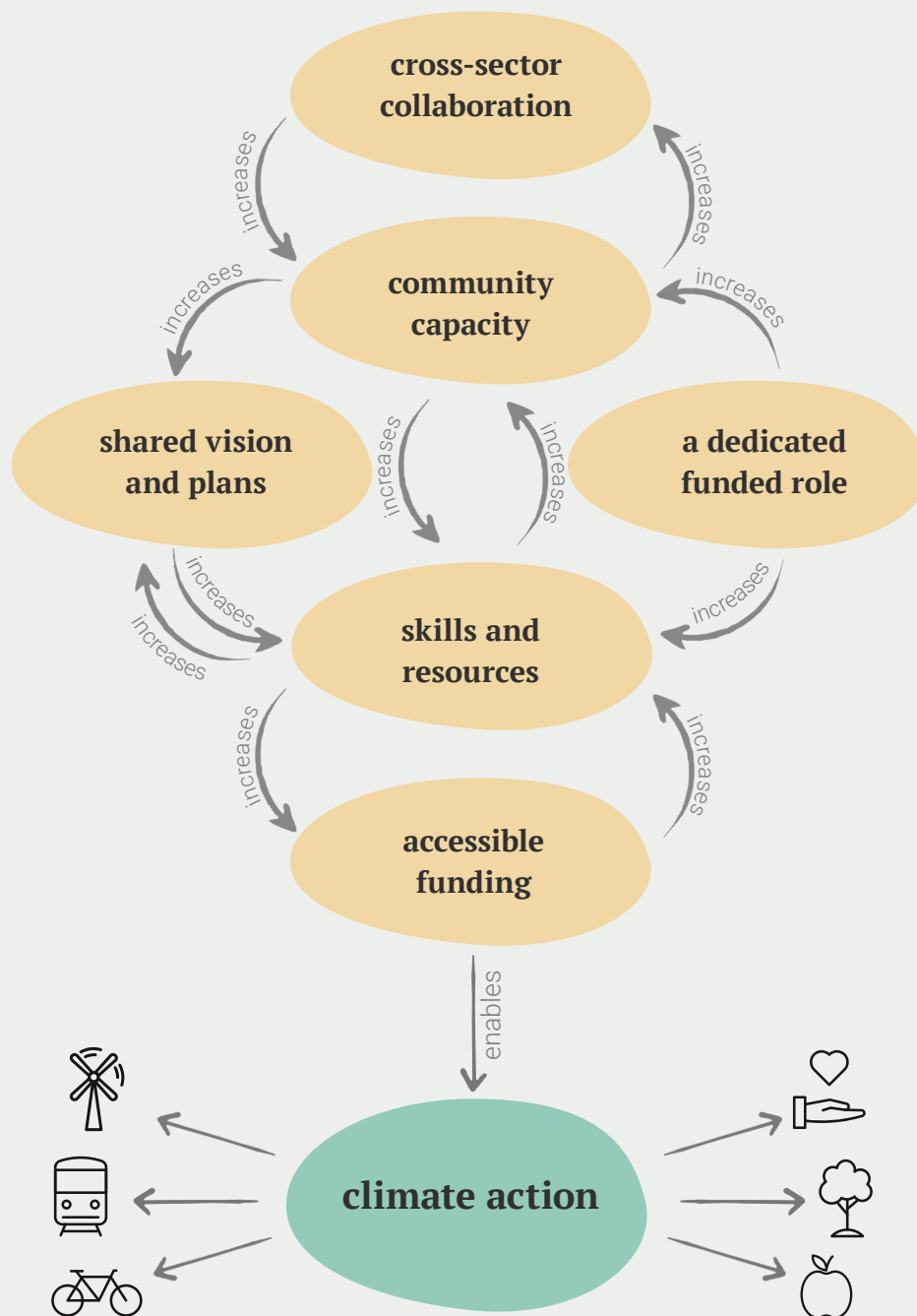


# Systems Thinking - Understanding Enablers and Barriers to Community-Led Climate Action



# Understanding Systemic Barriers to Community-Led Climate Action

Why is it sometimes so difficult to see change happen in a place? There is often a network of issues which interweave and make change and decision making more difficult.

In our work in nine very different Scottish towns, we noticed factors which were helping some places (enablers) and creating challenges (barriers) in others. Factors such as community capacity or sense of agency. We used a process known as "systems thinking" to explore these factors.

## What is systems thinking?

Systems thinking is an approach for holistically understanding a topic and how it functions as part of a wider system. Systems thinking helps focus efforts where they can have the most impact and reduce the likelihood of actions having unintended consequences. This is particularly relevant in the context of climate action, as climate change is woven across many different topics (health, transport, energy, housing, greenspaces). Visuals and diagrams are used to simplify and understand systems.

## How we used systems thinking in Climate Action Towns

By mapping the system, we were able to identify 15 key enablers and barriers to community-led place based climate action. Six of these factors are fundamental to enable climate action and are shown in the diagram on the cover of this document. This helped us understand where to focus resources. For example, in year two we decided to focus on building community capacity as this was identified as a key barrier to climate action.

## For example

We tested the systems maps in workshops in three of the towns. Community members and organisations from each town came together and discussed their progress across the fifteen factors, scoring each as a strength or weakness. Participants confirmed that this was helpful as it showed where to focus their resources to enable change or progress.

## Reading the systems diagram

There is no start or finish. A systems diagram is a way to illustrate the complex systems.

Each factor can be both an enabler and a barrier in how it interacts with the whole system.



**“ I will keep using this systems diagram in my work to think about the bigger picture. We can use it as a baseline in our planning. ”**

Workshop Participant  
Campbeltown

# Workshop Plan - Exploring Enablers and Barriers to Climate Action in Your Own Place

## Activity

## Overview

## Resources

### Welcome

10 Minutes

- Give a short overview of the timings and aim of the session.
- Ask everyone to introduce themselves by sharing their name and what their interest in the session is.

### Read the handout

10 Minutes

- Read through this document to the group. Covering what systems thinking is, where this map has come from and what the 15 key factors are.
- Ask the group if they have any questions.

A4 handout

### Exploring the enablers and barriers in your town

1 hour +

- Place the map in the middle of the table. Divide into smaller groups if there are too many people to read it.
- Talk through all of the factors, starting with the 6 fundamental factors in the middle in green.
- Discuss and score each factor. Use a 'red, amber, green' scale to score where red = weakness, green = strength, yellow = in between, an area for improvement". Colour the box with red/amber/green stickers or pens.
- For each factor, you can prompt discussion by asking "What is [factor] like in [town name]?" "Is this a strength or a weakness?" "How would you score this in red, amber or green?"
- Write down 2-3 short reasons why you have scored the factor this way e.g. "good collaboration between the community, businesses and council".

Large printed system map(s)

Pens

Red, amber, green stickers or pens

### Reflection and next steps

10-15 minutes

#### As a group discuss:

- Overall, what are the strengths and what are the weaknesses in our town?
- Which areas should we prioritise to work on next?
- What have we learnt from doing this?

Make a note of next steps and actions arising from the workshop

# Definitions of Systemic Enablers and Barriers



## Systems Thinking in a complex world

We live in a complex world where everything is interconnected. Systems thinking is an approach for holistically understanding a topic and how the topic functions as part of a wider system. It involves seeing the whole picture, observing the relationships between things, identifying underlying causes, accepting that behaviours are not always linear or logical, and that systems constantly change over time. Visuals and diagrams are often used to simplify and understand systems.

# The 15 Enablers and Barriers are:



## Using systems thinking in Climate Action Towns

We have used systems thinking to identify 15 underlying enablers and barriers to climate action across all nine towns. We produced a system map illustrating how they are connected. The map has helped the team understand where to build local capacity and focus our support.

# 1

## Access to information and knowledge

Availability of reliable, clear information and knowledge. Communication of information amongst local networks. Plus, the transparency and accessibility of processes.

# 2

## Awareness of climate change

Experience of local climate impacts. Exposure to climate change through social, educational and professional networks. Influence of local and national media.

# 3

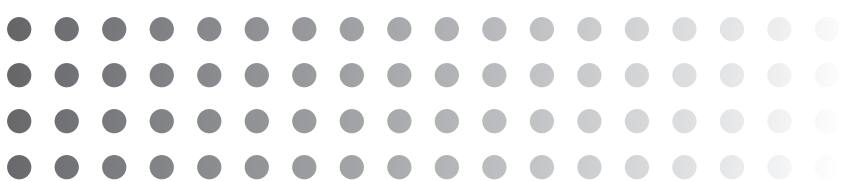
## Community capacity

The community's ability to organise actions, bring people together and give time and energy. Supported by constituted groups and accessible places to meet.

# 4

## Community cohesion

The ability of different people and groups within a community to work together.





**5**

**Competing priorities**

Other important priorities which compete for attention, at individual and town scale. Such as the cost-of-living crisis, health and employment.

**6**

**Cross-sector collaboration**

The ability of community groups, local organisations and regional partners from different sectors to work together in a place to deliver climate actions.

**7**

**Dedicated funded role**

The presence of a paid role with dedicated time to progress ideas, bring groups together and deliver climate action in a place.

**11**

**National and regional strategies**

Overarching strategies from local authorities or governments on climate change and connected topics, such as transport.

**12**

**Sense of agency**

A belief the community can influence change, community culture (apathy vs. proactive), history of people influencing change locally.



These are the 15 underlying enablers and barriers we identified across all nine Climate Action Towns.

**8**

**Funding**

Availability of relevant financial support for climate actions, from small to large scale. Accessible processes, timescales, funding mechanisms and ease of finding.

**9**

**Local leaders**

Local individuals or organisations who are passionate about climate change or their community, have a compelling vision and motivate other people to join in.

**10**

**Misinformation**

Misleading information about climate change shared on social and national media, from common misconceptions to conspiracy theories.

**13**

**Skills and resource**

Skills and resource from local people and organisations to support climate action. Such as writing funding applications, facilitating collaboration and implementing ideas.

**14**

**Understanding of geographical assets**

Ability to identify and understand local geographical assets with potential to support climate action.

**15**

**A shared plan or vision**

A Shared Plan or Vision for your place, bringing together community groups to develop and collaborate on delivery, such as a Community Action plan or a local Place Plan.



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