

Impact Report

North Carrick Community Benefit Company

August 2025



**community
enterprise**



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1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Context and the Purpose of the Report

Community Enterprise has been commissioned to carry out an impact assessment about the work of the North Carrick Community Benefit Company over the last few years. This will be done by looking back at the achievements and learning and using that to look forward and enhance the work.

The geographical boundary covers a 54-mile round trip, including areas from Maybole to Straiton, Minishant to Turnberry, and Dunure. Previously, these were all in Ward 7 of South Ayrshire Council. Changes in ward boundaries moved Kirkoswald, Maidens and Turnberry into Ward 8, but they were kept as part of NCCBC's remit.

The North Carrick Community Benefit Company have been giving out grants for almost 10 years and there is a need now to identify the impact from the investment and to consider learning to improve the work of the fund going forward. It's essential to understand the impact better and this may lead to more of a focus on capacity building and resilience.

The North Carrick Community Benefit Company (NCCBC) has a history spanning 10 years, making it a good time to review and assess its impact. NCCBC is held as an exemplar by ScottishPower Renewables (SPR), the funders, due to its good auditability but this is not always appreciated or understood by the community and applicants.

Although nearly £3 million has been invested, the economic value of that has not been assessed. For example, £135,000 was invested in a multi-million project in Maybole which may have been the key to unlocking the whole project which will have had significant economic and social impact. Understanding the real difference is vital.

The Foundations for Recovery programme developed proposals for capital projects with budget estimates of around £15 million of waiting for council support to attract more funding. These are examples that show that the investment can be strategic as well as community based. The efficacy of that needs to be tested.

There is interest in training and employability with, for example, a new driving lesson programme for those disadvantaged in the workplace. The Council no longer fund apprenticeships in sports coaching, so NCCBC are exploring whether they should fund them to help support grassroots sport in the local community. This is an example of flexibility and responsiveness in the fund. Knowing whether such approaches make a difference is crucial.

Match funding is insisted upon to attract inward investment, and SPR is keen to continue this requirement, though it has been a challenge for applicants. It is important therefore to understand if this has been useful.

With a core aim of making North Carrick a better place to live, work, visit and have leisure time, it impacts on every area of life; improving health, reducing poverty, addressing inequality, improving the environment and promoting culture. What outcomes should be prioritised will be considered.

Around £300,000 is available for distribution every year which is in excess of any other regional funder over that period of time.

Externally the country and region are at a period of change. Public sector cuts, cost of living and cost escalation (such as utilities and staffing) coupled with an increased demand on services is causing severe strain on the sector. Policy change is also influencing the sector, (often positively) with a renewed emphasis on a wellbeing economy, community wealth building, community empowerment, digital inclusion and a just transition to net zero. These are real opportunities for NCCBC to invest in but they need to be evidence based with clear impact.

This report should help to focus support and resources more effectively so that NCCBC can continue and increase its role of helping the communities of North Carrick to thrive,

1.2 The Achievements of North Carrick Community Benefit Company

Core Purpose

The North Carrick Community Benefit Company (NCCBC) was established in 2014 as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity in 2015. The primary purpose of NCCBC is to administer grant funding from ScottishPower Renewable's Dersalloch Windfarm and other sources that align with its charitable status. The funding is designated for the North Carrick area of South Ayrshire, which includes the communities of Crosshill, Straiton, Kirkmichael, Kirkoswald, Maidens, Turnberry, Dunure, Minishant, and Maybole.

NCCBC can only invest within the parameters of what is agreed with SPR.

History and Formation

NCCBC was formed to ensure that the benefits from local renewable energy projects were distributed fairly and effectively within the North Carrick community. The company operates with a focus on community development, aiming to enhance the quality of life for residents through funding organisations but also, in recent years, through investing in its own initiatives.

Key Projects and Initiatives

NCCBC has been involved in numerous projects aimed at improving the community. Here are some notable initiatives:

Community Grants

NCCBC administers grants to various local groups and organisations. These grants support a wide range of activities, from improving community facilities to supporting local events and initiatives.

Foundations for Recovery

This project received £515,000 from the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund (with a £50,000 contribution from NCCBC). The funding was used to commission 26 reports and feasibility studies that would stimulate projects in North Carrick to the point where they are ready for implementation. The initiative involved employing consultants, engineers, architects, and other experts to work on projects covering tourism, community assets, and workforce development (further information can be seen later in this report). The goal was to convert community and business aspirations into investment-ready projects.

Tourism Development

Part of NCCBC's work involves enhancing the tourism potential of North Carrick. This includes developing infrastructure and attractions that can draw visitors to the area, thereby boosting the local economy. This has ranged from investing in the Bruce Festival and supporting Northcarrick.com to installing artworks in its 9 communities to create the "Bruce's Web Arts Trail".

Community Assets

NCCBC has been involved in projects aimed at improving and maintaining community assets. This includes the renovation of local buildings, the creation of community spaces, and the enhancement of public amenities. The building that contains the charity shop is doing well, though the development of it was more complex and expensive than expected and the board has paused investment in other assets.

Workforce Development

Another focus area for NCCBC is workforce development. The company supports initiatives that provide training and employment opportunities for local residents, helping to build a skilled and resilient workforce. Supporting driving lessons is a current priority for example.

Action Planning

To create a firm foundation for investment, independent consultants were commissioned directly by NCCBC to deliver Community Action Plans in each of the areas based on grassroots community consultation. When these were completed, it was agreed that youth representation was not as in depth as it should be so a further stand-alone youth strategy was commissioned. This has helped to guide the investment of the funding to ensure it is not ad hoc but is focussed on particular evidenced elements which can be different in each community.

1.3 Methodology

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| Inception Meeting | A session took place with the board and staff representatives to identify the baseline for the work, agree the core intention and discuss the methodology. |
| Statistics | NCCBC shared the fund data since 2015 and a deep dive took place into the numbers and trends within the investments over that period of time up to January 2025. |
| Analysis of Evaluation Forms | Consideration took place of the monitoring forms that existed on the system to indicate the difference the project had made to applicants. |
| Applicant and Recipient Survey | An applicant survey was issued by NCCBC and it was completed by 29 organisations. This represents approximately 1/3 of organisations who have applied over that period and is felt to be a good representative sample |
| Key Stakeholder Contribution | Two key stakeholders contributed thoughts, South Ayrshire Council and Scottish Power Renewables. |
| Case Study Learning | 6 detailed case studies were undertaken on grant recipients to identify qualitative impact. |
| Strategic Programmes | Consideration of the strategic initiatives was done to identify the impact and potential impact of these in comparison to that of the grant programmes. |
| What Other Funders Do | Examples were given of other organisations which could stimulate thinking in the NCCBC board about how they should invest locally |
| Economic Impact Assessment | Once all this data was finalised the Economic Impact Assessor undertook an impact assessment into the work of the fund over that time. |
| Review and update | A review meeting took place with the senior manager and chair and this was used to create an updated version of the report for board consideration. |
| Public Presentation | Interim results were presented at the AGM and this stimulated debate and comments, as well as some follow up calls, which have been taken into consideration in the report. |
| Final report | All this data was summarised in this report which is accompanied by a detailed Appendices report. |

2. Findings and Recommendations

The full data can be seen in a separate appendices document.

2.1 Findings

Funding Context

Though rooted in local need and demand, the decisions made by NCCBC and what is possible to recommend within this report can only happen with the limitations of the funding parameters set out in the legal agreement with ScottishPower Renewables.

Some Statistics

The vast majority (78%) applied once or twice only and it was only small numbers who were regular applicants. Those who applied multiple times were not of a consistent type – they ranged from a bowling club to a regeneration initiative.

Since 2015, a total of £1,453,844 worth of grant applications have been received. £912,914 has been given out resulting in an 81% success rate. This success rate is at least partly due to the smart investment at a very local level and as a result of the support of the Development Manager to guide groups to strong applications.

The total project costs across those projects amounted to £1,747,448 (though this was skewed by the large Maybole Regeneration Project which brought in £5,880,636 in match funding). That investment of £912,914 levered in match funding of £7,945,418.

The return on investment (ROI) for each £1 of funding is £8.71. Even removing the Maybole heritage funding, there is still an external investment into the area of £2,064,783 and an ROI of £1 securing benefit of £2.65. The need for match funding is controversial and smaller organisations find it stressful and challenging but these figures show the strength of NCCBC in drawing in investment to North Carrick.

The average grant is £12,032 and the average match funding is £72,231.

A total of £184,950 was invested in community-led projects at a local level. The fund that was established to make accessing NCCBC funding for small local project easier and without the need for match funding. £23,530 in match was generated.

In 2022, a decision was made to invest in covid recovery in the area following the pandemic lockdowns. This is a good example of the freedom of NCCBC to be nimble and to responds to changing needs in the community. £179,000 was invested in 25 projects.

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In addition to grant funding, NCCBC has invested itself in strategic projects. This has ranged from Place2Be funding to community action plans, the purchase of the charity shop and the Foundations for Recover programme.

In total £1,802,000 has been invested which has secured match funding of £1,315,500

Planning

Commissioning area place plans and an additional youth strategy has been a key foundation of the planning of investment and helps groups to submit well thought out bids.

Case studies indicated the benefit of the fund investing in relation to local need as it changes.

Responsiveness

A major strength of the fund has been the ability to be flexible and responsive. Grant holders and stakeholders recognised and appreciated the fast response to covid and the investment that

saved many organisations locally. The recent response to the cost of living crisis has also been effective.

Impact

On a sliding scale from 1 (no impact) to 100 (extremely high impact), respondents were asked to articulate how high the level of impact was. Across the board, the level of impact was 77.

Since the organisation received the grant, the biggest proportion (60%) retained the same turnover and only 4% reduced their turnover. A significant 28% increased their turnover.

“Since the funding from NCCBC was secured we have been awarded more funding from other funding bodies and collectively we are now in a position to continue into the next stage of our project.”

Though the turnover increased for some organisations, surpluses only increased for 8% of respondents, with 23% becoming worse (reflecting the national situation set out for example in SCVO’s Third Sector Tracker). However 54% were able to retain their levels of surpluses.

“Being more visible helped us get more donations.”

For most (59%), their unrestricted reserves have been protected with only 7% having reduced their reserves. Compared to the Third Sector Tracker, this is more successful than the national average.

In relation to organisational capacity, the majority of groups had stayed the same. However 31% had increased volunteers, 27% had increased board members and 19% had increased part time staff.

“We have increased our trustees by three more people. Volunteers has grown too. We think that is due to the success of the project and the impact its making on community and people are more inclined to join us.”

Many had multiple benefit.

- 66% improved citizenship and volunteering
- 50% achieved better life chances for young people
- 53% have contributed to regenerating the area
- 46% contributed to the reduction of disadvantage and poverty
- 46% improved learning and education

“The project created local jobs with 4 people from Ayrshire gaining work. Opportunities for all members of the community to access arts and cultural experiences, opportunities to become involved as a volunteers creating improved community cohesions and pride.”

The outcomes set out in the guidance are extensive and limit the focus on the investments, but do open up the ability to be flexible.

Tourism has been a significant focus and for example, a modest investment in the Bruce festival has generated significant financial impact, though work is required to understand that in detail. The Bruces Web Arts Trail, launched in November 2024, is intended to increase visitor numbers but will need ongoing promotion and marketing.

Stakeholders feel that the priorities for the future should be

- Regeneration
- reducing disadvantage
- learning
- youth.

24% felt that they had improved fair work and good working practices by a large amount and 52% by a small amount.

14% felt that they had improved their equality and diversity by a large amount and 52% by a small amount

10% felt they have improved their journey to net zero by a large amount and 57% by a small amount.

“The grant saw us through the most difficult stage of the clubs existence that without we would have had to look at closure and surrender of the premises.”

The case studies indicated a high level of quality impact in skills development and wellbeing.

Additional support

The investment in strategic support staff, in particular the role of Develop Manager which has been the catalyst to strong applications, good working relationships and fundable projects. This has had a significant impact on the achievements of NCCBC.

Relationships

NCCBC has a strong reputation with strategic stakeholders. Though new large investment has been challenging because of national funding issues, that relationship will be vital if and when new funding comes on stream.

“NCCBC is an asset to North Carrick. I think it's fair to say they've moved through the organisation's 'bedding-in' phase and have achieved a lot.”

Nature of the Fund : Additional Benefit

Many of the investments by NCCBC are viewed as catalysts for future activity. The Foundation for Recovery programme in particular has stimulated new work. Though there is a frustration that there is limited funding available to invest in those projects, this needs to be viewed as a long term investment.

Investment in the Place 2 Be project not only allowed youth mental health support to happen, but was the catalyst to release over £200,000 of other funding. P2B indicated that this project changed their model of mental health provision for young people to be more community based and less school based.

A small investment in the Maybole Regeneration Project enabled significant investment into the community.

Case studies indicated that a key benefit of the fund is its flexibility and responsiveness to new opportunities.

Investment in local organisations is stimulating additional projects.

There are good examples of other funders who are providing additional support to build the capacity of their grant applicants and recipients.

There are good examples of organisations which are both funders and regeneration agencies. There are also good examples of the usefulness of the split between funder and project deliverer.

There is growing evidence that longer term unrestricted funding built on trusted relationships is effective, though most funders do not have the ability to invest in that way and, whilst revenue funding tied to specified outputs may be possible, “unrestricted” funding would not currently fit with the SPR agreement.

Community Assets

Substantial funding for community facilities has not only protected those facilities, but has been the enabler for numerous tenants and user groups of those facilities.

NCCBC has invested in its own assets and has secured external funding for the purchase and renovation of these assets. Taking complete control of assets is complex, unpredictable and expensive but can be a vital part of the local infrastructure and requires a funder with the vision and flexibility to invest. To reduce the risk, it may be better to commit to investing in community assets rather than adding more to NCCBC's own portfolio.

Monitoring systems

There was inconsistent impact data, even simple information such as numbers of beneficiaries over time, which would have shown the reach of the funding.

The small qualitative data there was, was useful and a way should be found to capture that in future monitoring without it feeling too onerous for grant recipients.

It would have been useful to set out beneficiary numbers across the grant recipient's work but so few organisations provided these in their monitoring reports that a realistic number could not be estimated.

Process and Administration

The process is viewed by some as rigorous and others as overly bureaucratic.

52% found the process easy or very easy. 19% found it difficult.

"Post covid recovery funding helped get us back up and running, the difficult application process means we have not applied since."

Though 38% felt the guidance and information was clear or very clear a significant proportion were less positive.

65% felt that the communication was good throughout the process and only 4% felt it was not clear.

In comparison with other funds, the NCCBC process is viewed as reasonable and proportionate.

"It was one of the most time consuming forms I have completed. The form itself was not difficult, but the amount of evidence and supporting documents it required took time to organise."

Though 45% of people found the monitoring process "very helpful", 18% found it more challenging and a further 32% were neutral about it. Comments throughout indicate an opportunity to improve the monitoring.

"Simplify the forms, reduce levels of match funding and only ask for quotes when essential. All of the above prevent small, inexperienced groups like ours trying to get funds."

Match Funding

The need for match funding is controversial and smaller organisations find it stressful and challenging.

Though vital for setting out good value and robust consideration of spend, sometimes it can be hard to secure three quotes, particularly in a rural area.

"For an organisation like ours, with very little revenue funding (only from volunteers own donations), the requirement for match-funding makes the NCCBC process quite challenging as in addition to in-kind contribution we often have to find another source of cash grant funding to make up the difference. If NCCBC were able to fully-fund small projects for community organisations like ours (where our volunteers supply the labour), the process would be so much easier."

2.2 Economic Impact Assessment

The economic impact was calculated by an independent economist and can be seen in detail in an associated report.

Economic Impact

In the five years before NCCBC was established (change from 2009-2014) the economy of North Carrick and Maybole shrank (in nominal terms) by 2.8% compared to growth of 7.6% across the whole of South Ayrshire. Since NCCBC was established (change from 2014-2022) the economy of North Carrick and Maybole grew (in nominal terms) by 51.6% compared to growth of 16.4% across the whole of South Ayrshire. North Carrick and Maybole's share of the South Ayrshire economy rose from 7.8% to 10.1%.

HM Treasury's GVA deflators were used to adjust the GVA data show the real economic growth rate, taking into account price changes. The real economic growth rate since NCCBC was established (growth from 2015 onwards) has averaged 3.3% each year across North Carrick and Maybole.

The number of jobs in North Carrick and Maybole has increased by just over 9% since 2015 (Figure 3.3). The number of jobs across South Ayrshire remained unchanged over the same period. North Carrick and Maybole now accounts for 12.5% of jobs in South Ayrshire, up from 11.5% in 2015.

The North Carrick and Maybole economy grew by nearly 18% in real terms (taking inflation into account) from 2015 to 2022. With employment expanding by 9.1% (Figure 3.3) productivity (GVA per job) also rose by nearly 8%.

The North Carrick economy is £88 million bigger compared to 2014. Additional economic growth since the establishment of NCCBC meant that to the North Carrick economy is £40 million larger after accounting for inflation and adjusting for the new Maybole bypass.

A conservative estimate was made based on the profile of NCCBC's funding profile across North Carrick's sectors and activities. Most of this was focused on tourism.

Including the additional GVA sustained through third sector organisations (set out earlier), the additional cumulative GVA sustained over the last decade by NCCBC amounts to £43.4 million.

Including the £8.3 million of leveraged match funding, the total investment supported by NCCBC was £11.3 million. This suggests a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 3.8. The BCR based on NCCBC's investment alone (£3 million) is 14.5.

Tourism accounted for an increasing share of jobs in North Carrick and Maybole's rising from 12.3% in 2015 to 13.8% by 2019 and falling back to 11.7% in 2020 as public health restrictions were put in place in response to the pandemic. More recently the share of local jobs in the tourism sector rose to 14.2% by 2022.

Summary

These figures are provided to illustrate the importance of considering distributional impacts. The focus of job creation in a community facing significant deprivation represents an excellent opportunity to address inclusion, child poverty, inequality and the distribution of economic opportunity.

2.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings set out in this report NCCBC should consider the following at board level and could;

1. Clearly split its activity into two areas with pre-agreed budgets annually;
 - a. Consolidate and strengthen the Community-led Projects Funding by investing in local panels to distribute small grants based on clear parameters set out by the NCCBC board. These should offer additional points for match funding but match should not be an essential requirement. This element allows for small amounts of unrestricted funding.
 - b. Continue with the main fund that does require clear outputs and outcomes and where match funding is essential.
2. Consolidate and grow NCCBC as a funder and investor in regeneration. The strategic projects have been highly successful but in the future this should be undertaken via a separately constituted development trust which should act as a regeneration agency, leading on region wide projects such as Foundations for Recovery. This would create a model that could draw in external investment and is already being planned.
3. Consider some longer revenue investment in strategic organisations, with very clear outcomes that fit within the agreement with SPR.
4. Continue to invest in staff that can provide support, guidance and a strategic perspective to North Carrick regeneration. This both stimulates strong projects and facilitates strong applications. This is where the capacity building investment is focussed. This post could also be a bridge between the fund and a future development trust.
5. Focus investment on building the resilience and capacity of the grant applicants and therefore the sector in North Carrick. Though this may not be palatable at a local level, NCCBC has the ability to invest in change and, with support, shift the approach to innovation, financial sustainability and encouraging self-generated income at a local level. This may require attracting free external support from the social enterprise eco-system. The community change is clear from the Economic Impact Assessment.
6. Ensure that all grants and investments fit within clear themes. There should be fewer themes and outcomes and these should be reviewed every 3 years based on community consultation and a gap analysis. This should be evidenced, but indications are that regeneration (including tourism), reducing disadvantage, youth and learning are commonly supported by funders and grant holders.
7. Significantly firm up but simplify the monitoring process as it is reasonable for NCCBC to track the impact of its funds. This should include quantitative data (numbers of beneficiaries) and qualitative data (stories of impact) as well as proof of spend. Support should be given to grant recipients as this is currently felt to be a barrier.
8. An external impact assessment should be commissioned every three years using a standard methodology to allow long term comparisons.
9. Continue with the robust application process but consider minimising the need for additional information and, under certain levels, the match funding requirement. Evidence of seeking quotes could be submitted when some applicants are unable to secure them.
10. Match funding should be retained but the system of different levels should be reviewed and communicated where there is a higher expectation of match funding when grant interventions are higher.
11. Improve its own marketing and storytelling.