



LEARNING REVIEW

To all in SCA

The last two years have presented huge challenges for us all. Despite this, a lot of people have continued to work really hard to keep the Climate and Nature emergencies on the agenda in South Yorkshire, by engaging with local and regional politicians and officials, and with the general public. The Covid pandemic also gave an extra urgency and relevance to areas on which SCA's volunteers, partners and allies were already working such as healthcare, clean air, access to nature and green spaces, affordable, sustainable, locally sourced food, democracy, media and the arts, and a just and sustainable recovery from the pandemic with opportunities for employment in green jobs.

Our bid for a partnership development project to the National Lottery was just nearing completion as the pandemic hit. Despite this, a successful in person public engagement programme ran from Spring 2021 onwards. In the meantime, the SCA Board has evolved from being the committee of an unincorporated community group to the Board of Directors of a registered (not for profit) company, responsible for a number of employees and managing governance and strategy challenges. SCA is becoming a learning organisation in which actions are reviewed and reflected upon, to inform future work. It is in this context that this Learning Review is happening.

We are pleased to attach the Summary Report from the first stage of review – Looking Back – Learning. We are very grateful to Kim Orwin, the Secretary to the SCA Board, for taking on the task of collating this report.

To ensure that SCA remains as transparent and open as possible this report will be posted on the SCA website for all friends, partners, allies and interested members of the public to view.

Rachael Hand, Partnership Coordinator for SCA
Vanessa Senger, co-chair SCA

1. Introduction

1.1 A short note on methods

On the 9th February SCA held an online event called 'Looking Back and Looking Forwards: Part 1 – Learning'. Members of SCA, friends, partners, allies and the general public were invited to attend and contribute their thoughts to the questions: 'What have SCA and Can Do done well over the last two years?'; 'What have we learnt that could have been done differently?'; and 'How can SCA best support the climate movement in South Yorkshire over the next 2 years?'.

Those who could not attend on the night were given the opportunity to answer those same questions anonymously through a Google Form, which was circulated in the February SCA newsletter. This generated an additional three responses. Members of the Development Project (Can Do) Steering Group were also contacted directly to ask to contribute their thoughts if they had not already done so at the event or via the previous Google form. This generated one additional response.

The perceptions of all the participants involved were coded and thematically analysed. The themes that emerged from the data were:

- Synergy between groups
- Internal communications
- External communications
- Fundraising and bid writing
- Public engagement events
- Looking at who is involved
- Encompassing the whole region

After these themes were identified, several reflection and review documents were also considered and included in the analysis where they provided supplementary evidence against the identified themes. These documents were:

- Learning from Imagine Zero Carbon South Yorkshire
- Learning from Creating a Plan for a Zero Carbon South Yorkshire
- Report from Admin and Communications Assistant
- Report from Partnership Development Coordinator
- Report from Public Engagement Development Coordinator
- Interim Learning Report on the Can Do Development phase from Cara Sutherland, External Evaluator

1.2 Successes from the last two years

It is important to be reminded of the many successes the Alliance has had over the last two years. There were several noted by participants of the Looking Back event, including:

- The creation of a lobbying forum which has presented collective views to SCR, SCC and MPs.
- Carbon Literacy training.
- Hope for the Future training.
- Can Do events, including the Alternative Christmas Markets and green week events.
- The hustings events with Friends of the Earth and Green New Deal SY.

These should be remembered alongside other successes from the same time period, which include:

- The SCA response to the YHCC plan, coordinated by Siobhan Laird. Changes suggested came through in the final draft. SCA now has a representative on nearly all of the YHCC working groups
- The events 'Imagine zero carbon South Yorkshire' and 'Create zero carbon South Yorkshire' held online in 2020.
- The online schools conference run by SCESY, supported by Can Do and several Can Do partners.
- SCA's relationship with the Diocese of Sheffield has been re-established. Connections have been made between SCESY and the Diocese, with the Bishop of Doncaster supporting the 2022 schools' conference.
- SCA now represents the climate movement in South Yorkshire, at the Barnsley Positive Climate Partnership.

Other successes which were not led by SCA but to which its partners and allies contributed include:

- The Nature Recovery Sheffield campaign
- Sheffield receiving the Bronze award from Sustainable Food cities – led by ShefFood

Other success stories are told on the Can Do South Yorkshire website candosouthyorkshire.org.uk

2. Key themes from Looking Back

2.1 Synergy between groups

A cornerstone feature of SCA has been partnership working, bringing a wide range of groups together and encouraging a sense of collaboration. The development of themed working groups, the successful coordination of the Lobbying Coordination Group, and the Can Do partnership are noted as strong evidence of this.

However, some participants reported that the collaborative mindset has been lost in recent times. Some working groups feel that they have been given a lower priority compared with other groups within SCA.

Overall, participants felt that there has been a lack of joined up thinking and that SCA could work to decrease fragmentation and increase synergistic working. However, this potentially sits in tension against a comment from one participant that SCA should not pick on particular areas and tell them what to do or steal the limelight from groups. It also was suggested that SCA encourage an environment where a consensus can be reached on where to focus energy. Another tension lies between deciding whether to focus on specific issues (for example dedicated campaigns or projects within a chosen themed area) or broad issues (for example multiple messages across wider themes).

Learning points

1. We are an Alliance; therefore, collaboration and partnership working is key to what we do as an organisation.
2. Action has not been joined up and if there was a clear idea of what was bringing groups together, our work could see increased impact.
3. Groups need to feel that they can be supported by and contribute to joint ventures, without losing their identity or credit for work done.
4. Clear communication between groups, partners and SCA needs to be maintained.

Ideas to move forward

Create a strategic plan that is owned by all partners, friends and allies of SCA and will generate collaborative aims and objectives going forwards.

2.2 Internal communications

Communications from SCA staff to partners and allies were reported as being both great and in need of improvement. Some reported that partners particularly were not being notified of events or opportunities for training.

However, a key complaint was that communications between the groups and/or partners and allies themselves could have been improved. For example, one participant referred to there being a great collaborative atmosphere which the felt was lost as time moved on and communications only came from SCA centrally.

It was noted that the Slack channel has become an announcement board rather than the interactive platform it was intended to be. There was a reported desire for more opportunities for discussion and networking, and to know more about who is joining the Alliance so that further partnerships can be developed.

Learning points

1. Internal communications between SCA, partners and allies have become direct and one-way and are lacking group discussion.
2. Good practice, learning and opportunities need to be shared more effectively.
3. Partners and allies are keen to network and develop relationships between themselves.

Ideas to move forward

To recognise the importance of maintaining communications and developing networks between existing allies and partners when developing SCA's strategic plan and consider ways in which existing 'internal' communication systems can be improved.

2.3 External communications

It is widely acknowledged by both staff and participants that SCA have made great use of both their own and the Can Do website in publishing content that brings publicity to groups and their projects. The tone of the content on the Can Do website purposely came from a positive, educational and non-judgemental

viewpoint and it is perceived that this content has been successful in raising awareness of climate issues. However, it is noted by staff that traffic to the Can Do website is not as high as it could be.

Several comments were made by participants in relation to SCA's two social media accounts (the SCA account and the Can Do account) and how posts on these do not attract a lot of engagement. Suggestions have been made by both allies and staff that SCA could invest in paid promotions to increase reach and get our messaging out further. There were also remarks made that there is not enough engagement on the part of SCA to interact with existing social media groups.

The SCA newsletter is well-regarded and shares relevant updates, but it was suggested that more information on allies and partners could be shared on it.

Learning points

1. SCA have made good use of both their own and the Can Do website, the newsletter and social media channels in sharing stories and details of relevant groups and activities occurring across South Yorkshire.
2. There is more work to be done in increasing the reach and engagement of all external communications but particularly through the website and social media channels.

Ideas to move forward

SCA develops a communications strategy and subsequent plan(s) to amplify the work already being done by partners and allies, and to drive engagement with other local climate organisations and activists and the wider general public.

2.4 Fundraising and bid writing

It appears to be widely felt by those who participated in the initial development bid writing process that it brought partners together and set the scene for strengthened relations and good collaboration. However, not all who would have liked to have participated were able to do so, due to the daytime timing of meetings.

Once the development project money came and the full award bid was being written, partners reported feeling left out of the process and that partners' offers of help to improve the leverage of the bid or to share expertise were not taken up. Some also felt that the bid was wrapped around SCA and the writing process was not transparent. It was noted that the lack of transparency led to some disenfranchisement.

On working with others, it was commented that SCA has previously supported collaborative work to fundraise for action projects led by grassroots community organisations.

Key learning points

1. The initial development bid process developed and strengthened partnership working.
2. The full award bid writing process was not transparent; drafts were not shared with partners; partners felt excluded from meetings and this resulted in disengagement.
3. Offers of help from partners experienced in fundraising were not utilised.
4. Meetings need to be timed to maximise the opportunities for participation.

Ideas to move forward

A robust fundraising strategy should be developed in full collaboration with partners and allies as a matter of urgency.

2.5 Public engagement events

SCA has a history of successful public engagement events. The Imagine, Create and Community Engagement and Regional Working consultation events were well attended by people from across South Yorkshire. Staff emphasised how the Imagine event particularly reaffirmed SCA's approach of aligning with issues of social justice, and emphasising the co-benefits of climate action and how it was important to not lose these findings as the organisation develops.

The Can Do pop-up climate hubs appeared in Sheffield on 11 days, at 5 different venues and they reached over 350 people. Staff reports reflect the large amount of positive feedback received in relation to these public engagement events, and it was reported that the most successful events were those offering something

practical free of charge, or entertainment and a hands on activity free of charge. At the Can Do events, feedback from members of the public showed that people are already aware of the actions they could take to help stop climate change, however there were larger barriers at play which prevent them from doing so.

However, it was strongly felt by participants at both Imagine Zero Carbon South Yorkshire and Looking Back that events should have been held in different areas other than Sheffield city centre. Of the Can Do events that were held in Sheffield, one person remarked that they were held in locations that receive too low footfall. It was felt that the Can Do project was perhaps too slow to adapt to the new realities of Covid.

In addition to this, it was felt by staff that important formal feedback and monitoring from who was attending the in-person engagement events was not prioritised properly. Members of the public quite often failed to fill in feedback forms due to low numbers of staff and volunteers asking them to fill the forms in. Some partners commented that the engagement monitoring forms were onerous, and this was evidenced by a number of partially completed forms submitted by members of the public.

Learning points

1. The events held so far have been good but must be held in areas that will attract more members of the public in the future.
2. Engagement monitoring was not prioritised as much as it should have been.
3. Engagement is most likely to be fruitful if it addresses people's concerns.

Ideas to move forward

Continue to acknowledge the importance of public engagement events and their role in furthering the messages of the climate movement, garnering information about motivators and blockages to positive action in individuals and understanding where change is needed in terms of research and monitoring.

To build upon what we already know to be relevant to the public in relation to taking action to help address climate change from our previously held public engagement events.

2.6 Looking at who is involved

There have been several comments made by both partners and allies and staff that SCA has done little to meaningfully engage widely enough with people who are not white, middle-aged or retired, middle-class activists.

Some also noted a lack of engagement with local people and the issues affecting them. It was commented that work has previously been carried out to engage local people in the past and one comment recommended that this should be revisited. It was also noted that work should be done with religious groups to connect further with local communities.

Volunteers have made a big contribution towards SCA but some felt that their contribution wasn't celebrated. There appears to be uncertainty about the role of volunteers and how they fit in terms of opportunities, but there is a desire to integrate volunteers into the work SCA does.

Learning points

1. SCA hasn't done enough to engage with non-white, young or working-class people, groups and activists.
2. There is confusion about the role of volunteers and where they sit in relation to structure and opportunities.

Ideas to move forward

SCA should re-commit to both a robust diversity and inclusion strategy, including incorporating anti-racism work into all threads of the Alliance, and a clear volunteer strategy.

2.7 Encompassing the whole region

SCA began to encompass the whole of South Yorkshire within its scope in 2019, and as a result of consultation during the Imagine and Create Net Zero South Yorkshire events, SCA changed its name and rebranded from Sheffield Climate Alliance to South Yorkshire Climate Alliance in 2021. Whilst still in its early stages, staff report that good links have already been made with organisations outside of Sheffield including Barnsley Positive Climate Partnership and others.

Overall, it felt that the change to a regional scope was a good one, but the perception of participants was that SCA is still Sheffield-centric. Participants strongly report wanting more regional action and more events, networking and engagement to take place outside of Sheffield. However, one participant questioned whether SCA actually has the resources to be able to do this effectively.

Learning points

1. SCA is still Sheffield-centric despite name change and rebranding.
2. There's a strong drive to develop the network and climate movement across South Yorkshire.

Ideas to move forward

Recognise the importance of understanding the outlook of the whole region in relation to the climate movement through research and mapping, with the overarching aim of building up our networks in Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham.

3. Concluding remarks: Looking to the future

The key themes presented in this report showcase where the perceptions and general strength of feeling amongst partners, friends and allies lie in relation to SCA's strategic direction. The learning points and ideas to move forward are designed to feed into the next open discussion event, 'Looking Ahead', which is to be held on 28th February 2022. It is important to note that this document should be taken into context with work that has already been undertaken – particularly the findings of the Imagine Zero Carbon South Yorkshire, Create, Consultation on Community Engagement and Regional Working and the feedback provided by staff.

There were numerous comments made at the Looking Back event in relation to what the future focus of SCA should include which did not fall into a defined theme but were considered important to capture for the development of SCA. By listing them here we acknowledge that these comments are to be addressed by

the organisation separate to the above themed proposed way forwards. These comments are:

- That nature, species loss and environmental degradation should be integrated into the SCA's scope.
- That further links into topics that are not necessarily 'climate-focussed' (e.g. land use) need to be developed.
- That there needs to be more action taken to energise the Alliance.
- That SCA should focus on the behaviours of individuals, organisations (private and voluntary and social sector) and local government.
- SCA should become agile and responsive rather than bureaucratic.
- That SCA should look to other regions across the UK to learn from good practice and success stories.

There were a handful of points made in relation to staffing, staff welfare and the SCA Board. All these issues are important to the future of SCA, however, as these relate to operational matters they will not be reported on in this public document.

May I take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all the SCA volunteers, partners, friends, allies and staff members who have given up their time to contribute to this report.

Report compiled by Kim Orwin
Secretary SCA Board of Directors
18.02.2022