
UK COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND (CRF)

Report by Director, Resilient Communities

EXECUTIVE

18 April 2023

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the delivery of the UK Community Renewal Fund (CRF) for Scottish Borders and note the outcome of the 2021/2022 Fund.**
- 1.2 The UK Government announced the Build Back Better Community Renewal Fund in the UK Budget in March 2021. The Community Renewal Fund (CRF) was a competitive one-off revenue fund with spending required to be undertaken by successful projects initially by the end of March 2022 but this was later extended by UK Government to 31st December 2022.
- 1.3 The aim of the Fund was to pilot projects across the UK and prepare the way for the UK Prosperity Fund from 2022/23 onwards. Projects were required to align with at least one of the following investment priorities:
 - Investment in skills;
 - Investment for local business;
 - Investment in communities and place; and
 - Supporting people into employment.
- 1.4 A call was put out for project bids in April 2021 which attracted 29 applications totalling £9million (Local Authorities could bid for up to £3million of UK CRF monies). These were assessed by an Independent Panel and a shortlist of projects devised for Council approval in June 2021. Eighteen project bids totalling £2,999,040 were submitted to UK Government for consideration.
- 1.5 UK Government announced in November 2021 that eight projects were successful, totalling £1,296,814.
- 1.6 All eight projects were successfully delivered by the deadline of 31st December 2022 with final grant funds of £1,251,018 drawn down from UK Government.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive Committee notes the outcome of the UK Community Renewal Fund in relation to project delivery.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 3 March 2021, the UK Government (UKG) published the UK Budget which was accompanied by a number of documents related to its Build Back Better policy agenda. The UK Community Renewal Fund was part of this Agenda. More information can be found at [UK Community Renewal Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/95422/uk_community_renewal_fund_prospectus.pdf)
- 3.2 Local Authorities were given primary responsibility for leading on bids to the Community Renewal Fund. The Community Renewal Fund (CRF) was a competitive one-off short term revenue fund with spending required to be undertaken by successful projects by the end of March 2022. Due to numerous delays, this was later extended by UK Government to 31st December 2022.
- 3.3 To access this Fund, lead local authorities required to submit a shortlist of project bids of up to £3 million to UK Government by 18th June 2021. Projects submitted needed to be of the highest quality based on the UK CRF technical guidance. Project proposals came from a range of local applicants, including voluntary and community sector organisations, business-umbrella groups, and local education providers including colleges and universities. Individuals and businesses were not eligible to apply.
- 3.4 Projects required to align to at least one of the following investment priorities:
 - Investment in skills;
 - Investment for local business;
 - Investment in communities and place; and
 - Supporting people into employment.
- 3.5 CRF projects required to be innovative with the aim of piloting new ideas/approaches that would support preparations for future funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 3.6 A call was put out for project bids in April 2021 which attracted a total of 29 applications totalling £9million (Local Authorities could bid for up to £3million of UK CRF monies). The Council's application process can be found at [UK Community Renewal Fund | Scottish Borders Council \(scotborders.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/uk-community-renewal-fund). All applications were assessed by an Independent Panel consisting of a representative for the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and representatives from the Scottish Borders Local Action Group with expertise in the environmental, community, arts and tourism fields.
- 3.7 Following assessment by the Independent Panel a shortlist of projects was devised for Council approval in June 2021. Eighteen projects totalling £2,999,040 were submitted to UK Government for consideration on 18th June 2021.

4 UK COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

4.1 Following submission of Scottish Borders bids in June 2021, UK Government announced in November 2021 that 8 Scottish Borders projects had been successful in attaining CRF funding to a total of £1,296,814. Scottish Borders was one of only 2 local authorities across Scotland achieving as many as 8 awards. The projects which successfully secured funding were as follows:-

Project Name	Organisation	CRF Award
Attainment Through Archaeology & The 12 Towers of Rule	Archaeology Scotland	£66,828
Borders Employment Advice & Mentoring	Berwickshire Housing Association	£214,450
Bridging the Gap Through Knowledge Transfer	The Bridge	£157,700
Energy Efficiency Supply Chain	Southern Upland Partnership Services Ltd	£56,000
Fit for Our Future: Holm Hill Master Plan	Newcastleton Community Development Company	£88,960
Mountain Biking in the South of Scotland – Helping to deliver the European Capital of Mountain Biking	Scottish Cycling	£154,942
Scottish Borders Regional EV Charging Feasibility Study	Scottish Borders Council	£183,600
Scottish Borders Sustainability Academy	Borders College	£374,334
	TOTAL AWARDED	£1,296,814

4.2 All successful projects were issued with offers of grant in December 2021 with the final contracts signed off in January 2021. Each project was assigned a Development Officer and Claims Officer from the Economic Development External Funding Team to assist with project delivery, liaison/reporting to UK Government and the drawdown of grant funds.

4.3 Projects were issued with 10% of their grant in advance to ensure voluntary organisations were not disadvantaged and in a position to bank roll expenditure without the need to undertake loans. The remainder of the funding was drawn down by each project on production of expenditure evidence at regular intervals.

5. OUTCOME OF PROJECT DELIVERY

5.1 As part of UK Government requirements, each project produced an Evaluation at the end of their project to enable UK Government to evaluate the benefits of CRF pilot projects nationwide. All 8 projects were able to provide these which were forwarded to UK Government at the end of January 2023.

5.2 All projects were successfully completed by the deadline of 31st December 2022 and the outcome of each is as follows:

5.2.1 Attainment through Archaeology & the 12 Towers of Rule:
Investment Priority: Investment in Skills.
Aim of this project was to provide skills training for local marginalised communities and improve access and understanding of local heritage sites in the Rule Water. The project fostered engagement and community interaction through excavation, surveys

and workshops engaging with 180 local school children; 7 young people supported by Works Plus and Borders Additional Needs; 8 young people supported by Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Borders Education and 60 adult volunteers. Young people had the opportunity to gain accreditation through Heritage Heroes Awards. The project engaged with 6 partner organisations, 5 schools, 5 local organisations and 7 local businesses. Two sites were excavated, a geophysical survey carried out and a heritage graveyard surveyed. Evaluation identified an appetite for this type of skills training to be developed and widened further and learning is being used to improve future delivery. Archaeology Scotland hopes to secure further funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund to undertake a programme across a wider scale with partners in the education sector. [Bedrule Castle, Scottish Borders | Archaeology Scotland](#)

5.2.2 Borders Employment Advice & Mentoring:

Investment Priority: Supporting People into Employment.

The aim of this project was to support social housing individuals into gainful employment, increase confidence through developing of digital and employability skills assisted by an Employment Coach. A team of 4 Employment Coaches were recruited to support housing association residents furthest from the job market and with significant barriers to work using a person centred mentoring approach. The delivery of this project was overseen by The Wyse Group who have significant experience in skills and employability training. Referral was through the Housing Network (Waverley, Eildon, Berwickshire and Scottish Borders) and local job centres. There were 87 referrals overall but only 50 participants choose to take part (reasons given for non-participation were ill health, lack of IT skills, childcare, social anxiety, lack of additional learning needs). However 22 people were successful in gaining employment and a further 4 were successful in gaining a qualification. The remainder, although not having gained employment, had confidence increased to develop CVs, and digital skills to continue with job application. Evaluation concluded that the pilot identified a need to broaden promotion further through the networks, digital and social media to increase participation and provide assistance with addressing learning capacity issues. Wyse Group has since developed a longer running programme and applied for funding from another source to develop this project further and run over a longer period of time.

5.2.3 Bridging the Gap Through Knowledge Transfer:

Investment Priority: Investment in Communities & Place.

This project looked to support local community organisations to transition to Net Zero and to facilitate collaboration and learning with other community organisations and statutory partners. This was undertaken with the provision of greening workshops, creation of knowledge toolkit and commissioning of Energy Audit/Decarbonisation Plans. The project engaged with 49 community organisations across Scottish Borders, 44 of which were Village Halls. 35 organisations took part in digital learning and greening workshops, 20 organisations were in receipt of Energy Audit/Decarbonisation Plans and 29 organisations took part in an Ideas into Action Conference. Online Knowledge Bank Toolkit was

produced [Resources – The Bridge](#). Evaluation identified a great deal of learning had been achieved by community organisations through knowledge transfer and is set to continue for the future through the Knowledge Bank.

5.2.4 Energy Efficiency Supply Chain:

Investment Priority: Supporting People into Employment.

Feasibility study to develop supply chain for small businesses across Scottish Borders to bid for local construction and energy efficiency contracts, assess the feasibility of a body to manage shared apprentices on behalf of a group of businesses, collaborate with schools and colleges to increase opportunity for careers in the building sector, energy efficiency and housing retrofit. The project also looked to work with partners to design materials to better educate homes and business properties on requirements to move to Net Zero and scope out training needs and suitable trainers. The feasibility was successfully completed in September 2022 and Southern Uplands Partnerships Services Ltd are looking to approach SPF for funding to test uptake of a medium scale retrofit programme to obtain more learning before progressing towards final implementation. [Scottish Borders Construction Forum | Southern Uplands Partnership \(sup.org.uk\)](#)

5.2.5 Mountain Biking in the South of Scotland:

Investment Priority: Investment in Local Businesses/Communities & Place.

Recruitment of 2 Co-ordinators to develop the business support and community engagement for MTB in the Tweeddale area. This fed in to support the development of the Glentress Plan and Borderlands Innovation Centre as well as build capacity of local volunteers and organisations to support trail maintenance and MTB skills learning across the region. The project pilot was extremely successful in delivering small grants to enable local businesses to better support MTB tourism through secured bike storage, trail maintenance courses and workshops developed skills training in trail maintenance for young people and community volunteers which improved 12,682m² of trails in the area. 32 people completed DIRTT (Developing Inter European Trail Building Training) courses; 62 dig days were delivered with 113 volunteers (both male and female) participated. Knowledge sharing was undertaken with 12 voluntary, 2 private, 2 universities and 3 public sector organisations. Businesses have been better educated to understand the significance of MTB tourism and how they can benefit from this. Evaluation has identified a positive impact of both Co-ordinator roles to establish better community and business engagement to support Scottish Borders as an MTB destination for the future. Scottish Cycling is looking to apply to SPF to continue to build on the positive work of the trail development and Co-ordinator roles undertaken through CRF in a wider context and to support delivery of the upcoming UCI events. [What is the Tweed Valley Forest Park and why should you... – DMBinS](#)

5.2.6 Scottish Borders Regional EV Charging Feasibility Study:
Investment Priority: Investment in Local Businesses/Communities & Place Feasibility Study.

To identify a new regional approach to the delivery of an EV Charging Network to maximise commercial opportunities within the Borders region and minimise expenditure for the public sector, business and residents. The feasibility study was successfully completed in December 2022 by independent consultants. The study consulted with 756 businesses of varying size and 1154 public, voluntary and private organisations across the region. The next stage of development is to undertake further market testing which will then allow progression towards partnership working towards funding for structural development. [Current and future electric vehicle use and charging to be put under the spotlight | Scottish Borders Council \(scotborders.gov.uk\)](#)

5.2.7 Scottish Borders Sustainability Academy:
Investment Priority: Investment in Skills.

Borders College sought to build a sustainable model of education and training across the area whilst responding to the local needs of businesses and the community. 16 online Natural Capital Entrepreneurship & Incubator Accelerator Skills Training courses were developed and piloted; 2 online Carbon Literacy for Schools & Lifelong Learning courses were created; 4 Land Estates, Farming & Countryside Natural Capitals Skills courses developed; 21 Green Recovery Supply Chain courses undertaken. Courses were attended by 132 unemployed; 236 employed; 14 small businesses; 6 medium businesses and 2 large. 14 public, 10 private, 5 voluntary and 3 other organisations also took part. Evaluation has identified demand for a significant learning resource covering a diverse range of topics and this will be continued for the future. Borders College is now looking to approach SPF to develop and deliver retrofit training programmes in partnership with RSLs. [Sustainability Academy | Borders College](#)

5.2.8 Fit for Our Future: Holm Hill Master Plan:

Investment Priority: Investment in Communities & Place.

Feasibility Study to scope out the potential for development of an area of land at Holm Hill, Newcastleton which had been purchased by the community. It was originally envisaged that a physical study would be undertaken, however substantial damage and inaccessibility of the land caused by fallen trees in the early part of 2022 required the project to be re-profiled to digital study. 3 feasibilities were eventually produced covering active leisure development, forest planning strategy and proposed decarbonisation community model (there were still some marketing activities which could not be completed within the timescale but which UK Government agreed could be funded by some of NCDT's original £12,700 match. This reduced the CRF match to £6,600, releasing £6,100 back to the Trust to complete the marketing). NCDT is hoping to approach SPF for funding to take forward some of the phased active leisure development identified.

5.3 As noted in paragraph 5.2, Archaeology Scotland, Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd, Scottish Cycling, Borders College and Newcastleton Community Development Trust intend to approach UK Shared Prosperity Fund to undertake next stages of development for their pilot/feasibility projects. Berwickshire Housing Association and SBC have already approached other funders for the next stage of their pilot/feasibility projects. It is expected the Energy Audit/Decarbonisation Plans completed for the Village Halls will be assisted towards suitable funding options by the new Borders Community Action in due course. UK Government will be undertaking an overall national evaluation of the UK Community Renewal Fund but it is not known at present will this will be publicised.

5.4 Final project breakdown of spend was as follows:-

Project Name	Original Total Project Cost	Match-Funding Contribution	Final CRF Drawn Down	Underspend
Attainment Through Archaeology & The 12 Towers of Rule	£80,828	£14,000	£66,771	£57
Borders Employment Advice & Mentoring	£214,450	£0.00	£211,316	£3,134
Bridging the Gap Through Knowledge Transfer	£157,700	£0.00	£133,006	£24,694
Energy Efficiency Supply Chain	£56,000	£0.00	£53,038	£2,962
Fit for Our Future: Holm Hill Master Plan	£101,660	£12,700	£83,210	£5,750
Mountain Biking in the South of Scotland – Helping to deliver the European Capital of Mountain Biking	£158,942	£4,000	£146,137	£8,805
Scottish Borders Regional EV Charging Feasibility Study	£183,600	£0.00	£183,600	£0.00
Scottish Borders Sustainability Academy	£374,334	£0.00	£373,940	£394
	£1,327,514	£30,700	1,251,018	£45,796

Note: Due to the one off nature of CRF and the requirement of UK Government to completely close the programme it was not possible for projects to carry forward any underspends for utilisation after end March 2023.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

The CRF programme has now closed and therefore there are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report. The report sets out final project breakdown of spend for the 8 Scottish Borders projects that had been successful in attaining Community Renewal Fund (CRF) funding awarded by the UK Government.

6.2 Risk and Mitigations

There are no risks or mitigations attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report. A recent Internal Audit (final report dated 20 March 2023) concluded that *“Effective governance, management processes, and administration are in place for the UK Community Renewal Fund and adequate arrangements to ensure compliance with the relevant Funding Agreement and applicable Regulations. Appropriate controls are in place over the administration of grant claims in respect of reimbursement of project and management costs for projects within the UK Community Renewal Fund.”*

6.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

The requirements of equalities and the importance of an inclusive approach to the development of project proposals were included in the guidance for the CRF application and assessment process. Equality impact assessments were also undertaken on each of the CRF projects by SBC staff.

6.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The requirements of a sustainable approach for the development of project proposals were included in the CRF guidance for the assessment process.

6.5 Climate Change

The requirements of a net zero carbon approach for the development of project proposals were included in the CRF guidance for the application and assessment process at the time of assessment.

6.6 Rural Proofing

The proposals contained in this report do not relate to a new or amended policy or strategy but many of the projects included elements relating to support of development of rural areas.

6.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

6.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There will be no changes required to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation resulting from the proposals set out in this report.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Acting Chief Financial Officer, the Interim Chief Officer Corporate Governance (and Monitoring Officer), the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and the comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

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Background Papers: UK Community Renewal Fund – Shortlisted Projects for the Scottish Borders (Confidential Report) – 17 June 2021

Previous Minute Reference: [insert last Minute reference (if any)]

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. External Funding Programme Co-ordinator can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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