

# Vattenfall Unlock Our Future Fund 2024

## Year 6 Report





# The year at a glance....



**86 awards totalling  
£816,454 awarded since  
Fund launch in 2019**



**20 projects supported in  
2024, with awards  
totalling £202,027 made**



**Fund oversubscribed - 36  
applications (requesting  
£555,567) received**



**Five-year fund evaluation  
and review published**



**Research project on  
barriers to community  
funding uptake carried  
out**



## Highlights

The Vattenfall Unlock Our Future Fund has now delivered six years of grant making activity, supporting community-led climate action projects across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. This year, 20 projects have received awards totalling £202,027.

Vattenfall contributes £150,000 per year to the Fund (as of 2019) rising in line with the Retail Price Index for the life of the wind farm, which is expected to be at least 20 years. 10% of the overall value of the Fund is set aside for project activity in Blackdog, the community hosting the substation for the wind farm. The Fund is administered by independent grant-making charity, Foundation Scotland.

To mark the completion of the first five years of grant-making, an external evaluation was carried out to review the Fund's impact to date and help direct Fund strategy going forward. The results of this work are summarised below and available in full [here](#). The updated Fund strategy was published in April 2024 and is available [here](#). Fund priorities essentially remained the same following the review. However, award amounts were increased to £2,500 for small grants and up to £20,000 in any one year for the main grant programme, with a maximum award of £40,000 for any single project delivered over two years or more.

In the sixth year of grant-making, a diverse range of projects was funded, benefitting community groups in both urban and rural areas. Projects addressed several key climate themes – energy efficiency in community buildings, decarbonising transport and supporting local food growing and waste minimisation schemes.

The scale of project also varied considerably from a small grant to provide energy efficient heaters to several larger awards for major building upgrades involving insulation, glazing, solar panels, battery storage and renewable heating. Awards ranged from £892 to £20,000.

A summary of all awards and more detailed case studies can be found in this report.

Awards were made throughout the Fund area, with several new applicants supported in northern Aberdeenshire where additional promotional and support activity had been targeted to address the historical issue of fewer applications from Banff and Buchan.

The Fund continues to support relevant research in the sector, working with University of Aberdeen staff and students to address issues pertinent to the Fund. This year an MSc student in Sustainability Transitions completed a study on the challenges and barriers to community take-up of climate-smart funding packages in northeast Scotland. The summary is available along with previous research work on the Fund webpage [here](#).

## Fund Evaluation and Review 2019-2023

In late 2023, after five years of grant-making, the panel and Foundation Scotland commissioned an evaluation and review of the Fund to gather evidence on the impact of the Fund to date, to ensure the priorities of the Fund were still in line with the wishes of the communities and stakeholders in the area of benefit, and to make recommendations for the future.

As part of the evaluation, eight qualitative case studies were conducted. Each case study showed a multiplicity of benefits. Key messages from the case studies were that:

- Projects have **reduced energy usage**, and with it costs – which is of vital importance for ongoing financial sustainability.
- Most of the groups awarded funding remarked on the **improved experience for users and volunteers** brought about by introducing low-carbon technologies. This was through having warm buildings, quiet and non-polluting vehicles and improved quality of lighting.
- Many groups have been able to **share their knowledge and experience** gained by delivering projects with other organisations and with wider communities.
- Each of the case study organisations was clearly **valued by those using the services** provided or in the wider community. Conversations with users carried out as part of the case studies rarely touched on the environmental credentials of those who had received awards, the focus was on the difference those organisations had made to people's lives.

In addition to funding projects, the Fund panel has worked with the University of Aberdeen on three research projects and facilitated networking and the sharing of knowledge between projects through holding annual award events, in years where Covid restrictions did not limit gatherings.

The Fund review, which considered Fund priorities and delivery arrangements, was informed by an online survey with Fund applicants, stakeholder interviews, meetings with representatives from two communities, an online seminar held in conjunction with the North East Climate Action Network, a review of how the funding and policy environment had changed since the Fund was launched, and a review of emerging good practice in fund distribution. The full report is available [here](#)

## Award Celebration Event

The annual award event was held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024 on a snowy day at the Garioch Heritage Centre, Inverurie, to bring together 2024 awardees as well as groups who had received awards in previous years to share progress on their projects. This was attended by 22 representatives from projects supported by the Fund, panel members and Vattenfall representatives.

Organisations gave presentations about their projects and had a chance to network with fellow awardees. There was also a short update about the Scottish Government's Local Energy Scotland project which is a key source of support for community building projects. Finally, there was also a special word of thanks from Lorna Smith, Deputy Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire who came along to learn more about the Fund and the projects supported.

Despite the weather having an impact on numbers attending, those present found it to be an informative and inspirational day – with lots of practical networking and connections made as groups at different stages look to support each other.

## Making a Difference – Case Studies

### Case Study #1

#### Logie Coldstone Trust

#### Powering the Community in Logie Coldstone

The village hall in Logie Coldstone near Aboyne was built in 1897. A well-used local facility, it underwent a major refurbishment in 2013 when major roof repairs led to a comprehensive refurbishment with insulation, new windows, LED lighting and an air source heat pump being installed. The Logie Coldstone Trust committee opted to continue this sustainability journey with a plan to install solar panels and a battery system to further reduce bills and build resilience in a climate-friendly way.

The group was awarded £15,000 from the Vattenfall Unlock Our Future Fund in 2022 and secured match funding from SSEN Resilient Communities funding, CARES and the Marr Area Partnership to install a 16.15kW solar PV system with a 40.5kWh Tesla battery system. The panels are Sunpower Maxeon panels which are high-performance panels with a very long (40-year) warranty covering both performance and materials.

The installation was completed in February 2024 and the group is really pleased with how well it is operating. “The installation of the batteries has really helped us to maximise our use of the energy we have generated, as often the energy is used at the hall in the evening. So far the system has supplied 71% of our total electricity use over the first three months of use. 40% of this has been used directly from the solar panels and 31% has been used indirectly from the batteries. So far over the three months of operation, we have generated 3.6MWh of electricity.”



The group had to overcome various challenges to get the project to this stage. Securing the funding was “time consuming and at times complex. The Vattenfall funding process was one of the easiest to cope with and the flexibility was extremely helpful.”

Securing the building warrant also took time. Eventually, the group arranged for the SER certificate from a structural engineer which was able to satisfy concerns about the main hall roof. This could have been done earlier to accelerate the process. There were also a few issues raised by the fact the hall is on a three phase electricity system – this is helpful for the installation of larger solar systems but limits what can be run in a power cut and makes it harder to get a smart meter installed. The group also recommend checking your insurance details which will have to be amended to cover this type of project.

The installation itself went very smoothly and the group was impressed with the quality of work from the contractor chosen.



“We have had a lot of interest in the system and have engaged in some events to share our experiences. We took part in an open doors day as part of the Climate Week North East 2024 event and we have also spoken at a Marr

Area Partnership AGM meeting, sharing our experiences with many people. We have also been using the installation to bring attention to the climate crisis and encouraging people to take action through our community newsletter.”

## Case Study #2

### Beannachar Camphill Community

#### Growing Together: building skills and a low carbon community at Beannachar

Beannachar is a Camphill Community located just outside Aberdeen, providing a training centre and residential care for young adults with learning disabilities. Beannachar operates on a 28-acre site that includes an organic farm, walled garden, grassed walkways, and woodlands, along with four residential houses and workshop buildings offering crafts such as woodwork and weaving.

In 2023, the centre was awarded £14,709 to repair and refurbish 85m<sup>2</sup> of greenhouse and polytunnel space for organic food growing, horticulture training, and therapeutic gardening. The award also funded an electric lawn tractor (replacing a diesel mower); three push mowers (without electricity or fossil fuels) to reduce carbon emissions and allow more trainees to get involved with grass cutting; and a cargo e-bike to transport produce from the gardens to the residential houses on-site, eliminating the need for a petrol van.

The impact of the project has been positive for students, staff, and the wider community, and the project results go well beyond the direct benefits of carbon saving. Students have gained new skills while spending quality time outdoors.





As the project has developed, students have helped make decisions on what to grow and learned techniques to expand their range of organic produce. They have also explored biodynamic farming practices through visits to local gardens, where they picked up composting tips and discussed establishing a wormery. The fresh produce has led to initiatives like "Meat-Free Mondays" across services, promoting healthier choices.

The project has delivered many successful outcomes. Students have gained confidence, independence, and a sense of calm from gardening, with some even taking on their own plots. Staff have observed improvements in behaviour and sleep, and the community has celebrated these efforts by creating a popular recipe book featuring homegrown ingredients. There have been a few challenges along the way. The original e-cargo bike model selected for the project was discontinued, but this allowed the purchase of two similar models, expanding access to eco-friendly transport. The new electric mower, though quieter, is slower to use, so this has required some adjustment to work planning.



Overall, the project has strengthened connections to the land and fostered a sense of community around sustainable living. Students are developing practical skills and confidence, while families have noted positive changes in health and engagement. The project is making a significant contribution to Beannachar's ongoing work in sustainable gardening and community engagement. Feedback on one student was especially positive: "The changes in this young adult are evident. They smile more, have the confidence to stop and speak to people, and we now hear they hope to use the new e-cargo bike to

help with mobility and balance in delivering produce. This would be a significant milestone of achievement and one that would not have been realised without the support from the Unlock Our Future Fund."

## Case Study #3

### The Boddam Hub

#### Shining a light on Boddam: transforming a fisherman's shelter into a low carbon community hub

The Boddam Hub was set up as a charity in 2022 to develop a new community space in a former fisherman's shelter, to bring people together to share information about local heritage and marine life and act as a refuge and emergency facility in the event of a power cut or similar. As a new group they began with organising litter picks, community events and planting, and then began work to renovate the building.

The old shelter was a fairly basic breeze block, flat roof structure with a large area of glazing looking out to sea, and an outdoor area between the building and the shore. The windows were single glazed in rotting wooden frames and the first job was to replace these with double glazed windows in pvc frames.



The group was awarded £9,460 from the Fund in 2023 to insulate the building (walls and roof) and install solar panels with a storage battery and an electric heater. This was part of a larger project to improve the whole building that included rewiring, redecorating and installing a new bathroom and kitchen facility.



The building is near the shore with a fabulous outlook but is extremely exposed, so the group had to install a frame to attach the solar panels. When doing this work, they discovered the original roof was badly rotted, and so had to replace the beams, which caused some delay to the original schedule.

Works were finally completed in March 2023 and as a result the hub is now almost fully powered through the solar panel system and backup battery. Running costs are met through donations and hire of the building to small groups for clubs and activities. The Hub is open two mornings a week for a community drop-in and access to a foodbank which the group also operate.

Local volunteer Fiona said: “We found that by engaging with the village in getting members to help with painting and arranging events, we had a great sense of community spirit, and the community feel that the project belongs to them. We are often trying to encourage visitors to make use of our litter picking equipment and showing them the benefits of the carbon neutral energy we use. We have been involved in planting round the area and look forward to hosting more events to educate about the importance of acting against climate change.”

The Hub project has completely transformed a much-neglected building to create “a safe and welcoming space that can be used by everyone and give them a sense of pride in our lovely village. We could not have achieved this without the funding.”

## Fund Distribution

### Year Six Award Summary

Applicant	Project Summary	Award
Aberdeen Association of Social Service (VSA)	To contribute to the cost of double glazing for a care home, to save energy, improve comfort and reduce bills.	£10,000
Aberdeen Performing Arts	To contribute towards the upgrade of the theatre's Building Management System, allowing staff to more efficiently and sustainably manage the theatre's energy output.	£20,000
Apex Church Peterhead	To create a community and food growing garden to regenerate an outdoor space and improve health and wellbeing.	£2,500
Community Food Initiatives North East	To contribute towards the purchase of a second hand electric van to support the delivery of fresh fruit and vegetables to customers across Aberdeen, with profits from this trading activity being reinvested into support services.	£15,000
Ellon Community Allotments	To contribute to the cost of constructing a new allotment and community growing site from disused land at Balmacassie to grow food and support health and wellbeing.	£20,000
Fraserburgh & District Men's Shed	To cover the costs of installing and insulating a new ceiling and lighting to reduce energy requirements and make the building more comfortable for members.	£4,700
Gairn Community Garden	To regenerate a derelict allotment and create a community space to grow fruit and vegetables and increase biodiversity.	£2,500
Garioch RFC	To purchase new heaters, to save energy and improve facilities.	£892
Magpie/Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action	To fund new doors, insulated door frames and roof insulation at the reuse premises to improve energy efficiency.	£15,474
Mormond West Parish Church	To insulate the church hall roof space, in order to make the hall more energy efficient and to reduce costs.	£3,000

Applicant	Project Summary	Award
Strichen Community Park Company	To contribute to cost of solar panels, battery storage, heat pump and energy efficiency improvements to community park facilities.	£20,000
Strichen Town House Trust SCIO	To contribute to cost of insulating walls and ceilings and repairing windows to improve energy efficiency and restore a community venue.	£20,000
The Belmont Community Cinema Ltd.	To part fund one new cinema projector, helping the cinema to re-open and provide a high-quality experience for the community.	£10,000
The Seed Box Ltd.	To contribute towards the purchase of a small electric multi-purpose vehicle to collect garden waste for community composting, and improve financial and environmental sustainability.	£11,600
Tullynessle & Forbes Community & Hall Association	To contribute towards the cost of insulation, solar panels, and battery storage to improve the energy efficiency and financial sustainability of the community facility.	£5,775
Turriff United FC	To contribute to cost of upgrading to LED floodlights to reduce energy use, save money and improve experience of players and supporters.	£6,000
Victoria & Albert Halls (Ballater) Trust	To contribute to cost of insulation, to improve the energy efficiency of the community halls.	£20,000
Blackdog Residents Association	To create a rest stop area with seating and plants to encourage residents to enjoy the outdoors and improve health and wellbeing.	£2,500
Hall Russell United Junior FC	To contribute to cost of installing LED floodlights to increase use of the facility year round	£3,000
Buchanhaven Hearts Junior Football Club	To purchase an energy efficient robotic mower, helping the club to cut the cost of fuel and repairs, improve their emissions, and re-allocate volunteer hours.	£9,086

## Year Six Applications

Small grant applications (for £2,500 and under) were considered separately from large grant applications (over £2,500). Ten applications for small grants were received, for a total combined request of £23,201 (compared to three applications in the previous year, and four the year before that). Of the small grant applications in year six, two were funded, totalling £5,000, a conversion rate of 20% (by number of applications). This is lower than the normal conversion rate (see below) due to the number of applications that did not meet fund criteria. Further efforts should be made in 2025 to be even more explicit in Fund materials that projects should lead to direct carbon savings.

26 applications for large grants were received for a total combined request of £532,365.65. Large project applications were assessed using a two-stage process. Initially, applications were shortlisted based on the projects' likely contribution to the Fund priorities. At this stage, five applications were rejected. The remaining 21 projects underwent a detailed assessment. Of these, 17 were funded, totalling £197,027, a conversion rate of 65% (by total number of applications).

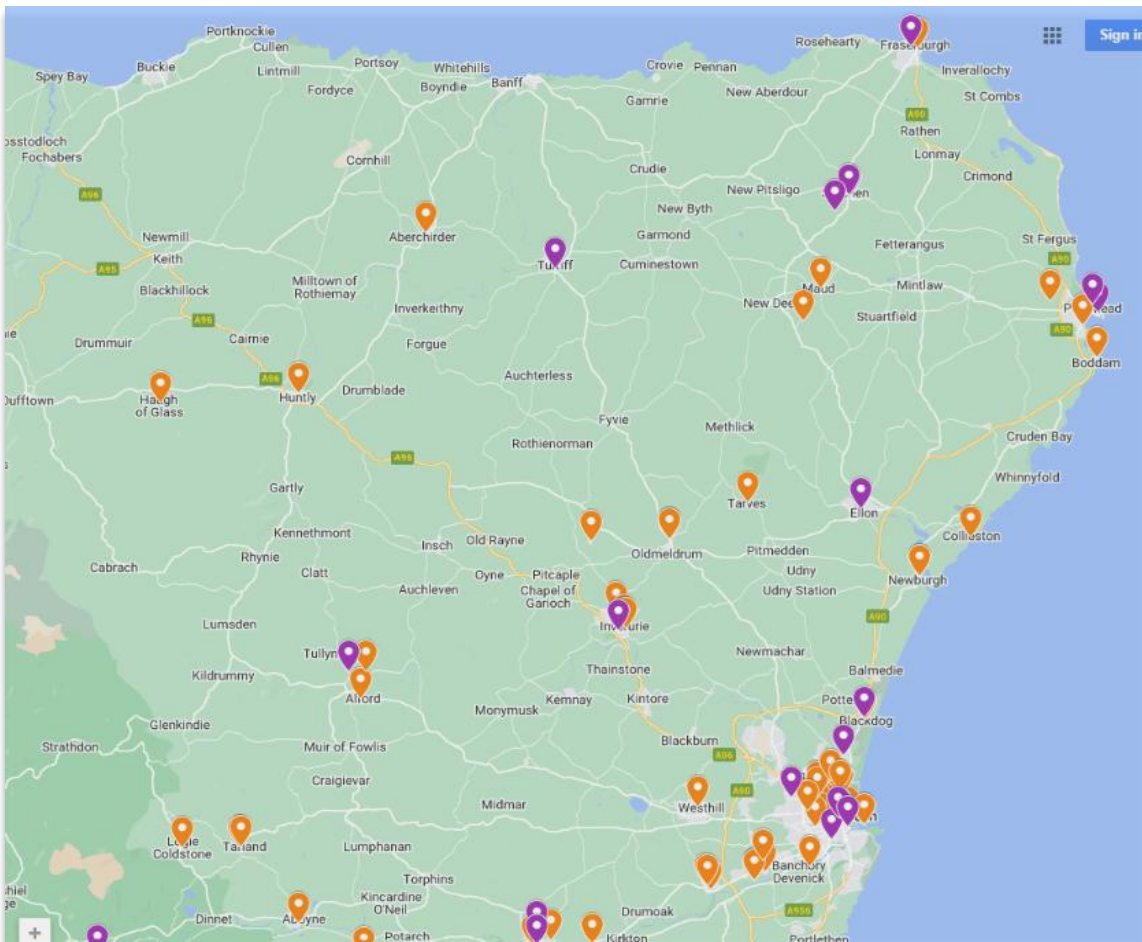
There was one application to the Blackdog sub fund with one award made of £2,500 to the Blackdog Residents Association (BRA). A further award of £3,000 was made from the Blackdog sub fund for floodlights for a local football team, following a discussion with Vattenfall and BRA. The award was made based on a proportion of club members being resident in Blackdog.

The total value of the Fund was augmented in 2024 with a donation of underspent funds from the North Connect Legacy Fund. This enabled an eligible Peterhead based project to receive an award of £9,086. In addition, it is worth noting that one of the small grant applications which was not considered sufficiently relevant to this Fund, was passed on to Vattenfall who were able to find further corporate sponsorship for a programme for young entrepreneurs.

They also provided £1,000 sponsorship for an environmental conference – a symposium being held in Aberdeen for the International Network on Offshore Renewable Energy (INORE) - which had approached the Fund for support but fell outwith the timeframe.

Fund Year	No. applications	Applications £
Year 6 – 2024	36	£555,000
Year 5 - 2023	29	£490,000
Year 4 - 2022	27	£406,000
Year 3 - 2021	42	£555,000
Year 2 - 2020	24	£314,000
Year 1 - 2019	33	£415,000

The locations of successful applicant organisations in years one to six, based on the postcode of the main contact, are shown in figure 1. 2024 awardees are shown in purple. Orange represents awardees from previous years. This includes awardees in Fraserburgh, Strichen and Turriff following on from targeted Fund promotion in this previously underrepresented area. There remains a gap however in the communities along the north coast of the shire which will require further focus in 2025.



## Finance

### Fund Statements (Summary): 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024

#### Main Fund

<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>£195,303.31</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Year 6 Vattenfall	£176,777.38
Interest	£4,974.64
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£181,752.02</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Grants paid	£225,230.52
Grants awarded but not yet paid	£127,992.00
Fund expenses	£627.40
Transfer to Blackdog sub fund	£17,677.74
Contribution to Foundation Scotland	£24,106.01
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£371,527.66</b>
<b>Total funds available at 31 October 2024</b>	<b>£5,527.67</b>

#### Blackdog Sub fund

<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>£75,468.41</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Vattenfall Year 6	£17,677.74
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£17,677.74</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Grants paid	£35,500.00
Grants awarded but not yet paid	£0.00
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£35,500.00</b>
<b>Total funds available at 31 October 2024</b>	<b>£57,646.15</b>



## Unlock Our Future Community Champions Panel

The Unlock our Future Community Champions Panel is recruited locally to make decisions on how the Fund is spent, reviewing the Fund strategy on an annual basis and recommending grant awards, as well as helping to promote the Fund to local groups. There were no new members in year six, with Morag McCorkindale continuing in the role of chair. The panel met four times during the year, to facilitate award making and input to the Fund review process. This included taking part in a Theory of Change workshop which helped develop the Fund strategy.

### Members for the year:

- Morag McCorkindale (Chair)
- Jean Morrison (Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group representative)
- Rob Clunas
- Amy Gray
- Lyndsey Leiper
- Roederer Rose Lyne
- David Nicolson
- Guy Haslam

Morag, Rob and Lynsey have stepped down from the panel following the 2024 grant-making rounds after four years on the panel, and recruitment is underway to fill these vacancies. Guy Haslam has taken over as chair of the panel from Morag.

## Fund Promotion and Support to Applicants

The majority of Fund promotion work is carried out when the Fund opens to applicants which was 7th May 2024. This was later than usual due to the schedule of the Fund review. It was agreed to delay the Fund opening until the review was complete and the Fund strategy subsequently updated.

Along with the Fund opening, support sessions for applicants were promoted which were a mixture of online and face-to-face, with an online information seminar delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024 about the fund launch, and one-to-one, bookable advice sessions available on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024 in Fraserburgh and Aberdeen. In addition, staff attended the NESCAN (Northeast Scotland Climate Action Network) member event in Inverurie on 11<sup>th</sup> May and Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action member event on 15<sup>th</sup> May. Staff also delivered a joint session with Local Energy Scotland online on the 29<sup>th</sup> May.

The Fund adviser encourages applicants to get in touch and discuss project plans before applying which hopefully improves application quality and helps to manage applicant expectations.

## Conclusion

The Unlock Our Future Fund continues to grow with an increasing number of applications in the past three years and a record sum awarded in 2024. As well as contributing funding directly to community-led climate action projects, the Fund has a wider role in networking local groups and helping to promote the potential and impacts of grassroots environmental activity. The wide range of projects supported continues to highlight the multiple benefits of this approach:

- demonstrating effectively how projects which are good for the planet will likely also be good on a local level
- improving facilities and key service delivery
- reducing costs and making life better for local residents and the volunteers who are supporting them.

Demand for funds continues to grow and as in previous years, the Fund has been heavily oversubscribed. It has been positive to see this year how Foundation Scotland was able to augment the funding available with an additional contribution from a relevant fund. The willingness of Vattenfall to consider supporting groups in other ways has also been noted, which helps to maximise Fund impact across the region.

## Further Information

### For further information please contact:

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For further information about the Unlock our Future Fund go to

<https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/apply-for-funding/funding-available/unlock-our-future>

## Appendix One

### Background to the Fund

The Unlock our Future Fund is a community benefit Fund provided by Vattenfall. The Fund benefits projects focused on environmental sustainability and taking place within the local authority areas of Aberdeenshire and /or the City of Aberdeen.

Decisions on grant award and overall Fund strategy are made by a panel of local representatives. The Fund is administered by independent grant-making charity, Foundation Scotland.

Vattenfall contributes £150,000 per year to the Fund (as at 2019), tracking the Retail Price Index, for the life of the wind farm, which is expected to be at least 20 years. This sum is inclusive of contributions to the Fund administrator's costs. The Fund makes grants of up to £20,000 for activity in any one year, with the added possibility of grants up to £40,000 for projects taking place over three years.

The overall purpose of the Fund is to support charitable activity that addresses the following priorities:

- contribute to a **climate smarter world** with sustainability at its core
- invest in **community facilities and activities** that are fit for the future and are environmentally sustainable, especially community spaces and transport
- support **creative solutions**
- ensure a **legacy** (lasting impact) which brings clear benefit to the local community

Grant applications must meet at least three of these priorities.

The priorities were informed by an independent consultation which took place in 2017, prior to the Fund launch, and were updated in 2024 as part of the five-year review process. In addition, several other criteria are taken into account by the panel when deciding which applications to support.

These are:

- **Community impacts**
- **Organisational impacts**
- **Sharing knowledge and experience**
- **Taking a holistic approach which takes into account the energy hierarchy**
- **Making best use of other funding sources**

The Fund strategy (available from the Foundation Scotland [website](#)) provides a fuller description of the Fund priorities and additional criteria and is reviewed on an annual basis.

10% of the annual donation from Vattenfall to the Fund (starting at £15,000 in year one) is set aside for project activity in Blackdog, the community hosting the substation for the wind farm.

VATTENFALL 



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**Unlock our Future  
Fund recipient**