

Blackford Community Fund Case Study

Tailoring Grantmaking to Village Needs



Foundation
Scotland

Highlights



Donor contributions to date of £190,108



£187,109 income from community invested funds used to support grant making



Total grants of £374,540 awarded over 17 years



35 local charities and community groups supported



Regular annual awards to over 65% of applicants



Cumulative support of £58,340 awarded to activities for older residents

Blackford Community Fund

Fund at a Glance

- Fund Donors: EDF Renewables & Ochil Developments Ltd
- Year of Fund Commencement: 2009
- Area of Benefit: Blackford Community Council Area
- Local Authority: Perth & Kinross
- Original Invested Fund Value: £250,000
- Average Annual Gains from Invested Fund: £21,470
- Initial Community Benefit Fund Value: £12,600
- Current Annual Community Benefit Fund Value £20,900

Webpage: foundationscotland.org.uk/Blackford

About the Fund Area

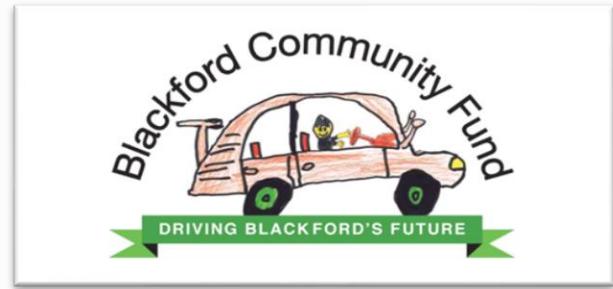


Blackford is a small village in Perth & Kinross with a population of around 900, located roughly halfway between Perth to the north and Stirling to the south. The community has many active special interest groups and a rich cultural heritage, which is preserved through local activities such as Blackford Highland Games—one of Scotland's oldest Highland Games events.

The village faces particular challenges in relation to access to services and limited public transport connections. The rural location means that retaining accessible and affordable services within the village is particularly important for long-term community sustainability. With almost 25% of Blackford's residents being over 60 years of age, supporting older residents is also a key local priority. These issues are not immediately apparent from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020 data, as higher rankings in domains such as income, health and education, offset the poorer rank associated with geographical access to services.

Fund History

The Blackford Community Fund was originally established in 2009 as a result of a £250,000 donation by Ochil developments Ltd. Blackford Community Council approached Foundation Scotland for support in considering how to best manage the donation for the long term benefit of the community.



It was agreed that the initial donation would be invested through Foundation Scotland's established endowment arrangements at the time. This involved investing the funds through Foundation Scotland's investment managers. This was a helpful option given the lack of incorporated organisations in the village that could otherwise take responsibility for the donation. The arrangement would be that funds could then be , drawn down as required for grant-making to support the local community.

It was further agreed that an Advisory Panel would be established to advise on grants, with final approval for any funds drawn down from the CIF remaining with Blackford Community Council. Foundation Scotland provided administrative and governance support for processing applications and awarding grants.

Foundation Scotland provided support in promoting opportunities to join the Panel, allowing for open nominations for any individuals with strong connections to the area through residency, work or volunteering. Induction training was provided to support the selected representatives in their role as Panel member.

In 2011, Foundation Scotland was appointed by EDF¹ to manage community benefit arrangements associated with the Burnfoot Hill wind farm in Clackmannanshire. Blackford was identified as one of the communities in the area of benefit alongside Alva, Dollar, Tillicoultry and Glendevon. A separate [case study](#), considers the impact of funds ringfenced for the Clackmannanshire area.

Blackford Community Council saw merit in bringing their community benefit allocation from the Burnfoot arrangement into their newly established arrangement and which would boost their Blackford Community Fund. This was an early example of the pooled fund arrangements that Foundation Scotland has sought to promote and broker in other multi-fund, single community contexts.

¹ As at time of set up, now known as EDF Power Solutions

Since then, annual income from community benefit funding has increased with the addition of the Burnfoot North, Rhodders, and Burnfoot East wind farms in 2014, 2015, and 2023, respectively. Together with the original Burnfoot Hill wind farm, the four wind farms are collectively known by some as the 'Burnfoot cluster', and community benefit arrangements from all four are clustered into one agreement between Foundation Scotland and EDF Power Solutions.

Between 2009 – 2016, £178,449 of grant funding was distributed, with around 40% of this being covered by the annual income received from the wind farms. Since 2017, increasing community benefit income has accounted for a greater percentage of total grants awarded each year, with community benefit income now generally sufficient to cover annual funding needs for Blackford community organisations.

However, the option to draw down additional funds from their invested fund, including the use of a portion of initial capital if required, creates additional flexibility in the event of a shortfall. This was particularly beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic when funding demand increased substantially due to many community groups being unable to generate income through their normal activities but still being required to meet core costs such as insurance cover.

It is also anticipated that the invested monies will allow the Fund to continue operating beyond the operating lifetimes of the wind farms, securing a long-lasting legacy for the Blackford community.



Fund Design and Decision Making

The Blackford Community Fund has been designed to support community groups working to benefit Blackford residents. Through discussions facilitated by Foundation Scotland with the Community Council and members of the Community Panel, deliberately broad Fund objectives were chosen so that multiple different types of initiatives could be supported. The objectives chosen were to support any activities that 'enhance quality of life', 'foster a vibrant and sustainable community' or 'promote community spirit by bringing people together'.

Initially, the Fund offered grants of up to £1,000 to groups which were formally constituted and held their own bank account. Community groups could apply once per year for an award covering projects of up to 12 months. Award limits have increased over time with increasing annual community benefit income and the scheme now offers grants of up to £2,000, with applications accepted twice yearly and an average of 18 local organisations receiving funding annually. Feedback from applicants and regular reviews of the impact which the Fund is making locally have also resulted in increased flexibility over the years, recognising the needs of smaller informal groups, long-term projects and the importance of out-of-cycle decision making in response to urgent community needs. These changes are catalogued in more depth in the Learning and Reflections section.

It was also considered that the invested fund provided flexibility to make larger sums available on an exceptional basis if any larger-scale projects were identified as a priority by the local community. However this has only happened once in 2017, when Blackford Improvement Group proposed a major redevelopment of the area's main playground and the Fund was able to offer an award of £45,774 to supplement funding already secured by the Group from Perth and Kinross Council, enabling the project to proceed.

Since 2011, funding decisions have been made by a Community Panel, comprising a representative from Ochil Development Limited), a member of Blackford Community Council, and five local residents.

The Panel sets eligibility criteria and priorities for the use of the Fund with support from Foundation Scotland, evolving in response to periodic reviews of Fund activity and impact.

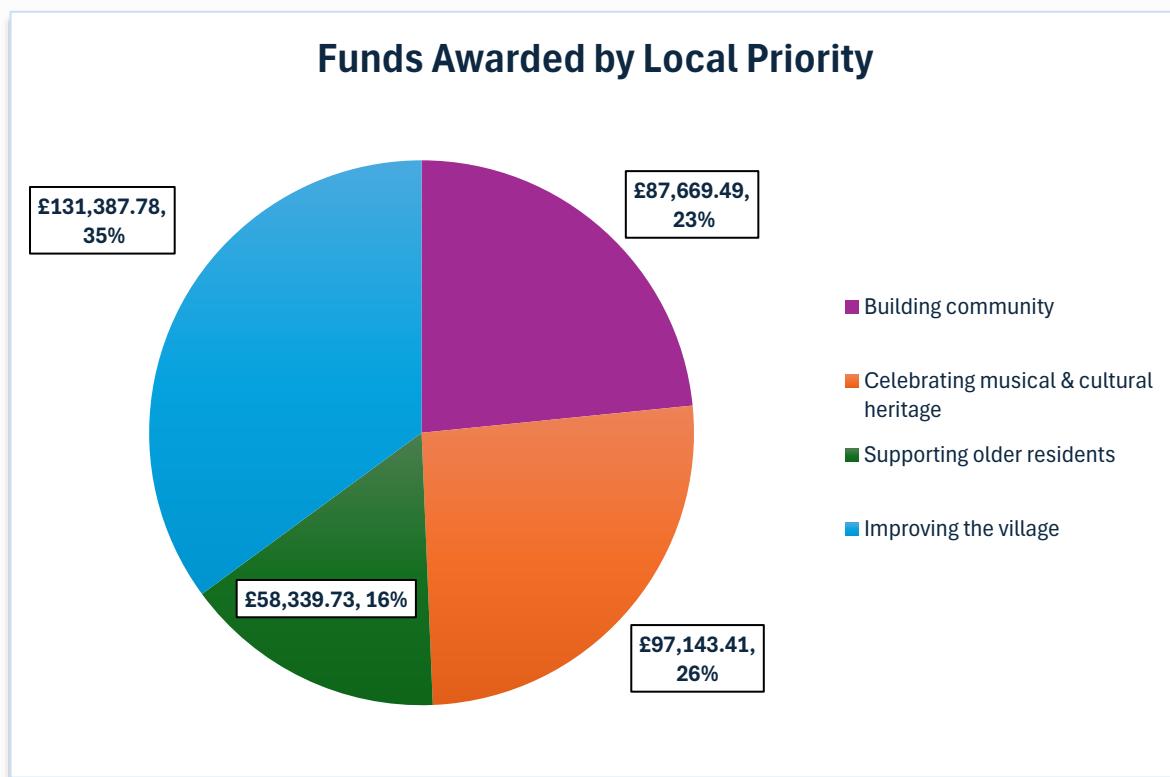
How the Fund is Making a Difference

Over 17 years of continuous grant-making, the Fund has awarded grants totalling £374,540 to 35 organisations.

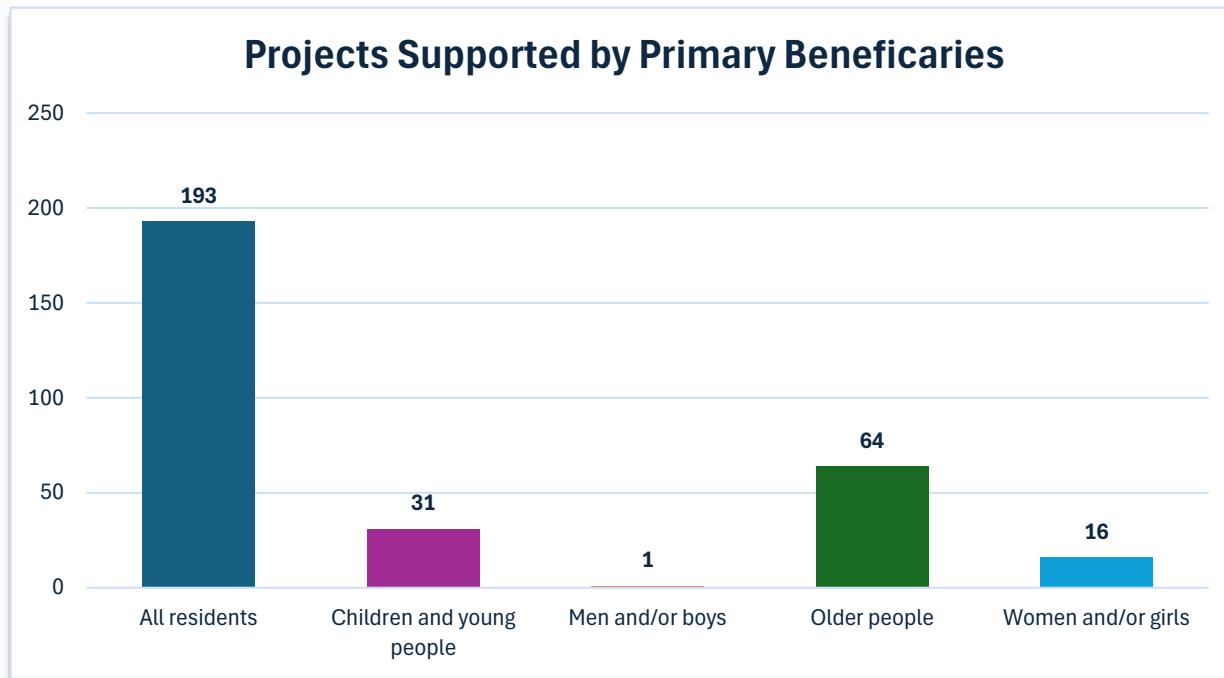
During the 10th Anniversary Fund Review in 2019/2020, it was identified that grants awarded by the Fund were making a positive difference for local residents in four key thematic areas :

- Bringing people together to build a sense of community
- Celebrating and developing Blackford's musical and cultural heritage
- Helping older residents to stay connected
- Improving the look and feel of the village

Grants awarded to date have been fairly evenly distributed across these four thematic areas as follows:



The different organisations that have been supported deliver a wide range of activities which benefit a cross-section of the village's population. Whilst the majority of activities have been open to all ages, the Fund has also made significant contributions to projects working with both older residents and children and young people.



During the Fund's set-up phase, it was recognised that with the village's high proportion of older residents and limited public transport connections, a key priority would be supporting projects that benefit older residents, particularly those providing social activity in the immediate local area.

Intergenerational lunches bringing together seniors and primary school pupils each month have been a core aspect of provision for older residents in the village. The Fund has supported the lunches with grants totalling £25,840 since 2012.

The lunches were originally hosted by the Senior Citizens' Lunch Club, in partnership with Blackford Primary School, bringing older residents and Primary 7 pupils together for a shared monthly meal.

When the Club sadly folded, Ardoch and Blackford Parish Church stepped in to continue providing this valued activity, opening the lunches to all community members and younger school pupils, continuing to encourage friendships across the generations. The Fund has been able to support this transition with grants to cover meal ingredients, musical entertainment, and food hygiene training for new volunteers.



A short case study, which can be [found here](#), provides more information about the project.

Insufficiently accessible facilities can also be challenging for older residents and those with mobility issues. A series of grants totalling just under £40,000 over ten years have supported Blackford Bowling Club to upgrade its premises, making the facilities safer and more accessible for disabled and elderly members alike. Awards have supported kitchen upgrades, installation of ramps and handrails, and ditch matting for safer outdoor access. Members of the Club have volunteered time and DIY skills to support the refurbishments, creating further opportunities to socialise and make a positive contribution to their community.

"Members helped and the new ditch matting was installed by ourselves; this has made the ditches much safer for the disabled and our elderly members."
Jacqueline Campbell, Blackford Bowling Club Committee

The Fund primarily focuses on offering small awards for regular and ongoing activities. This funding model recognises the importance of contributing to these organisations' core operational costs, such as venue rental, insurance or staff salaries. These types of costs are vital to underpinning sustainable delivery of activities, but can often be challenging to secure external funding towards, as the direct benefits to participants are less apparent.

To date, almost a quarter of all grants awarded through the Fund have focused on core costs, supporting local groups to keep their activities running from week to week. Reducing the financial pressure on organisations to meet these basic but necessary costs, also helps to ensure that fees for participants can be kept to a minimum, ensuring that activities are accessible to all.

Keeping membership fees and class costs low is once again particularly beneficial for older members who often have lower incomes and might otherwise struggle to access leisure activities. Even very small awards can make a substantial difference. For example, Blackford Crafters, which has received 12 grants all under £600, has been bringing local people together for 12 years, offering a creative outlet and opportunities to build friendships for as little as £1 per week. Read more about the project [here](#).

Similarly, grants supporting core costs, such as equipment maintenance and catering, have supported annual events such as the Gala and Festive Lighting. These yearly celebrations, bring residents all ages together to enjoy local holiday traditions - see this [case study](#) for more information.

With both the Gala Committee and the Festive Lights Group having received annual grant funding for a period of 15 years, this long term support helps volunteer committees to plan ahead, try new things, and respond rapidly to changing circumstances.



"We estimated that a total of 600 people attended the events over the week, many attending more than one event... keeping things which had worked well over lockdown, such as the scarecrow competition and making the walking treasure hunt sheets available from the start of gala."

Marjorie Sloan, Gala Committee Member

Another key area in which the Fund is making a difference is through supporting the maintenance and refurbishment of community buildings and public spaces. With over £137,000 awarded to projects supporting such improvements, the Fund has enabled a legacy of long-term benefits that extend far beyond an initial 12-month grant period.

Two key examples of infrastructure support are grants awarded to Blackford is Brighter (a group dedicated to improving the look of the village) and Ardoch and Blackford Parish Church.

Blackford is Brighter has received grants annually since the Fund's launch to create bright and eye-catching floral displays around the village each year, which you can read about [here](#).

The Church was offered a grant towards costs of installing Wi-Fi provision in the church hall, which serves as a meeting space for many community groups.

"Internet provision is an essential resource for our community and will be an ongoing project."

Sandy Marshall, Session Clerk, Ardoch and Blackford Parish Church

In addition to standard grant awards of up to £2,000, over the Fund's lifespan, six strategic, larger-scale awards have been made to support key local events and community facilities. The Community Panel was particularly proactive during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that grant-making and fund distribution continued despite the challenges of lockdown restrictions. Two major projects supported during this period were the development of a Community Cycling Club and Community Garden, both of which allowed residents to participate safely in outdoor activities, supporting social opportunities and mental wellbeing during this difficult time.



This [case study](#) details the ongoing work of the Community Garden and how it continues to make a difference to village residents, even beyond the pandemic.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

Bespoke Funding Arrangements

By combining annual community benefit income with the existing community invested funds, the Fund will be able to continue supporting community activity for many years beyond the lifespan of the Burnfoot wind farms. However, the flexibility to withdraw invested funds, if and when required, means that should funding demand exceed the annual income, additional monies are available. This reduces competition for funding between groups and encourages more partnership working between organisations. With the geographical spread of communities benefitting from the Burnfoot wind farms cluster being so wide, allocating funds to individual communities like Blackford has also allowed the Fund to focus on priorities that are specific to the area and demographics, rather than attempting to balance the needs of multiple, diverse communities.

Flexible Funding

Whilst the maximum award offered by the Blackford Fund is relatively modest compared with many grants available through other community benefit-based funds, the grant-making programme reflects the size and scale of groups operating in the area. Over the fund's lifetime, around 40% of awards have consistently been offered at the standard maximum level. This provides strong evidence that these modest awards continue to support groups in delivering consistent, reliable, and effective projects. However, in 2024 it was recognised that the maximum award had not been routinely increasing with inflation, despite annual community benefit income being index-linked. Therefore the maximum grant was raised from £1,500 to £2,000 to reflect the significant rise in costs faced by many local organisations.

Flexible funding options, which allow an organisation to receive multiple awards in the same year, where these contribute towards different activities, also create opportunities for groups to grow and develop new services or activities.



For example, Ardoch and Blackford Parish Church has received regular annual funding for intergenerational community lunches, but in 2024, the Church also sought support for a monthly Music Club, which helps build the confidence of individuals and groups to perform for a small audience.

With grants supporting both core costs and capital works, the Fund allows for groups to naturally progress from smaller start-up activities to more complex projects as organisational capacity grows. Blackford Bowling Club provides a clear example. In the first five years of the Fund, the Club received grants focused on replacing worn-out equipment, but as the committee gained confidence and skills, applications began to focus on building refurbishment, such as roof repairs and upgrades to the Club toilet facilities.

Whilst groups must be formally constituted to be eligible for a grant, the Fund has also created opportunities for smaller, unincorporated organisations to access awards through arrangements with existing constituted organisations, such as Blackford Study Group.

The Study Group acts as a constituted parent organisation for four informal community groups: Blackford Bells, Blackford Crafter, Blackford Sings, and Women Make Your Mark. This structure allows lower-capacity groups with small numbers of volunteers to access funds whilst sharing core costs, such as insurance cover, where a single policy can cover the activities of all sub-groups.

Responsive Decision Making

The Panel based model of decision-making is effective at identifying emerging community needs, as panel members have strong connections to the area. As the Panel responsible for setting fund criteria and priorities, as well as making decisions on applications, the Fund is able to be more responsive when needed, offering out-of-cycle decisions for urgent funding needs and larger grants where more substantial investment is required.

This was particularly important in supporting the ongoing maintenance of Blackford Highland Games Park. The park is leased to the Highland Games Committee by a local landowner on condition that the Games take place there each year. Outwith the Games season the park is available for the whole community to enjoy. Committee volunteers take on responsibility for maintaining the area, including mowing a grass area of 11 acres. When the organisation's ride-on mower broke down, the Fund was able to respond rapidly, offering an award of £15,608 to fully cover the shortfall needed for a replacement.

Supporting Digital Integration

Over the 17 years of the Fund's lifespan to date, there have been several major changes in the grant funding landscape. One of the most notable is the increasing move towards fully digital processes for applications, grant acceptance and reporting.

Along with many other funders, Foundation Scotland has moved towards more online processes, which do suit the vast majority of current applicants across the funds it administers. However, with limited broadband provision in the Blackford area and high numbers of older long-serving volunteers on many committees, some local organisations have found the increasing requirement for digital engagement challenging.

Foundation Scotland has sought to enable funding to continue reaching such groups through a designated contact who can provide telephone-based advice and support.



In 2023, the Panel also agreed to pioneer a simplified application process for organisations delivering ongoing or annual activities. Groups applying for funding for previously funded projects are asked to provide a short confirmation statement that activities are ongoing, along with predicted costs for the year ahead.

This removes the requirement to complete a full application form, where the majority of information remains unchanged from year to year. However, the need to balance bespoke support with consistent processes means that some level of engagement with standardised systems is still needed. Foundation Scotland is currently undertaking a review of how end-of-grant reporting data is collected, seeking to make this process more accessible and streamlined.

It is expected that once completed, this will reduce the administrative burden of reporting, making it easier for groups to demonstrate how their projects have positively impacted the community.

Building Lasting Relationships

With more than 65% of applicants receiving funding over multiple years, through consecutive one year awards. These grants have become a cornerstone of enabling groups to deliver projects that meet local needs. On average, once an organisation makes a successful application, it has received subsequent annual grants for periods of 10 years or more. Even for newer groups that have more recently engaged with the Fund, the majority show a pattern of year-on-year funding rather than sporadic support. This long-term investment helps retain key community services and facilities that might otherwise be consolidated into more centralised and urban areas due to financial pressures.

Looking Forward

The Fund demonstrates how a tailored grantmaking strategy can work well for a small community, with grants awarded to date primarily focused on maintaining the status quo in the area. Whilst this creates a strong foundation to ensure that the many and varied activities taking place in the village can continue without placing any undue financial burden on residents, it does mean that the Fund's impact in terms of larger-scale community development projects has been limited.

With such high levels of community activity in the area, it is relatively unusual that no development focused anchor organisation has emerged from the existing local organisations. It has been noted, during reviews of the Fund that groups delivering more substantial infrastructure projects, such as the park redevelopment, could progress towards incorporated status to enable a more development approach. However, skills gaps in volunteer pools, and there being no immediate need for further infrastructure development, have resulted in no further expansion of such groups.

Looking forward, the Panel is considering how the Fund might further support repeat applications for smaller grants through opportunities for multi-year funding. Multi-year awards can enable long-term planning and strengthen governance for smaller organisations by reducing financial risks. In Autumn 2025, the Fund will pilot three-year grants for eligible groups delivering community-wide events, such as the Gala Week and Festive celebrations.

Opportunities to support larger-scale projects continue to be limited. However, Foundation Scotland will work closely with the Community Panel to consider how the Fund might be able to support such activities in future.

Conclusion

The Blackford Community Fund demonstrates how investing in reliable, ongoing financial support contributes to a more successful and sustainable community. Investment in community buildings supports the retention of services locally, and awards for social activities help residents to build connections.

Grants supporting annual celebrations ensure these remain affordable for all, regardless of financial circumstances. All of these elements help to build community resilience.

The Fund also showcases how even relatively small grants can have a significant local impact, allowing organisations to grow and develop over time. Flexibility is built into the arrangement to allow for offering more substantial awards in response to emerging community needs, but careful consideration will be required to determine how the Fund could more actively encourage local groups to progress towards more developmentally focused projects and activities.

The long-term nature of the EDF Burnfoot cluster community benefit arrangement facilitates building strong relationships with local organisations. This longevity is further strengthened by the invested endowment, which will allow the Fund to continue operating beyond the lifespan of these wind farms.



Foundation
Scotland

