

# Engaging with the community on climate change adaptation through cultural practice

Case study: Sniffer, Creative Carbon Scotland, Aberdeen City Council and Robert Gordon University



Effective community engagement is an important element of creating transformational change. This case study explains how the organising group used a mini-arts festival in Middlefield, Aberdeen, to explore the contribution artists, or cultural practitioners, can make to adaptation engagement and the benefits this can bring to local decision making.

## How will the climate change in East Scotland?

UK Climate Projections 2009 data for East Scotland suggests that, under a medium emissions scenario, by the 2050s the region may see:

- An increase in summer mean temperatures of around 2.3°C, and of winter temperatures of around 1.7°C;
- A 10% increase in winter mean precipitation and a 13% decrease in summer mean precipitation.



Source: <http://ukclimateprojections.metoffice.gov.uk>

**Adaptation Scotland**  
supporting climate change resilience

## Why Aberdeen?

Aberdeen City Council is currently working with Adaptation Scotland to produce the city's first climate change adaptation strategy. This strategy is created by the city, so gaining input from local communities is an essential part of the process.

## Why Middlefield?

Middlefield is in the north west of Aberdeen and is predominantly residential, with a large proportion of social housing. A new community-hub has recently been opened and the area has been earmarked for significant investment in greenspace. Helping the community to reflect on what changes might affect their neighbourhood now has the potential to increase the prominence of

adaptation in key local decisions in the near future. Helping the community to reflect on what changes might affect their neighbourhood now has the potential to increase the prominence of adaptation in key local decisions in the near future. The project team worked with community cultural and media charity Station House Media Unit (SHMU) to identify Middlefield Community Hub as the base for the mini-arts festival.

## Who was involved?

Creative Carbon Scotland led on promoting the event and selected four artists. These were:

- Simon Gall [www.clypemusic.com](http://www.clypemusic.com)
- Jo Hodges & Robbie Coleman [www.museumsofthefuturenow.wordpress.com](http://www.museumsofthefuturenow.wordpress.com)
- Alice Mary-Cooper [www.alicemarycooper.com](http://www.alicemarycooper.com)



Creating motivation that leads to action requires engaging with the right stakeholders using the right approach at the right time. Using a cultural lens can help reach new audiences and generate new ideas.

# ARTS & CLIMATE CHANGE

## MINI-FESTIVAL

Middlefield Community Hub, Manor Avenue

Saturday 22nd April, 10:30am - 5:00pm

Creative Carbon Scotland arranged for the use of the Middlefield community-hub and got the word out to local residents through community radio shows hosted by SHMU and flyers distributed to community centres.

Robert Gordon University evaluated the day's activities, capturing lessons. All project partners helped to host the event on the day.

### What happened?

The artists delivered three creative workshops across the day.

Simon set participants the task of rewriting traditional local songs and nursery rhymes to tell the story of climate change. By encouraging participants to use Doric (the north east of Scotland distinctive dialect) and write about climate impacts on their own lives, Simon helped to recast the message of adaptation in local, everyday language.

Joe and Robbie led participants through a storytelling exercise: The Museum of Future Middlefield. Once they'd donned their curator's white gloves, participants were given a set of esoteric objects – including an amber brooch and the flag of a radical farmers movement – from the Museum of Future Middlefield in the year 3000. The task was to tell a story about how their chosen object played a key role in adapting the local community to climate change.

With the aid of her small red suitcase, Alice told the story of being evacuated from her childhood home. She asked participants, if Middlefield was being evacuated, what three things would they save in their suitcases. From the physical, the story moved to the practical, with Alice asking what three skills each person had that could help their neighbours during the crisis. The shared conversation uncovered a huge array of skills that could easily be turned towards adaptation action and tapped into pride in community cohesion and cooperation.

During the sessions, Dr Leslie Mabon and Sophie Spencer from Robert Gordon University used participant observation to gather evaluative data and tell the full story of the day. The day ended with a group discussion between the artists and the organisers to reflect on the approach.

SHMU were present throughout the day, documenting workshops and holding interviews for the production of a short film following the event (<https://vimeo.com/235886095>).

### Findings

The key lessons learned from the project were:

- **Arts-based practice offers a whole different way of thinking about climate change.** If undertaken sensitively, such activities may also help to break down existing power relations and allow different knowledge and value positions to work together in ways that may not so easily be possible in conventional decision-making forums.

- **There is potential to utilise an arts-based approach with more empowered decision-makers** (e.g. urban planners, local government, more affluent communities) as a means of leading them to think differently about climate change adaptation.

- **The nature of the mini-arts festival event created a self-selecting audience.** If using an arts-based approach to communicate with a large audience, consideration should be given to how to reach all relevant parties, including those who may feel excluded from, and/or uncomfortable in, participating in art.

### Next steps

- The project was presented at the 2017 Transformations Conference T-lab workshop.
- RGU researchers continue to carry out follow-up interviews in Middlefield and Aberdeen to assess the impact on community members, and are developing an evaluation report.
- Project partners are continuing to seek opportunities for follow on work.

### Further information

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For more information on the project partners, see:

[www.creativecarbonscotland.com](http://www.creativecarbonscotland.com)

[www.rgu.ac.uk](http://www.rgu.ac.uk)

[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk)

[www.sniffer.org.uk](http://www.sniffer.org.uk)

## Adaptation support

Adapting to climate change takes time and Adaptation Scotland are here to provide support and advice with your adaptation queries and projects. Get in touch to discuss how we can help you with your climate adaptation work.

[www.adaptationscotland.org.uk](http://www.adaptationscotland.org.uk)

# Adaptation Scotland

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