



# **Eco Lifestyle Stakeholder Event 8<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The Eco Lifestyle Project has been running for nearly two years. Recently, stakeholders were invited to join the Middleport Matters team to celebrate the successes, share the barriers and learning, and discuss future possibilities.

We invited representatives from various relevant organisations and were pleased to welcome people from Saint Nathaniel's Academy, Stoke-on-Trent City Council waste management team, community groups and more.

The funding for the project came from Cadent Foundation (project running costs) and Middleport Environment Charity (purchase of property). Representatives of both funding partners spoke to the assembled stakeholders to explain their interest in the project and thank everyone for their involvement.

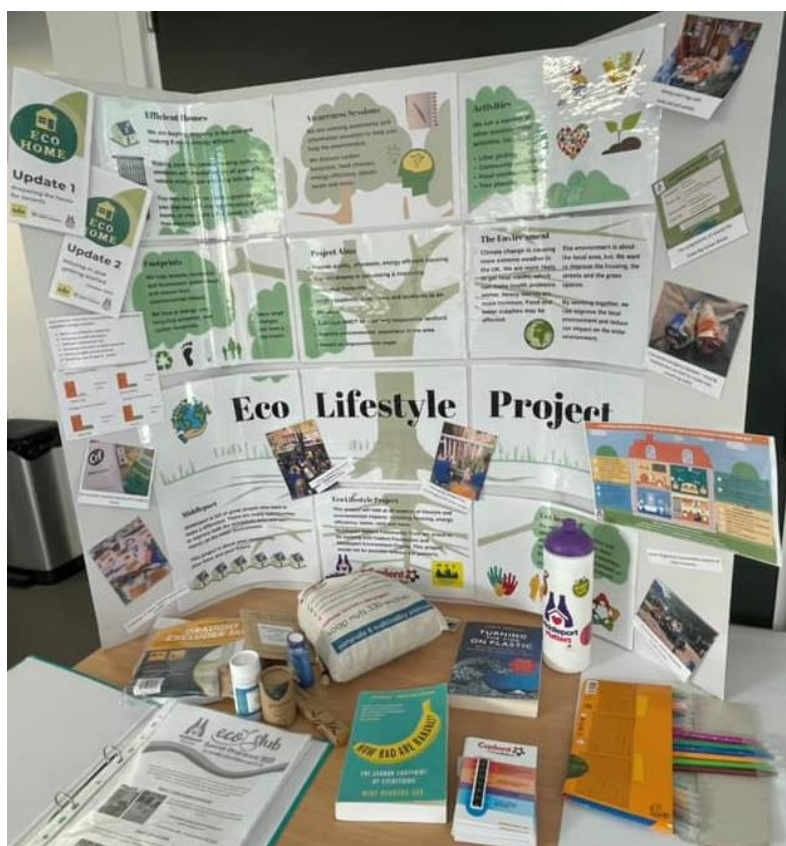
The Middleport Matters team had prepared a number of displays and interactive activities for attendees to get involved with. These covered areas such as how to get more people doing Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and barriers to using greener options such as public transport and zero waste shops. There was also a display explaining the Eco Lifestyle project and a collection of headlines to prompt conversation. A member of Middleport Matters was available at each stand to discuss them in more detail and facilitate conversation.

Everyone was invited to make a pledge for what they personally will do to help the environment. Some pledges were very personal, focusing on individual or household choices. Others were around what they could do professionally and as part of their organisations to make a bigger impact. All were positive and thoughtful and we very much hope to hear back on how they go.

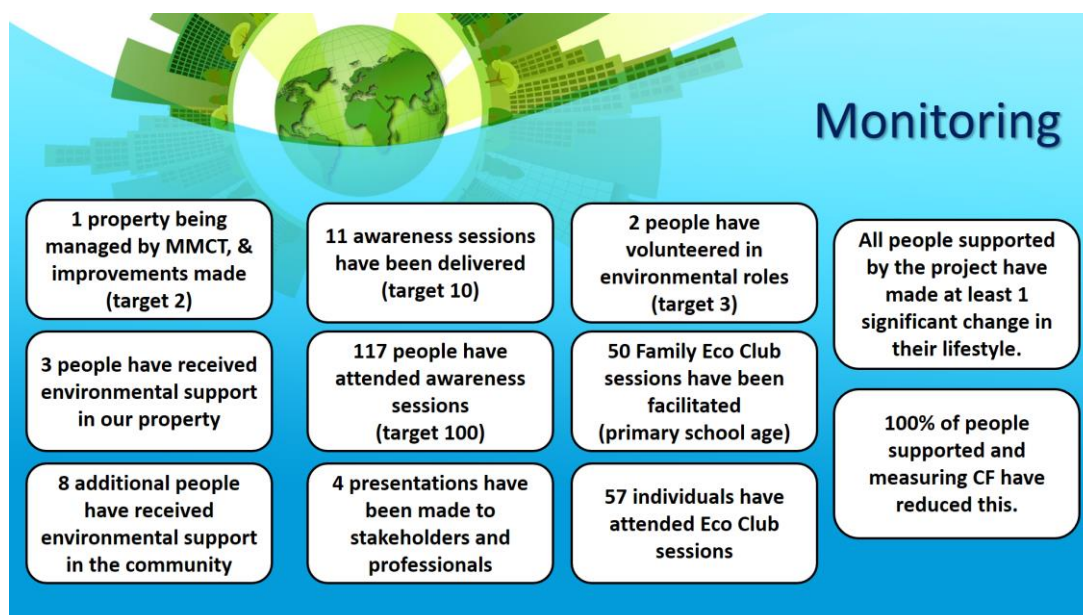
# Eco Lifestyle Project

The project aimed to promote and support more environmentally friendly and energy efficient lifestyle choices, in ways that were affordable and achievable to typical households in Middleport and the wider Stoke-on-Trent area.

The core of the project was to obtain a property and offer regular close support to the tenants. Middleport Environment Charity purchased a terraced house typical of the area and Middleport Matters manage it as landlord. Our Eco Lifestyle Coordinator meets the tenants regularly to discuss their lifestyle and help them find ways to become more energy efficient, reduce waste, and save both pennies and planet.



At the same time, the project has provided a number of awareness sessions, eco craft sessions for families and other activities to engage the public. For example, the project has facilitated the creation of Eco Club, where families learn about the environment. A small group of residents benefited from close support as part of the Eco Residents scheme, and between them have found significant savings measured in carbon footprints, plastic bottles and money.



At the stakeholder event, we provided an overview of the outcomes and outputs of the project and were on hand to explain the impacts on local people. We were also able to discuss some of the challenges in reaching people and how being part of Middleport Matters enabled a lot of conversations that would otherwise have been impossible.

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*"I'd never heard of soap nuts, but I'm definitely going to try them."*

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All represented organisations were encouraged to do more to lead the way and make it easier for individuals to make greener choices. The main theme of the intentions they shared was to improve education and information.

# Developing Green Spaces

We had a stand showcasing some wonderful local projects, such as the Burslem Port area which has been allowed to rewild for the past 50 years. There were also photos of projects from around the country, where councils had funded rewilding, adjusted grass cutting schedules to better suit pollinators, and planted community orchards.

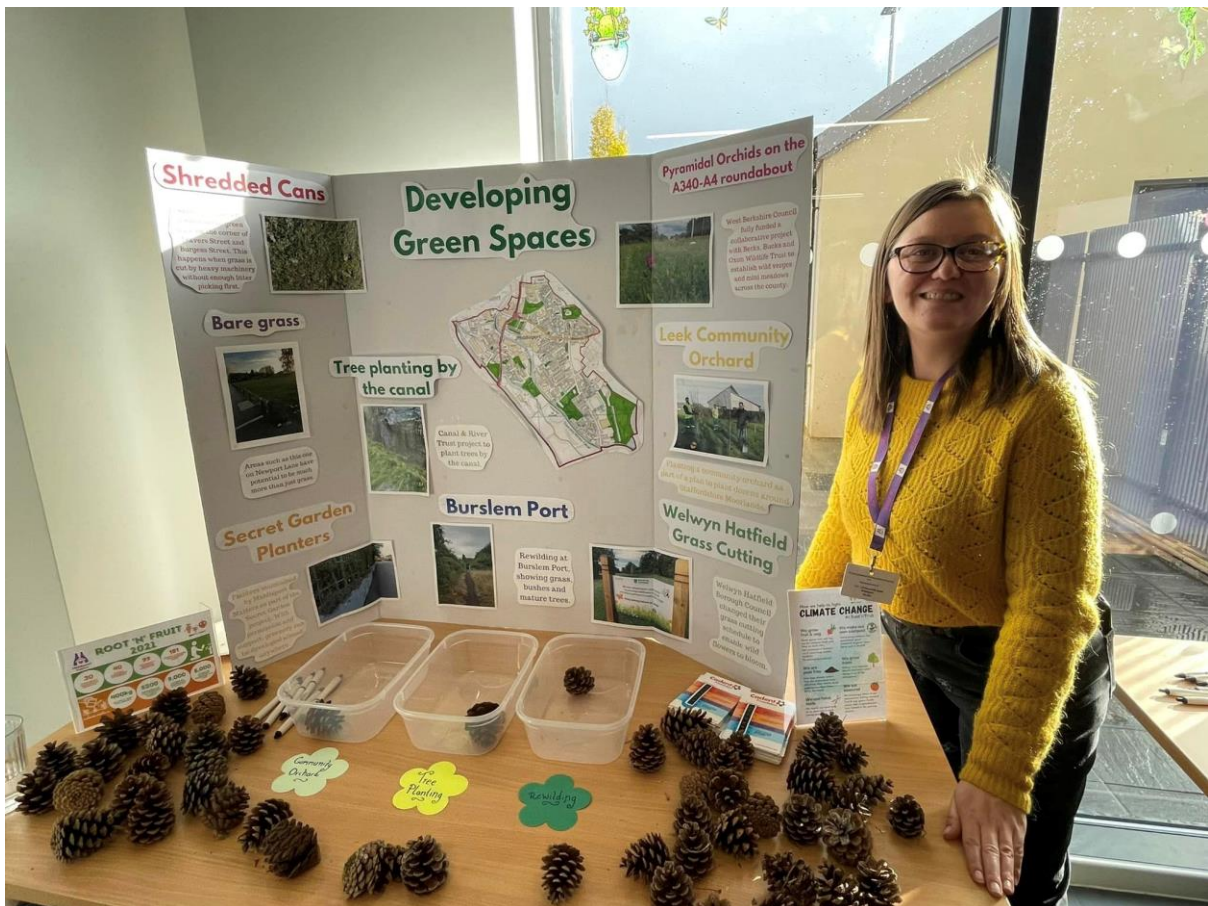
Middleport has a lot of green space in and around it, but much of it is bare grass. The variety of possible projects showed how much potential there is to develop some truly wonderful green spaces for the benefit of both people and nature. Everyone who stopped to chat agreed that more efforts should be made to develop the green spaces in Middleport and beyond. It was particularly noted that the neighbourhood park and surrounding green infrastructure was a major asset to the area.

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*“We need to protect and improve the local green assets”*

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People were invited to vote for their favourite green space development option. There wasn't a clear winner as people thought all of the options were worth pursuing.



# Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

This well-known phrase has become contentious in some environmentalist circles as it is often used for greenwashing – eg. companies may use packaging that is technically recyclable and claim they're doing enough. As our Reduce, Reuse, Recycle stand showed, there are many practical challenges that are not easily overcome.

Local residents had previously provided us with their reasons for not following the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle advice more. People generally want to do better for the environment, but schemes are complicated, poorly advertised, and difficult to access. There are no second hand shops in Middleport, so neither donation nor shopping there is easy. With everything in shops and supermarkets wrapped in plastic, there are few options to avoid the packaging. Stoke-on-Trent City Council recycling schemes seem complicated and there is little understanding among residents of what goes in which bin.

Our residents also shared what they would find helpful. They all agreed that knowing more about what was available would be useful. Many Middleport residents are not computer literate, so information on leaflets would be more useful than online.



We had some great conversations with the people who visited the stand. One visitor suggested looking to see which houses didn't put out recycling bins to target support. Another suggested that the Stoke-on-Trent City Council should work more closely with Middleport Matters to improve local understanding of their recycling schemes.

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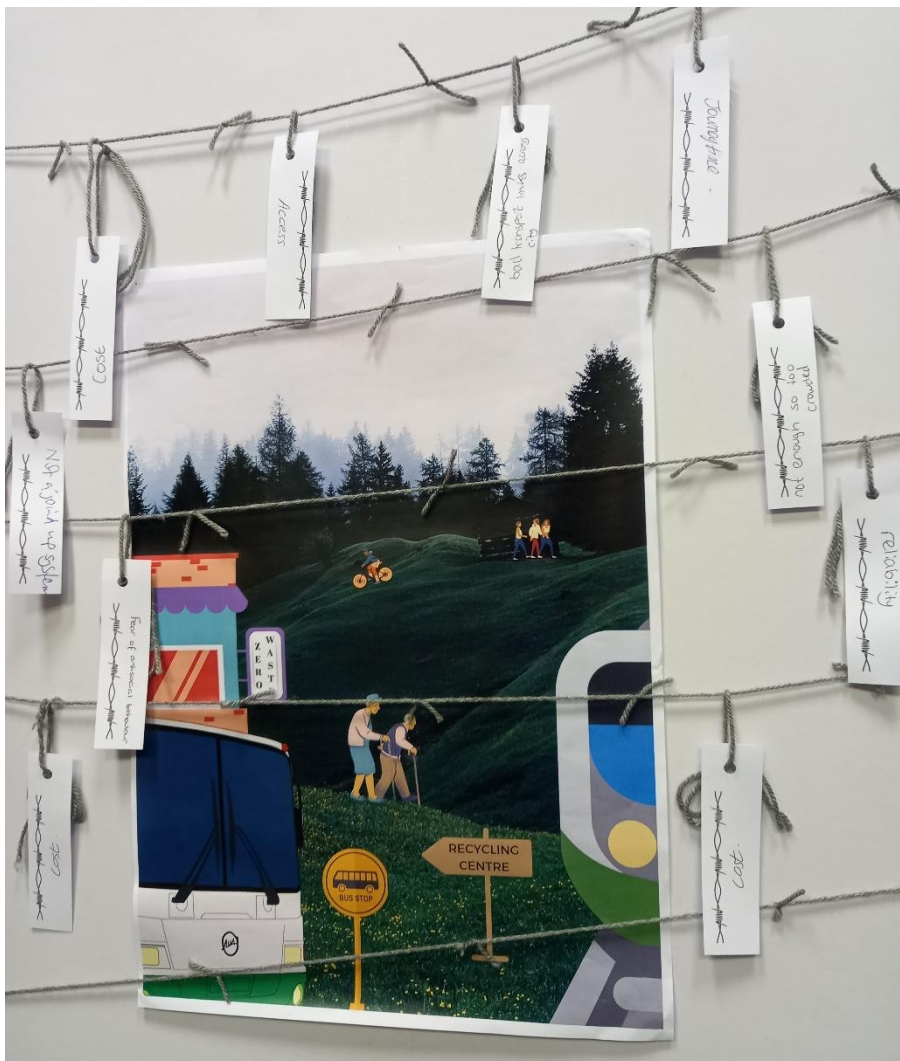
*"We've got to help people more."*

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# Transport and Access

There are many greener options that people are encouraged to use: public transport, active transport (cycling and walking), zero waste shops, recycling centres, etc. However, there are also many barriers to using those facilities. This display centred around the difficulties that people face when trying to make greener choices. She invited attendees to add their own barriers to the yarn barbed wire fence.

*“Public transport is just not a joined up system.”*



Common themes in the barriers shared with us included practical concerns like journey times and limited availability of buses in or through the local area. Others claimed social issues, such as overcrowding and fear of antisocial behaviour stopped them wanting to use public transport. Several people said cost was an issue.

## Power and Responsibility

There are many factors that affect environmental footprints of households. These range from governments making laws, to packaging choices made by companies, to the efforts of environmental charities in providing education and caring for wild spaces.

However, individuals can also affect those structures by talking to others about environmental matters, choosing greener products where they can, and requesting and supporting eco-friendly policies. By using the power they have, individuals can set ripples through all layers of society.

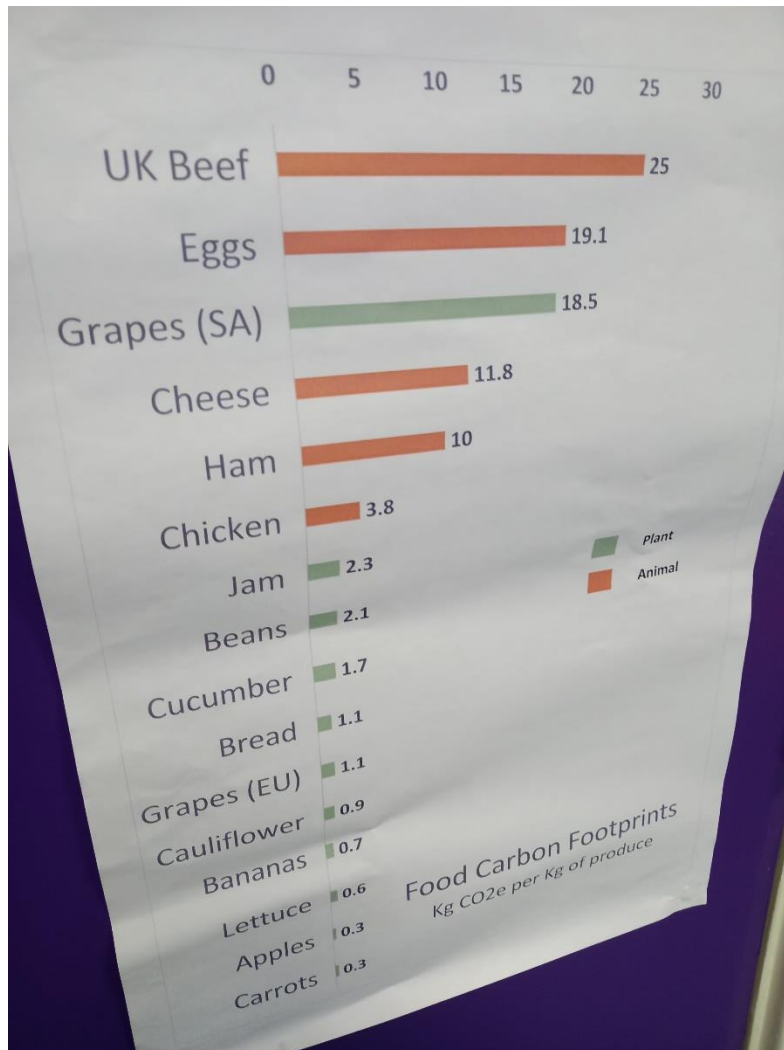
A variety of headlines was on display, such as the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, previously announcing that he would not attend COP27 and Stoke-on-Trent City Council's 2019 declaration of a climate crisis. These prompted some conversations around who had power and how top-level decisions impact ordinary people.

We facilitated discussions and received feedback from various attendees that collaborative working, transparency and appropriate communication were key, because of the way everything intersects across society.



## Buffet

Carbon footprints of animal products are typically higher than plant-based foods. Information showing carbon footprints of a range of foods was displayed by the buffet provided at the event.



Buffets at corporate events are frequently very meat-heavy, with vegetarian options usually cheese-based and vegan options ringfenced for those who specifically requested them. We took the opportunity to arrange for some vegan options, such as cheese alternatives and quorn slices, for people to try. Specific carbon footprint comparisons were provided alongside these.

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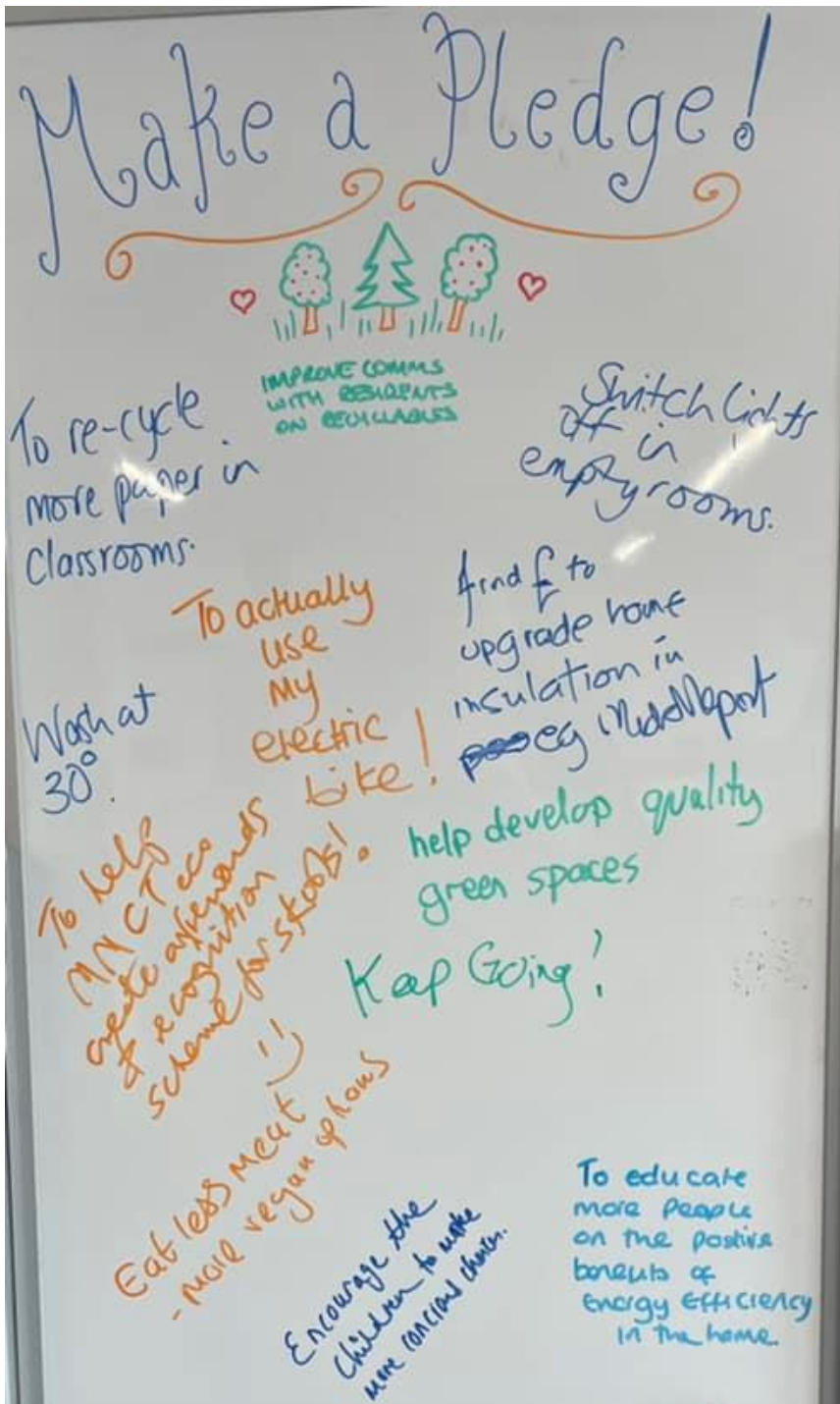
*"I tried soya milk in my tea and I honestly couldn't tell the difference."*

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Several nuanced conversations were had around the need for overall meat and dairy consumption to be reduced. There were also discussions around how the method of transport can affect a food's carbon footprint. A number of people were pleasantly surprised by how much they enjoyed the vegan alternatives.



## Next steps & conclusions



It was clear that everyone involved could see the value of projects like this one and the need for collaboration and action across the board. There are many opportunities for improved wellbeing and reduced household bills from making greener lifestyle choices. However, there are also many challenges and barriers. Accessibility of information was a common theme, with it either being lacking or overwhelming. Community organisations who already have grass roots engagement are well-placed to provide or facilitate advice and guidance.

Several attendees pledged to work with Middleport Matters on future projects. These include improving education and information accessibility, skill sharing, and exploring collaborative recycling options. We will be following up individually to move these forward.

Middleport Matters are committed to our ongoing work to support and

encourage communities and stakeholders to make positive lifestyle changes for better environmental impacts and increased energy efficiency. We will continue to share our findings with stakeholders and work collaboratively to bring about positive outcomes.