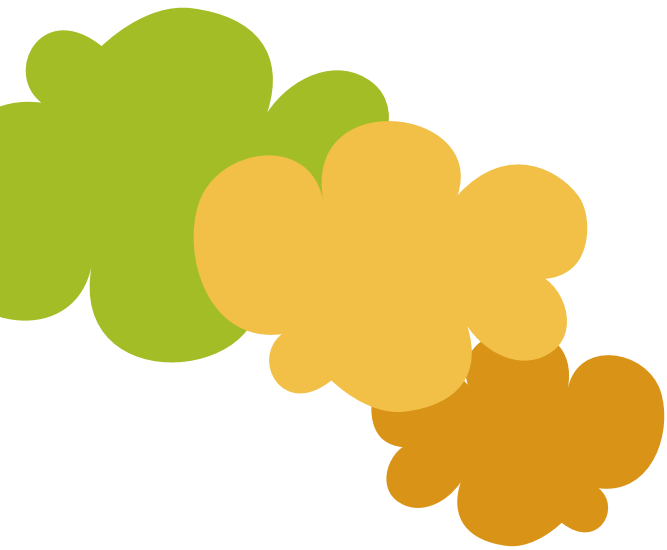
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About Vital Signs

Vital Signs is a tool for measuring the vitality of our communities and informing philanthropic giving. Each report contains up-to-date data and the findings of robust research. Alongside this are examples of how philanthropy is already improving lives and some suggested next steps.

Every three years we do a full report across the ten Vital Signs themes. In the intervening years, like this one, we take a closer look at one topic in more detail. You can find our previous Vital Signs reports at www.quartetcf.org.uk/reports

Energy & transport

The West of England Combined Authority and all four West of England local authority areas have made a commitment to reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. This is twenty years sooner than the 2050 deadline of the UN Paris Agreement. To meet this, we need to reduce our overall energy consumption and switch to clean energy sources. This will mean significant change for all of us. Work at the community level can be invaluable in bridging the gap between individual level action and broad societal change. Projects that support people to insulate their homes, switch to green energy or reduce car use will have a real impact on global warming.

We also need to acknowledge that we're not all starting from the same position: the consumption of the top-earning 10% of households produces more than three times the emissions as that of the bottom 10%.[2] As with the Covid crisis, it is typically not people in the highest income brackets who suffer the worst consequences of a polluted, warming planet. Issues around energy use and transport overlap with disadvantage, isolation and poverty. Wider factors influence and constrain our individual choices, such as where we live or availability of public transport. Addressing these is essential in creating a fairer future.

Vital Statistics

VS Researchers have calculated the percentage of carbon emission cuts that are needed every year to meet the UN Paris Agreement targets, representing near-zero emissions by 2050 and zero emissions by 2100.[3]

Annual reduction in local CO2 emissions needed to adhere to the UN Paris Agreement limits	
Local authority	**Percentage annual reduction needed**
Bath & North East Somerset	**-13.1%**
Bristol	**-12.9%**
North Somerset	**-13.9%**
South Gloucestershire	**-13.8%**

VS Our annual mileage in vehicles is increasing over time, despite our commitment to reducing emissions. In 2019 in the West of England we drove **6,702** million miles, up from 6,570 million the year before.[4]

VS Access to public transport is unequal, especially for rural areas. But even in cities, access is an issue. In Bristol on average **11%** of residents can't leave home when they want to due to inaccessible public transport. But this rises to **18%** among disabled residents, **15%** among Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents, and **15%** among 16-24 year olds.[5]

VS **Less than half** of homes in all four of our local authority areas are considered well insulated and energy efficient.[6] Insulating homes helps prevent them from overheating in summer as well as keeping them warm in winter.[7]

Percentage of homes that are well insulated (EPC rating of C or above)	
Local authority	**Percentage of homes that are well insulated**
Bath & North East Somerset	**37%**
Bristol	**38%**
North Somerset	**44%**
South Gloucestershire	**43%**

VS There is a rural-urban divide in active transport. Bristol has the highest proportion of people reporting walking **(35%)** and cycling **(9%)** for travel at least 3 days per week. South Gloucestershire and North Somerset's rates are much lower. In North Somerset rates are well below the national average at **16%** walking and **2%** cycling and have decreased over time.[8]

VS In Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES), the lowest earning **10%** of households are nearly twice as likely as others to live in energy inefficient homes.[9] Living in cold homes wastes energy, damages health and increases fuel costs.

Vital Initiatives

Reducing energy use

Grants don't have to be for big or complicated projects in order to make a difference. The Megawatt Community Energy grant programme has supported organisations in North Somerset to reduce their energy use and costs through switching to more efficient lighting. Grants to the Clevedon YMCA, Nailsea School and Crockerne Primary School totalling **£9,340** helped convert old strip lighting into LED alternatives. Only two months after making the switch, Nailsea School could report savings of £198 and 1632 kWh of energy.

Tackling fuel poverty

The coronavirus crisis has exacerbated fuel poverty. People spend longer at home so fuel bills have increased and many have lost work or income. The Centre for Sustainable Energy used a grant of **£9,020** to extend their Warm Homes Advice and Money Service in Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset, and in Ashley, Bristol. Both of these areas have high levels of fuel poverty. The grant provided emergency help with spiralling fuel costs and heating repairs, and supported residents to get help with reducing energy use and costs in future. The group has also used Surviving Winter funding in B&NES to help older people cope with fuel costs during winter.
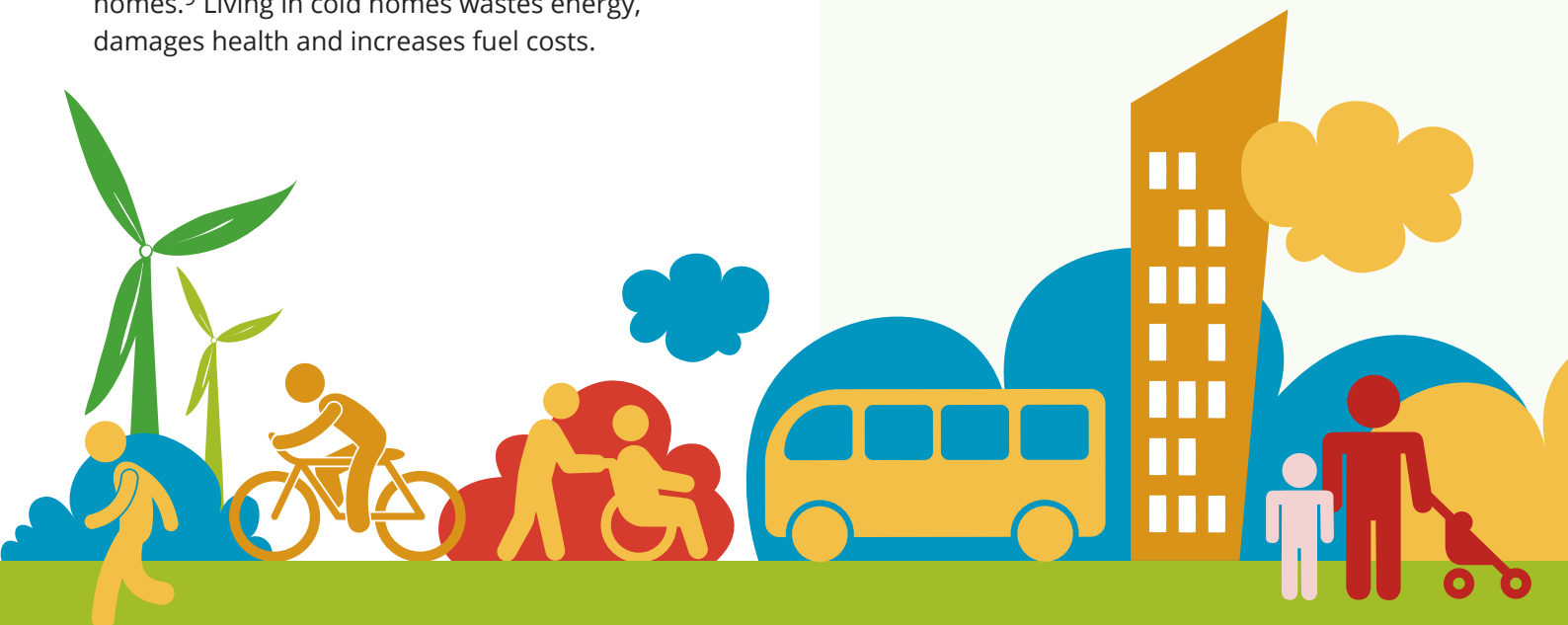
Food

Climate change affects our food production and security. The definition of food security is broad, spanning the global availability of food right down to individual household level.[10] Unequal access to affordable healthy food is caused by social, environmental and economic factors, leaving some people worried that they can't get enough good food to stay healthy. This has been evident during the Covid crisis. As well as not being able to afford food, some people simply cannot reach fresh food due to lack of transport or shops. These are known as 'food deserts' and we have them here.[11]

The current food system doesn't work for everyone and it doesn't work for our environment. Globally, a third of food is completely wasted, representing around 8% of total emissions.[12] Steep declines in insect populations through climate change, the widespread use of pesticides and intensive farming practices risks three-quarters of our food crops.[13] New ways of growing and accessing food are needed.

Some excellent local initiatives support changes to the local food system, such as Bristol Going for Gold or the Sustainable Food Partnership in Bath & North East Somerset. These aim to enhance local biodiversity, increase equality of access, boost local production and health, and reduce emissions from food miles.

Vital Statistics

VS People facing disadvantage have had poorer diets during the Covid crisis than previously. A poor diet increases the risk of serious illness and premature death, including greater vulnerability to infectious diseases such as Covid.[14]

VS In advance of official government statistics, the Social Market Foundation has estimated the number of children facing very low food security in the UK during the coronavirus pandemic.[15] When children can't access enough good food it affects their health, attainment and life expectancy, perpetuating inequalities into the future.

Children facing very low food security by local authority	
Local authority	**Percentage of children**
Bath & North East Somerset	**16.6%**
Bristol	**17.5%**
North Somerset	**15.6%**
South Gloucestershire	**16.2%**

VS Food insecurity has risen during the Covid crisis. From April to September 2020, Trussell Trust food banks gave out **34,192** food parcels across the West of England, an 85% increase on the previous year.[16]

VS Globally, the food system accounts for **26%** of all greenhouse emissions. Changing our food system is central to tackling climate change.[17]

VS For every £1 spent on food in the UK, there is an extra **97p** in hidden costs caused by the negative effects of our current food system. This includes things like the cost of managing pollution and the societal costs of ill health.[18]

VS A warming climate affects UK farmers and consumers: in the 2018 heatwave, reduced dairy production due to lost grazing increased the price of butter by **24%**.[19]

Vital Initiatives

Local action for healthy food

The Knowle West Alliance consortium has been awarded **£8,400** from the Bristol City Funds No Child Goes Hungry programme. The grant will help create a community food action plan for Knowle West in south Bristol. They have started by mapping the many resources and services that already exist in the area. Knowle West is an area with high levels of children eligible for free school meals and obesity is a problem here, as elsewhere in our region. The food plan will help local food initiatives to be more joined-up and strategic, and to fill gaps. Residents are involved at every stage and are supported to create the change they want. The goal is that everyone has the tools and resources to access plentiful, healthy food across Knowle West.

A separate grant from the Bristol City Funds is providing staff capacity for Redcatch Community Garden, a nearby community space for food-growing and classes. Their Bristol Community Health grant will help them forge stronger links with other local organisations including Knowle West Alliance.

Weather

Climate change has already started to bring an increase in extreme weather events like heatwaves, droughts and flooding. These are likely to become more frequent, intense and longer-lasting. We will all be affected by changes in the weather but some of us will bear more of the burden. Older people, young children, people with mental or physical health conditions and disabled people are particularly at risk.[20] People on low incomes and people in rented or poor housing – disproportionately likely to be from non-white ethnic groups – are also at greater risk as they are likely to have fewer resources to help them adapt and less choice in how to respond.[21] Because of this, adapting to the impact of climate change is an issue of fairness. As we've seen with the Covid crisis, those most affected tend to be people and communities who are already facing disadvantage or exclusion. People facing several disadvantages will be even worse affected.

There are measures we can take now to build greater resilience for individuals and communities. These include preparing buildings for extreme heat, planning for future flood risks and using nature-based solutions, where planting trees and greenery can reduce flooding and provide a cooling effect. Local VCSE organisations have the expertise and reach to work with communities on improving our planning and response to extreme weather. Philanthropy will be vital in helping them do so.

Vital Statistics

VS The five hottest years on record have all been in the last six years.[22] In the summer heatwave of 2019 Bristol's road temperatures reached over **50°C**, very close to their softening threshold.[23]

VS It's well known that high temperatures exacerbate many physical health conditions. Less well known are other effects, including rises in domestic abuse and suicide during heatwaves.[24]

VS Summers are expected to be drier and hotter, but we will also see wetter, milder winters in the West of England. By 2050 winter rainfall is projected to have increased by between **9% and 28%**.[25]

VS Some disabled people and people with care or support needs can be at greater risk during emergencies. Planning for extreme weather must be inclusive and take account of the different things we all need to keep safe and have our daily needs met in disrupted circumstances.[26]

VS Scientists have mapped land that may be below flood level by 2050. The best-case scenario shows Severn Beach, South Gloucestershire, some of North Bristol and much of North Somerset below sea level. The worst-case scenario has large swathes of the West of England's coastal areas subject to rising sea levels and significant flooding.[27] Bristol's city centre is at high risk of future flooding.[28]

VS Places absorb and retain heat differently. Areas of green space and water tend to be cooler than man-made materials. Local satellite mapping of surface temperatures can identify consistent 'hot-spots' for heat, such as housing estates and industrial buildings.[29]

Vital Initiatives

Family-led approaches

Families Acting on Climate Emergency (FACE) in B&NES aims to educate local people of all ages and backgrounds about the climate emergency and the carbon reduction actions they can take. This family-focused, volunteer-led group provides an inclusive forum for sharing ideas and taking practical action at a local level. A grant of **£1,177** from the BWCE Fund grant programme has supported their core work and enabled them to offer more information and support to members online due to coronavirus restrictions. FACE works alongside parents and schools to raise awareness in a non-judgemental way and support local behaviour change.

Communities taking action

Ujima Radio is a leading Black, Asian and minority ethnic arts and media social enterprise with more than 30,000 daily listeners. Their Black & Green project, run with Bristol Green Capital Partnership, was granted **£5,000** by the Megawatt Community Energy grant programme. This series of climate-focused radio shows enables discussion and action on climate change that is made by and for the diverse communities of Bristol. The lack of diversity within the environmental sector is an ongoing challenge that these radio shows help to address.
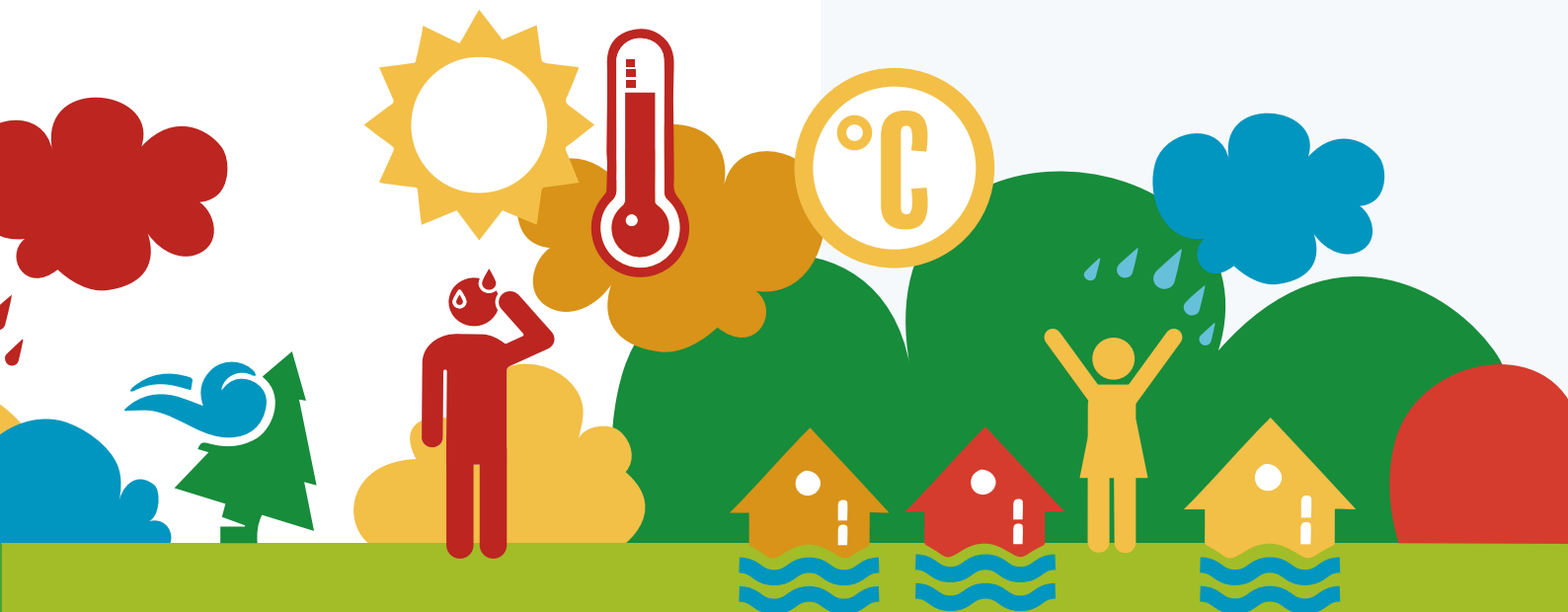
Nature

As well as the food, water and air that sustain us, nature benefits us in many ways. These include enhancing our mental and physical health, providing essential habitat for wildlife and removing pollution from the air. Following the national lockdowns of the coronavirus crisis, we all have a new-found appreciation of the importance of nature and green spaces.[30] Greenery has important cooling effects in a warming climate, especially important in urban environments. Research shows that adding even small amounts of greenery to areas lacking green space has a positive impact both on wellbeing and the environment.[31]

But access to green space is unequal. For some people, public parks may be too far from home, they may feel unsafe or not have sufficient amenities to make visiting comfortable and practical. This inequality of access has knock-on effects because our environment has a strong effect on our health outcomes. Facilitating access to green space, especially for people experiencing deprivation, can help reduce wider health inequalities.[32] But there is currently no statutory duty to provide public green space. To create habitat, support communities and reduce pollution, increasing the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space should be a top priority.

Vital Statistics

VS There is a clear link between satisfaction with parks and green spaces and measures of deprivation: in Bristol, only **53%** of people in the most deprived areas report being satisfied with parks and green spaces compared with **87%** in the least deprived areas.[33]

VS Polluted air is one of our four greatest public health risks. The direct health impacts of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide pollution in England will cost us **£1.69bn** in the eight years to 2025.[34] Road traffic is the main source of air pollution in B&NES. In central Bath the surrounding hills prevent air flow, trapping pollution in the city.[35]

VS Between 20-30% of species may be at risk of extinction if the climate warms by 1.5°C or more, risking the ecosystems on which we depend for our food.[36] The climate has already warmed by **1.2°C**, despite agreements to limit global warming. There is still time to limit warming but action must be swift.[37]
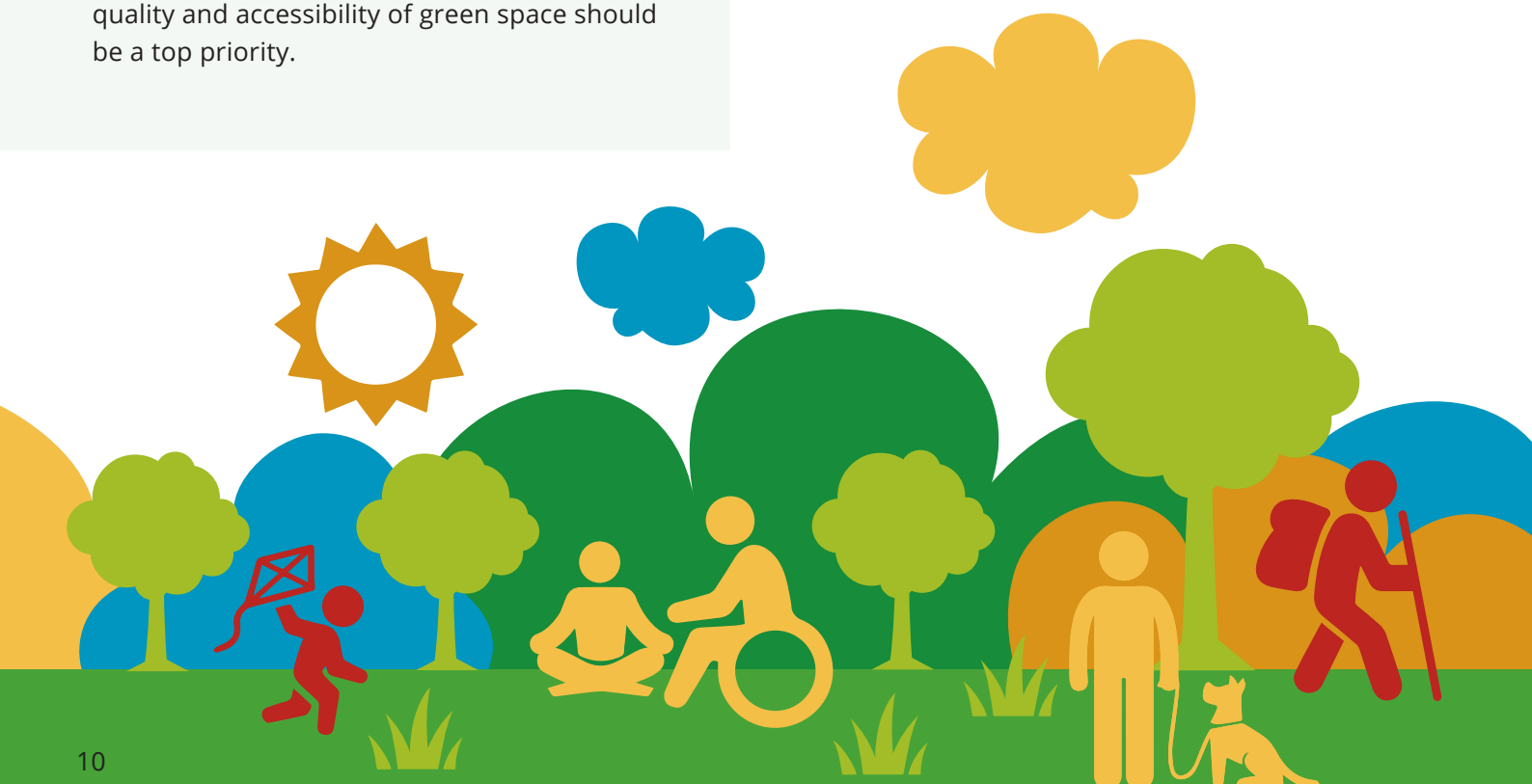
VS In urban settings, allotments and smallholdings are some of the most biodiverse habitats and can be crucial havens and corridors for wildlife.[38]

VS There is **282km²** of woodland in the West of England and many green spaces. The West of England Nature Partnership has created online maps of our existing green assets, highlighting opportunities to expand these to benefit everyone.[39]

VS In a survey in B&NES, **more than half** of young people said that improvements to parks is one of their top priorities. Nearly a **third** also prioritised more wild, natural spaces.[40]

Vital Initiatives

Access to historic woodland

Tortworth Forest Centre is restoring a historic arboretum at Tortworth, South Gloucestershire, for education, nature connection, wellbeing and therapeutic sessions, helping a wide range of people access important woodland. Therapeutic sessions support people facing mental health, substance misuse and social isolation challenges. With a grant of **£2,445** from us they have built a woodland eco-classroom. The classroom is made of natural materials and provides shelter in bad weather for attendees and volunteers. Having a shelter on site also makes the space more user-friendly for people hiring the site, generating income for the group's work.

Saving water and saving carbon

Pretoria Road Allotment Society in South Gloucestershire has been supported to improve rainwater harvesting at their allotment site in Patchway. The allotments provide an important green space for the Patchway and Charlton Hayes area. Their Megawatt Community Energy grant of **£2,834** has enabled the group to reduce the use of mains-fed water to the site and reduce their carbon footprint. The group calculates that for every 10,000 litres of water that is harvested instead of drawn from the mains, they will save 5.5kg of CO2.

Quartet's climate commitment

We're committed to taking action on climate change both through the funding we offer and through our own practices as an organisation. We know that now is an important time to increase our understanding and efforts. We want to help the West of England meet its targets, to safeguard our green spaces and protect the wildlife that depends on them.

Action we're taking:

- Quartet has signed the Funder Commitment on Climate Change. This commits us to educating ourselves, bringing a focus on the environment into everything we do and invest in, and being transparent on our progress.

- A new group of our staff and trustees is looking at each aspect of our work and how we can support the wider goals of a zero carbon West of England by 2030.

- Our investment managers adhere to the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment. We will continue to review the investment policy for our £50m+ endowment to ensure that the impact on the environment, alongside social and governance issues, is considered in all our investment decisions.

- We're reviewing our philanthropy and grant-making to look for ways we can strengthen our positive environmental impact in all that we do.

- Protecting ourselves and our environment can't be achieved without great collaborative effort. We're committed to supporting the incredible collaborative work that is already going on locally, and to working with others for a fair transition to sustainability across our region.

We want to be really open about the work we're doing and the journey we're on. We know we don't have all the answers: your comments, suggestions and feedback on how we can do more for the environment are all really welcome.

Vital Steps

- We need to support the VCSE sector to engage with the climate emergency and prepare for future extreme events. We've seen just how important the sector is for getting critical, frontline support to the people most affected. A strong VCSE sector builds community resilience. We invite funders and philanthropists across the West of England to join us in considering the environment and climate vulnerabilities in future funding decisions and in working together for wider benefit.

- We will listen to VCSE groups about what support they really need from us. Local research shows the sector wants resources to support collaboration between groups and an end to the competitive nature of funding. [41] We will explore the ways we can work differently to meet these requests.

- The coronavirus crisis has shown how inequality in our society produces and deepens negative outcomes for some of us and not for others. We urgently need to address poverty, inaccessibility and discrimination as part of any action we take for a fairer, greener future. Quartet's VCSE sector Coronavirus Recovery Proposal highlights the need for more support for community leadership and for organisations serving those of us who are most disadvantaged when crises hit.

- There is an incredible amount of expertise in our area on the natural world, mitigating climate change and supporting resilience across our communities. We are committed to making sure the funding we offer complements and enhances the wider initiatives of our statutory bodies and others. Philanthropy can add significant value to meeting shared goals and a joined-up approach is essential.

If you want to work with us to improve local resilience to the climate emergency, get in touch with Ronnie Brown on 0117 989 7705 or at ronnie.brown@quartetcf.org.uk

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Contact us

We would love to have your feedback on Vital Signs, including ways we can make our reports more useful or accessible in future. Feel free to send your comments, questions or suggestions to vitalsigns@quartetcf.org.uk

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