



Annual Report 2023-24





Welcome

Welcome

Down To Zero is all about climate and community. We know that access to land for local people has decreased, spaces for nature are at risk and we have already seen the adverse impact of weather events on local communities over the last few years.

The World Economic Forum recognised extreme weather events as critical changes to our earth's systems, with biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and natural resources shortages as the biggest and most critical long-term risks and challenges for humanity. As a result, we know how important our work at Down To Zero is for current and future generations of our communities here in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT).

There are challenging times ahead for our climate and local communities. However, adversity also brings opportunity and our success in 2023-24 is only the beginning for Down To Zero.

We have had a fantastic year, with the organisation seeing growth and development from welcoming more than 150 participants at our Pontyclun site to establishing Llysh Bocs, our vegetable box subscription service, which will contribute to reducing food poverty across the county.

As an organisation, we continue to ensure that we are strategically aligned with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Environment Act, Global Sustainable Development Goals, Welsh Government priorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's corporate plan and national funders in the area. As a result, we look forward to supporting a just and equitable green transition and enabling localised socio-environmental and economic regeneration in RCT.

We would like to give our sincere thanks to the local community and in particular volunteers who have supported the organisation through a period of significant development and have played a key role in our success so far.

We would also like to thank our funders and partners: Cynon Taf Community Housing Group (CTCHG), Cwm Taf Care and Repair, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Moondance Foundation, Pen-y-Cymoedd Community Fund, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, Welsh Government, National Lottery and National Lottery players for their continued support.

Here's to the next year and all that we will continue to achieve.

Natalie Rees & Tom Addiscott



Supporting Resilient Communities

Supporting Resilient Communities



During 2023-24, we successfully delivered year one of the programme funded by Welsh Government funded Sustainable Steps and administered by the National Lottery. We also delivered on our Moondance Foundation funded project, which included our polytunnels, wellbeing cabin, compost toilet and our trees.

These projects have resulted in considerable community engagement, learning and development in the environmental, climate and carbon agenda.

Our site in Pontyclun has undergone a major transformation thanks to the efforts of staff and volunteers. We have created a low impact sustainable food system based on three large scale polytunnels and rainwater harvesting systems set up to support our home-grown sustainable food objectives. The produce grown in these polytunnels will be harvested and packaged by staff and volunteers for our income generation initiative, Llysh Bocs.

Did you know that 'Llysh' is a play on the Welsh word llysiu, therefore, being a literal translation for 'Veg Box'.



- We have planted more than 100 fruit trees, shrubs and bushes at our Pontyclun site.
- We have built and established 5 beehives to increase pollination and biodiversity around our Pontyclun site.
- We received £9,920 National Lottery Awards For All funding which has enabled us to employ two part-time beekeepers.
- We have held two beekeeping workshops with 12 people attending.
- We received £95,000 of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, via Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, to establish our Llysh Bocs initiative.
- We have run a training session on biochar and charcoal for staff, volunteer and tenants, with 7 people attending.

In December 2023, we completed the lease for our second site, Bryn Gobaith, in Mountain Ash, to further expand the Down To Zero community reach. Since then, we have steadily been developing the infrastructure for community involvement since October 2023.

This work has included the construction of wellbeing cabins, compost toilets, a biochar kiln, as well as incorporating a Keep Wales Tidy food development package and wellbeing area.

We have also been working with Dare Valley Community Woodland to develop a sustainable forestry management plan for our Mountain Ash site so that we deliver a regenerative approach to land management and subsequently, our related biochar production.



Partnering with Others

Partnering with Others



Our growing presence in the local community has seen us broaden our partnership working and highlight how Down To Zero can deliver excellent collaborative options across sectors.

In October 2023, we welcomed Men's Shed Pontyclun (MSP) to our site, so they could continue their excellent work in tackling loneliness and isolation for men and women. The group are a welcome addition to our site and bring passion, enthusiasm and skills to our working environment. We would like to thank them for all their hard work and efforts over the past year, including for the maintenance work undertaken on our bunker.

Thanks to our partnership work with Cynon Taf Community Housing Group, Cardiff Metropolitan University and Cwmbach Community Wetlands, in 2024-25 we will complete the purchase of 27 acres of wetlands and broadleaf woodlands in Aberdare.

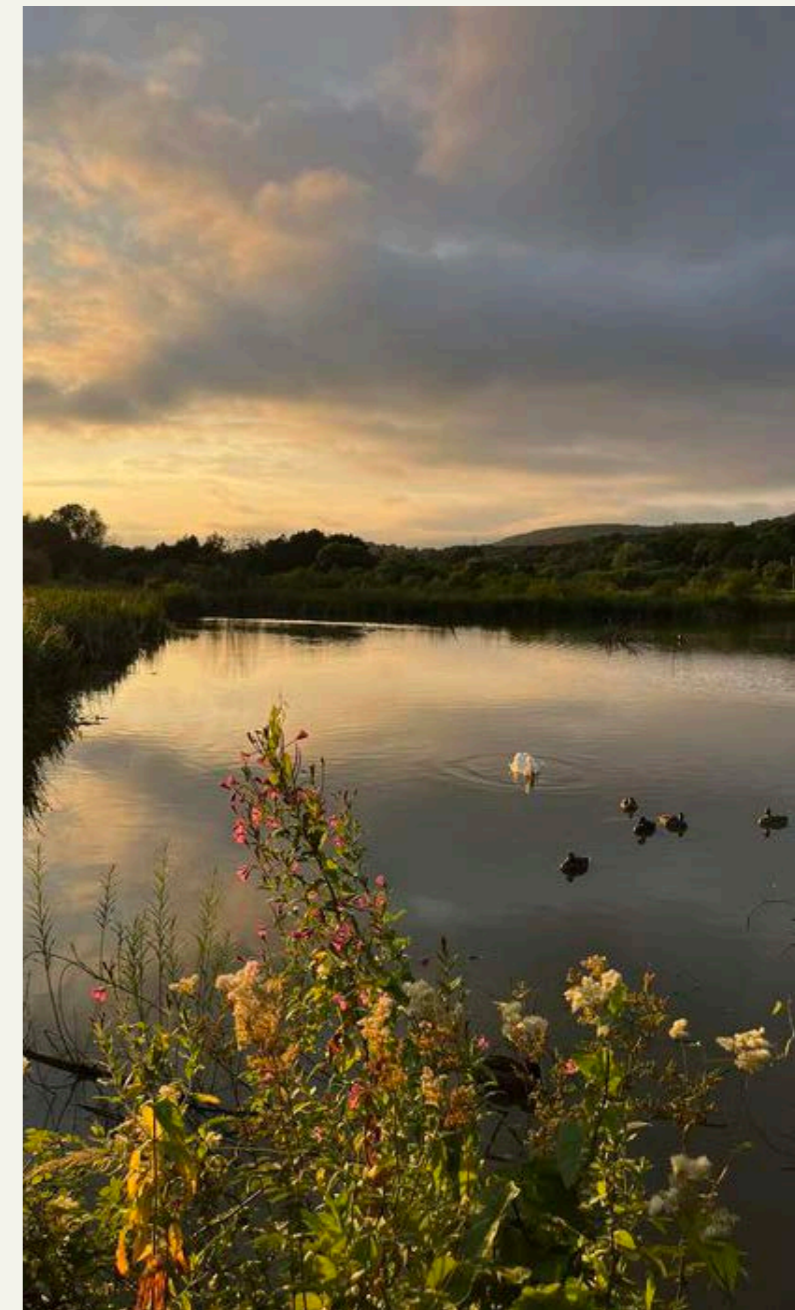
The wetlands are a much-loved environmental gem in the Cynon Valley as they act as an important flood defence for the valley as well as a haven for wildlife, local activity and wellbeing. The purchase will be made possible with funding from Cynon Taf Community Housing Group and Pen-y-Cymoedd Community Fund.

The purchase of the wetlands will ensure that, as a Group, we can achieve our strategic goal to ensure that more than 8,721 tonnes of CO₂e within land remains sequestered.

Did you know that the Cwmbach Wetlands hold up to 12,000 tonnes of CO₂e and sequesters between 61 and 88 tonnes of CO₂e per year?

We will look to support local stewardship through the Cwmbach Community Wetlands Society, who will work closely with Natural Resources Wales, the local authority and us to conserve and enhance this important area for future generations.

Throughout 2023-24, Down To Zero has supported, facilitated and shared knowledge with key organisations across the third sector, including the Bevan Foundation, as well as key individuals including elected officials. This work has meant exploring alternative economic models for socio-economic regeneration, community wealth building principles, land access for carbon capture and the importance of delivering the green agenda in our communities.





Delivering the Green Agenda

Delivering the Green Agenda

In 2023-24, we worked with Cardiff Metropolitan University to deliver a highly successful SMART Partnership that evaluated the operational carbon emissions associated with all CTCHG's activities and their existing 1,850 dwellings.

The overall baseline carbon assessment results for the Group, which show the total Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, are below:

Emissions Scope	Total Emissions (t CO2eq/y)
Scope 1	4,718.286 (+/- 734.372)
Scope 2	985.63 (+/- 23.880)
Scope 3	242
Total	5,945.916 (+/- 758.252)

This was an essential piece of work that provides a platform for all future carbon reduction and capture work for the Group. Following the carbon footprint baseline the team then developed a unique strategy to explore the reduction of their carbon and sequester and store any remaining carbon through nature and land-based solutions that will support an inclusive, rather than extractive, economy.

In February 2024, the SMART Partnership evolved into a successful Knowledge Transfer Partnership application to support innovative retrofit and offset work over the next three years for CTCHG and its housing stock.

In August 2023, Jack Nodwell, our carbon associate was highly commended at the Sustainable Ecological, Engineering and Design for Society (SEEDS) International Conference, within the category of Building Performance, Analysis and Evaluation, for his scholarly article titled 'Analysis of a Best-Fit Web Based carbon assessment tool for SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) Projects that Evaluate Operational and Embodied Carbon in Housing Stock'. This work established an effective evaluation platform for housing associations across the UK to analyse and measure lower carbon building through life cycle analysis.

Delivering Excellent Services



Delivering Excellent Services



Over the course of 2023-24, we had 158 registered participants at our Pontyclun site, including those visiting for the first time, volunteers for one-off projects and those who are a core part of our Down To Zero volunteering cohort to support our work. Of these,

- 86 were engaged as participants
- 43 were one-off volunteers
- 29 were regular volunteers

The following quotes are from some of the organisation's regular volunteers and participants. They showcase the impact of our work on individual skill development, learning and wellbeing.

'The project has helped me a lot over the past year or so, from helping me to meet new people to becoming more physically active and learning new skills and knowledge of carbon friendly planting and food growing. The project has been invaluable to helping boost my overall confidence and self-esteem.'

Leanne

Regular Volunteer and Cynon Taf Community Housing Group Tenant

'The work I've done with the project, has given a new lease of life that's helped focus my mental health and given me the chance to learn new skills, learning about how much we waste as a society and how bad it is for the environment. With our project we are trying to save as much as we can for future generations.'

Dave

Regular Volunteer and Community Member

'Participating with Down To Zero for the last year has been of an immense benefit both personally and professionally. I have had the opportunity to be involved with an innovative project that has challenged me to learn about nature-based solutions to climate change on a local basis.'

Rhys

Cynon Taf Community Housing Group Staff Member

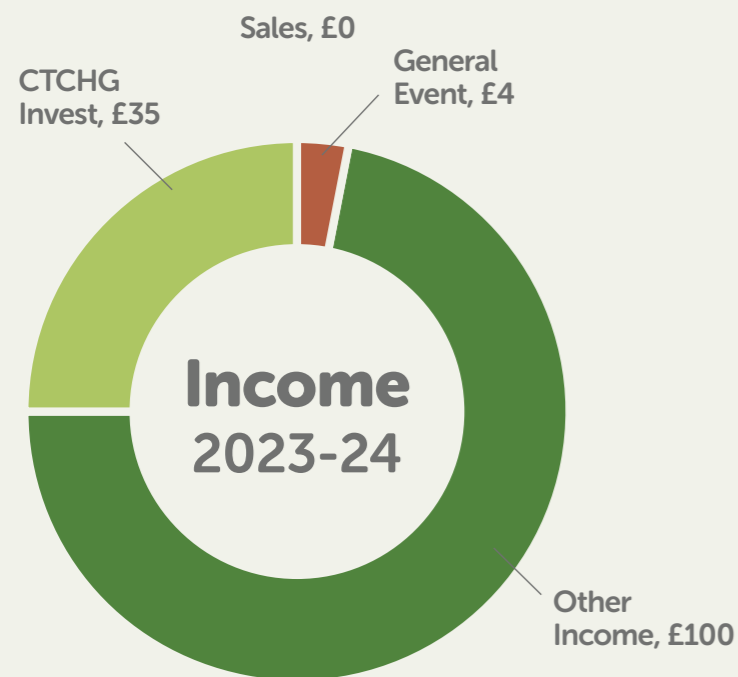
'Twelve months ago, I was in a bad place, mentally and emotionally. I was given the opportunity to volunteer in a few places, which I enjoyed but were not quite right for me. When I was told about Down To Zero, I was interested straight away. I started with one day, then three then five.'

'I'm now one of the lead volunteers on site. It has helped me tremendously with my mental health, I have regained my confidence, I am back in a working environment. I have loved learning new skills and sharing the skills and knowledge that I have. More recently we have been working with young people and adults and I have really enjoyed educating them around horticulture, preparation, gardening and teaching them new life skills.'

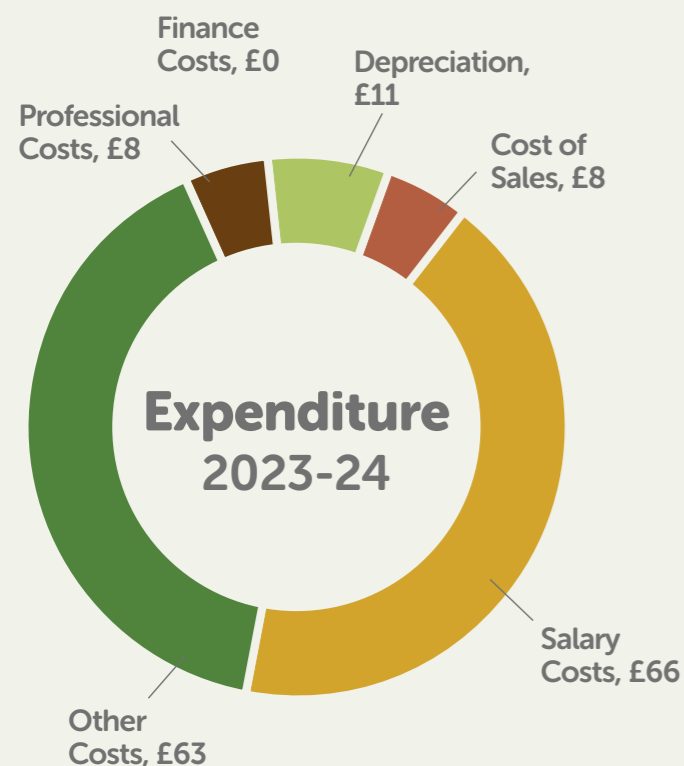
Michael

Regular Volunteer and Community Member

Protecting our Financial Sustainability



Income/Investment	2024 £,000
Sales	0
General Events	4
Other Income	100
CTCHG Invest	35
TOTAL	139



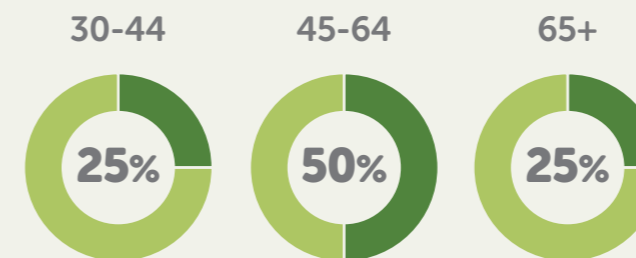
Expenditure	2024 £,000
Cost of Sales	8
Salary Costs	66
Other Costs	63
Professional Costs	8
Finance Costs	0
Depreciation	11
Total	156

Investing in Our People

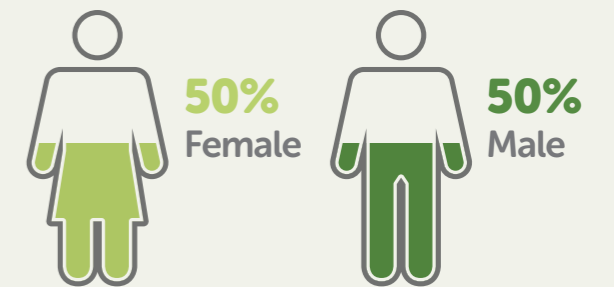
Our Board

Down To Zero is supported by a Board of eight individuals, including the Chair, who support our organisation with skills relating to the green agenda and community involvement.

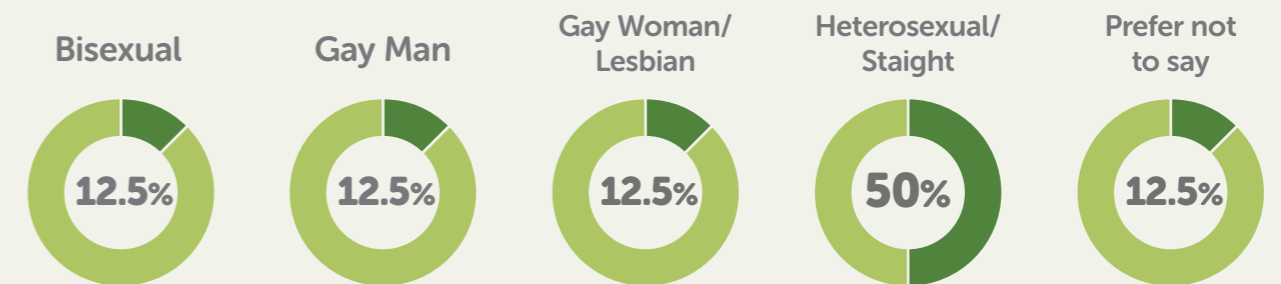
Age



Gender



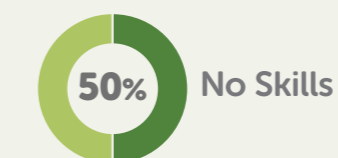
Sexual Orientation



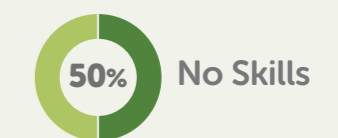
Disability



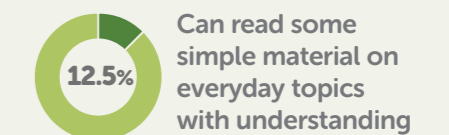
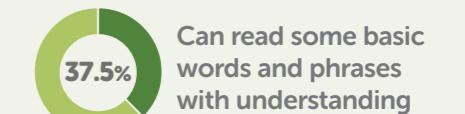
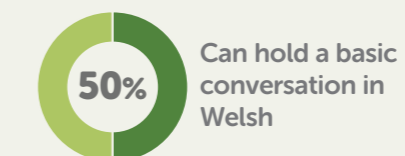
Welsh Language (Speaking)



Welsh Language (Reading)



Ethnic Origin



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