



# BEES OF BENSHAM

## Short Project Report



APRIL 2022 - APRIL 2024 / PREPARED BY DINGY BUTTERFLIES CIC

Dingy Butterflies CIC works with residents, communities and organisations in Gateshead to explore the key issues that affect their community and support them to make a change. This is achieved using creativity and art to engage people and work with them in social action, to have a voice in their community.

## INTRODUCTION

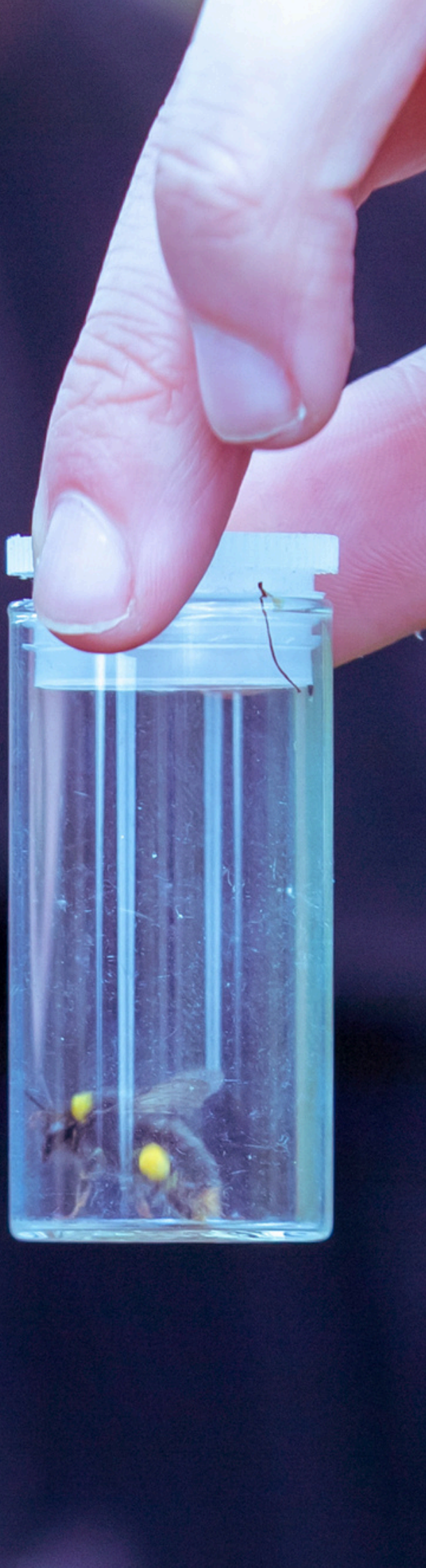
Bees of Bensham is an arts and citizen science two-year project led by Gateshead community arts organisation Dingy Butterflies CIC and artist and beekeeper Barbara Keating, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, being in the bottom 10% globally for biodiversity. Pollinators are in decline but this is largely unquantified. If action is not taken, this will have serious implications for biodiversity and food production. Bensham & Saltwell as a community, has limited green space, with most people having concrete backyards. What green space we have, either is marked for housing development or not fully managed or monitored.

Bees of Bensham involved working across our community to understand what bees and pollinators live in our community, how we can support them; and the benefit there is to help increase the bee and pollinator population for our community and our natural world.

Using creative and citizen science methods we worked with residents, community groups, environmental organisations and academics. We collated data on pollinators and flora and map green spaces in our community; delivered climate training, knowledge of pollinators; and skills sharing opportunities. This was to give people knowledge about the climate, what benefits it gives us and make them feel inspired and in awe of nature.

We have explored what land we have in our community, how we can utilise it for the benefit of ourselves and the nature that we share it with.



## OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Over the two years of the project we have:

1. Worked with diverse community groups, including patients and staff at a local medical centre, residents of a over 50's council tower block, a refugee and asylum seeker organisation, a youth group, and a group of young Jewish women with special educational needs.
2. Created a resident group of local people who have taken part in monitoring habitats, nature and flora and fauna walks, training with our partner organisations, visits to local museums and organisations, taking part in seed collecting activities and volunteering at our events
3. Created a network of climate and nature organisations, academics and experts to support the project, train and engage with residents.
4. Organised a series of community activities, walks, trips and creative workshops with local community groups in the local community
5. Organised two seed collecting events to collect seeds from a development site for redistribution into the community to offset sum of the loss of habitat.
6. Published a podcast of six episodes interviewing artists, academics, community and climate workers and residents around the subject of the environment
7. Published Dùthchas, a book that brings together artwork created by Barbara Keating over the course of the two year project.
8. Organised symposium on April 2024 that explored the links between creativity and science and how both sectors can work with communities to explore climate issues. This was in partnership with the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University.
9. Designed and created in collaboration with residents and bee experts, a Bensham bee information key of the 33 species found in the community
10. Designed and created a bee hotel working with residents and local wellbeing and woodwork organisation Handcrafted.
11. Won Gateshead Councils Awards 2024 for Tackling Climate Change.
12. Worked with Gateshead Council and Earthwatch to create a Tiny Forest

We have developed a project framework and partnerships with community groups and nature and climate organisations. We have worked with academics and research projects to include citizen scientists methods and created a resident group that we will work with to develop projects in the community. We will continue to work with this network of residents, community groups and nature organisations and are looking for further project ideas and funding opportunities.

## WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

The project has two parts to it to involve local people from our community in the project.

### RESIDENT GROUP

The resident group is a group of trained and skilled up residents who are closely involved in the overall project. The group currently consists of 10-12 core people who were found through our links to local organisations, talking to and getting them to sign up at the community events we have organised and been involved in, as well as through our social media. They represent a cross demographic of the community including young and older people and refugees.

We are working with the resident group exploring issues around habitats and climate change and how we can support and improve the natural environment in our community. The resident group has been integral to the project and has been a way of training up, through workshops, walks and activities, and working closely with them. This is an important part of the legacy of the project and we will continue to work with them on future projects. We have had positive feedback from members about the project, the learning experience and how it has helped them understand what they can do to support their community. .

### WIDER COMMUNITIES

Alongside working with the resident group we have been supporting local organisations, groups and communities to explore habitats around their buildings and communities. This includes:

- The Comfrey Project (an asylum seeker and refugee organisation) whose building and grounds we have used to hold workshops, training, and walks
- Rawling Road Medical Centre (GP Surgery) Working with their patients groups through walks and creative activities and working with them in the future when they develop the derelict land next to their building into a community garden.
- Bensham Court (a tower block for over 50's). Working with them to improve access to nature through their allotment and surrounding land.
- The Chev (a group for young Orthodox Jewish girls with Special Educational Needs). This group has been exploring pollinators, plants and food dehydration connecting to local food networks and the wider community.
- Friends of Saltwell Park. Support them in understanding how they can develop areas of the park to support pollinators and how the park engages with nature.

## ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS - APRIL 2022 to April 2024

Research Visits	Public Walks	Workshop Sessions	Public Events	Community Groups
4	25	35	15	10
<b>ENGAGEMENTS</b>				
<b>1168</b>				

### COMMUNITY MEMBER TESTIMONY

In April 2024 we received an email from one of our resident group members. In it they expressed their gratitude in how working with us on this project has affected them and their family and wanted 'the people who have inspired me to know the impact they have had on this corner of the world.'

They were a single parent who had just moved to the area and had no local connections, families or friendships in the community and felt alone and isolated. They had previously gone through trauma and had needed therapy. During the lockdown they had quit their job and decided that one of the things they needed to heal was to come from 'caring about Mother Earth alongside people who could pass on joy and enthusiasm for soil, air, plants and creatures in my own community. I needed to seek them out.' This is when they found Bees of Bensham.

'After my first Bees of Bensham workshop I recognised that, there were REAL LIFE PEOPLE who care about Environment as much as I did and had knowledge and skills that I wanted to learn... that Bensham contains activists and scientists and residents who passionately nurture and thrive together on the subject of Environment. Moving to Bensham has transformed my entire trajectory.'

After becoming involved in Bees of Bensham and meeting environmentalists in Bensham they decided to go back to school and completed an Access course in Science at Gateshead College studying biology, biochemistry, chemistry and advanced maths. They received a distinction and secured a place at Northumbria University to study a degree in Environmental Science.

They have now lived in Bensham for four years and wanted to tell us how Bees of Bensham has been integral to their healing. In their words:

'I want to tell you all, that as a rootsy organisation, you have been integral to transforming my life. These connections, learnings and encouragements have not only pushed me to study environmentalism full time but are seeping into the lives of my children and everyone they interact with. You've been part of my healing journey, because you've persistently and gently worked in my community and never restricted access. You've all been inspiring, passionate, understanding and while I've been over here navigating parenthood, studies and work, I've never felt excluded. As long as you continue creative connections with this community, we are here, we hear you. You are making a huge impact.

They continue to work with us and have been integral to development of further projects in the community.

## CONCLUSION

There are similarities between creativity and being in nature in that both can support people's health and wellbeing. This is something we will be taking forward in future work and projects. Some of the future partnership working will focus on these issues to explore how we can support people in Bensham & Saltwell to feel closer to nature and to express this through creative practice.

Exploring issues around climate change, nature, and food preservation in the community will be our focus over the next two years and integral to how we as an organisation move forward. Understanding nature through monitoring and observing it rather than the need to change habitats, has been an important part of how the project has developed and been understood. We are looking to continue developing the project working with the resident group beyond the project.

We have gained knowledge of what is possible in the community, developing partnerships with the council and other organisations and academics. For this to happen further funding would be required for it to gain its full potential. This is something we are currently researching and applying to funders to continue. It is important this is achieved as soon as possible to keep the network of residents, community groups and organisations in touch and engaged with the project.

This methodology of working has become important to how we see Dingy Butterflies developing in the future. This involves having a dedicated group of residents who we work with to develop projects and ideas working in the community, alongside a network of partners, stakeholders and experts who can support us and the community in engaging with ideas, issues and projects. As a result of the work we have done over the last two years we have focused our work into exploring the issue of climate change, nature and food in Bensham & Saltwell, and supporting communities, individuals and groups to engage with the subjects through creativity.

*Did you know there are 270 species of bees in the UK? We're learning so much about pollinators today at Bees of Bensham with Dingy Butterflies! It's been wonderful hearing about how artists, scientists and communities can all come together to help pollinators.*





Dingy Butterflies

[www.dingybutterflies.org](http://www.dingybutterflies.org)

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Project team

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Barbara Keating, Bees of Bensham Lead Artist

Amy Mitchell, Freelance Project Coordinator

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Christine Wright, Community Outreach Advisor, Royal Horticultural Society

Mark Welfare, Freelance Naturalist

James Common, Senior Naturalist, Natural History Society of Northumbria

Daisy Macari, Freelance artist

Mattie, Bees of Bensham podcaster

Hannah McParlin, Film maker

Iris Priest, Freelance Artist

Tom Robinson, Freelance Project Coordinator

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Mark Goddard, Assistant Professor, Department: Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University

Brigit Strawbridge, Wildlife gardener, amateur naturalist, and advocate of bees

Suzy O'Hara, Lecturer in Digital Arts and Enterprise, University of Sunderland

Federica Paradiso, PhD Researcher, Northumbria University

Beatrice Dale, PhD Researcher, Northumbria University

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