

How Loveland offers  
**community, well-being,  
food, nature, education,  
skills and hope.**

*I think it's such a **magical place** and I hope it stays and continues to **bring our community together, grow food, educate, and offer a safe and welcoming green space** for those in Penryn and the wider area!*

**Becky Fry. Tim Hughes. Molly Bond.**

University of Exeter Bridging Communities

**The Loveland Community**

Love Lane, Penryn, Cornwall. <https://falmouthfood.coop/loveland>



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# Executive Summary

Hi, we are Becky, Tim and Molly, an interdisciplinary research team from the University of Exeter, based on the Penryn campus in Cornwall. We share interests in growing food, community resilience and well-being, and improving access to land for people to connect with nature.

This report aims to :

- **Outline and explore the many benefits that Loveland community field offers the Falmouth and Penryn community.**
- **Explore the future needs of the Loveland community, so they can continue to reach their 5 key aims:**

*Enhance wellbeing*

*Nurture community resilience*

*Produce local food*

*Improve the condition of the land as a space for learning*

*Increase biodiversity*

We held conversations with the Loveland community and a volunteer survey during spring and summer of 2024. These showed Loveland to have a positive impact on:

- **Community connection**
- **Well-being**
- **Food system awareness**
- **Climate anxiety and hope**
- **Education**

We would like to give huge thanks to all of Lovelands' volunteers for welcoming us, and contributing their time to get involved in our research.

We hope that you find this report useful in understanding the importance of Loveland to the Falmouth and Penryn community. If you have any questions about our findings, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Tim

Becky

Molly

[t.h.hughes@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:t.h.hughes@exeter.ac.uk) [b.fry@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:b.fry@exeter.ac.uk) [m.r.bond@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.bond@exeter.ac.uk)

# Background

## Loveland

Loveland is an 8-acre community field project in Penryn, Cornwall, which began in 2021. It is next to St Gluvias Church, and is leased to Falmouth Food Co-op by the Diocese of Cornwall as a space for community, food growing and nature. The field encompasses a range of land-based projects, such as: a **market garden, community vegetable plot, medicinal herb garden, fruit and nut orchard, and skill-sharing events.**

Loveland is one of Falmouth Food Co-op's 3 initiatives – alongside a grocery supporting local food growers, and a kitchen delivering free healthy meals to those in need.

## Research origin

This research project arose from the Loveland communities' need for a volunteer coordinator for Saturday community sessions, and the opportunity to work together with university staff and students to understand the benefits that Loveland brings to the local community and how to grow Loveland's positive impact.

£5000 was secured from the **University of Exeter Bridging Communities Fund** to employ a Saturday volunteer coordinator to lead weekly community sessions (Eve), a community researcher (Becky), and a photographer/filmmaker (George). **This provided valuable direction and education for the Saturday volunteers**, and led to the creation of this report and the short podcast series Plen an Powes.

The success of the project has led to a further £10,000 of funding from the University of Exeter Bridging Communities Fund to help deepen local community engagement in Loveland through acting on the findings of this research.

## Volunteers attend Loveland on Wednesdays and Saturdays,

and help with maintenance and growing vegetables on the commercial and community vegetable plots.

## Lovelands' five key aims:

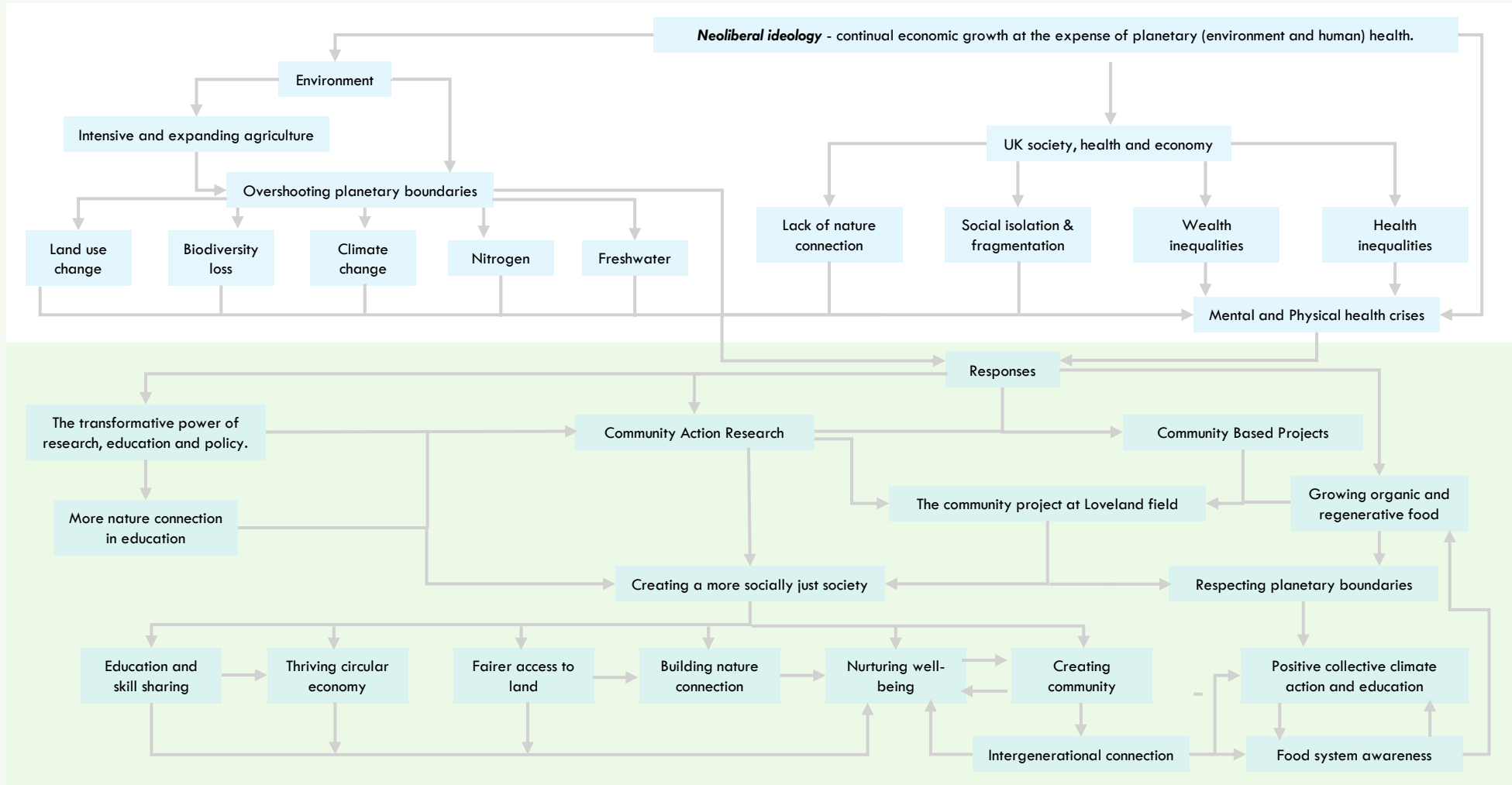
- Enhance wellbeing
- Nurture community resilience
- Produce local food
- Create a space for education and skill-sharing
- Increase biodiversity



Aerial view of Loveland field

# Background

## How Loveland field contributes towards a greener, healthier and fairer future.



A diagram of UK environmental and social issues. Exploring how transformative research, education and policy can provide environmental and social benefits through supporting community-based projects, such as the Loveland community growing field.

# Background

## Mental health & Well-being in the UK

Out of 71 studied countries, the UK has the **joint highest number of people in mental distress**, and the **second worst overall measure of mental health** (Sapien, 2024).

Mental well-being includes specific aspects of mental function: *Mood and Outlook, Drive and Motivation, Cognition, Social Self, Mind-body Connection and Adaptability & Resilience* (Sapien, 2024). Average mental well-being has been found to be lower in countries with higher economic metrics such as per capita GDP (Sapien, 2024). Mental well-being is also lower in younger age groups (Sapien, 2024).

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as “a state of well-being, in which the individual realises their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community” (Newson & Thiagarajan, 2020).



Seedlings at Loveland

## Nature connectedness

The planetary crises display that **in global society, the human-nature relationship is failing** (Richardson et al., 2021). **Higher levels of nature connectedness (relating to an individual's relationship with nature) correlate with higher levels of well-being and a high level of ecological behaviour, compared with environmental education alone** (Otto and Pensini, 2017). Increasing nature connection is thus suggested as a solution to mitigate the planetary and public health crises (Martin et al. 2020).



Privet hawkmoth at Loveland



Baby wrens in Loveland cabin

## Research aims

1. Explore the impact of Loveland community growing project on food system awareness, climate anxiety, wellbeing, community resilience, and education.
2. Understand how Loveland can act to achieve its five key aims: enhance wellbeing, create a space for education and skill sharing, nurture community resilience, increase biodiversity, and produce local food.



The location of Loveland community field<sup>4</sup>



Artwork for the short podcast series accompanying this research

Loveland's' aims closely align with the University of Exeter's purpose to use **the transformative power of education and research to 'create a sustainable, healthy and socially just future'**.

## Methods

The research team created and **shared a survey on participants' experiences at Loveland, based around Lovelands' 5 key aims.**

Questions were centred around themes of community, well-being, climate change perceptions, and thoughts on Loveland's' future needs ([link](#)). This included a range of qualitative and quantitative questions. It was shared widely at Loveland Saturday volunteer sessions throughout May-July 2024, through the Loveland volunteer group chat, and at events, such as the Loveland summer solstice feast. It should be noted data was not collected as extensively from Wednesday volunteer sessions, due to research time constraints. This presents an opportunity for further research, to ensure the full demography of Loveland is captured.

Conversations with some members of the Loveland community were also recorded to understand and share their experiences of Loveland in more detail. These were focused on people closely involved in the Saturday community sessions. Highlights from the conversations were released as a series of short video podcasts called "**Plen An Powes**" (a place to rest), edited by George Steedman Jones ([link](#)). Please also check out Becky's video introduction to the research [here](#).

## The researchers

The researchers (Becky, Tim and Molly) are also Loveland volunteers who have experienced positive well-being from the community and nature connections they have made through Loveland and other experiences working in regenerative agriculture. They believe in the importance and benefits of community growing. They have brought these experiences and beliefs to the research with the aim to support Loveland's aims and community and so that others may benefit from similar positive experiences.

# Findings

## 1. The Community

Community was the **number one motivation for people to attend Loveland field:**



When asked what is the best thing about Loveland, many spoke of the social benefits:

*'The best thing about Loveland is **community acceptance, with no judgement or expectation.** You can work at your own pace. It encourages teamwork, it encourages creativity...'*

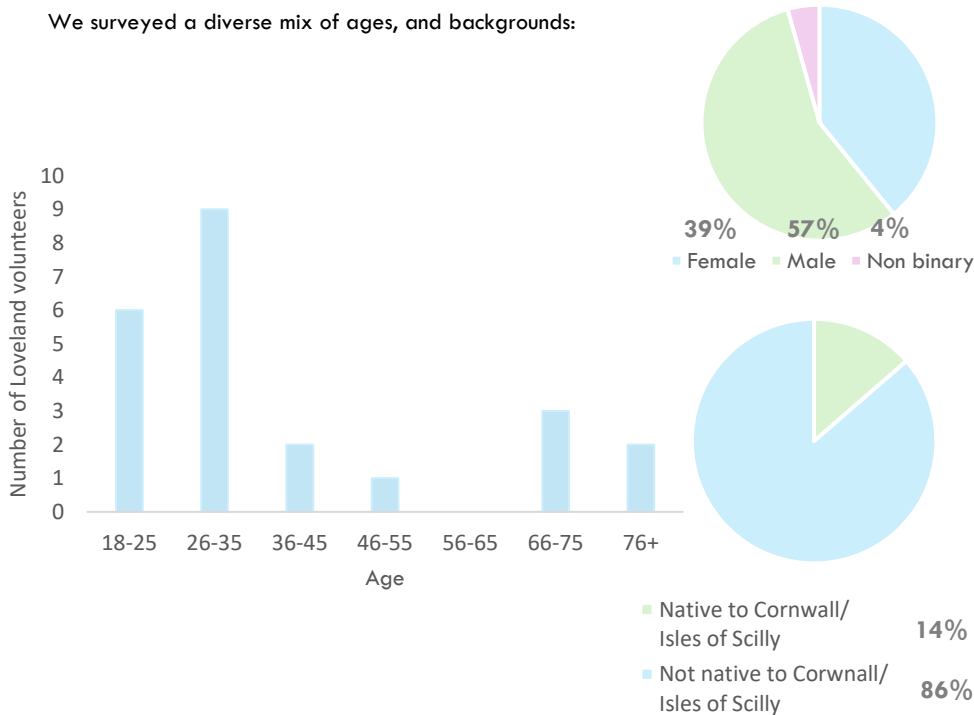
*'The best thing about Loveland is the community it has created... not just a woodland to walk through, but a community space where you can learn about growing veg...'*

*'The best thing about Loveland is socialising in an active way, outdoors ... I get to learn things from people who I would never otherwise meet'*

*'Intergenerational constructive conversations are **good for my wellbeing**'*

### A) Intergenerational connection & Demography

We surveyed a diverse mix of ages, and backgrounds:



The number one reason people attend Loveland is to: **feel connected to other people**



Above: Loveland summer solstice feast, 2024



Left: Loveland community garden

# Findings

## 2. Wellbeing

Many participants spoke of the way Loveland has improved their health:

*'Being at Loveland helped to start and continue the journey of pulling me out of a psychotic breakdown. Even when I feel distressed or mentally out of it, I still want to be there'*

*'Loveland is small, but it has had an outsized effect on my wellbeing, in particular, my ability to deal with anxiety and depression'*

*'Loveland provides a space away from studying and a place of peacefulness'*

*'I need to get out in the sun and act productively to improve my wellbeing'*

*'Loveland has massively benefited my physical and mental health'*

*'I notice every time I come, I feel calmer and more fulfilled... I often avoid group events, but I find Loveland is a great place to challenge social anxiety and get out of my head'*



Loveland welcome sign

# 100%

Of participants stated that  
volunteering at Loveland has  
improved their overall  
wellbeing.

When we asked **how** Loveland had improved their wellbeing:



91% said connecting with other people

88% said connecting with nature

79% said taking notice and being present

70% said learning

67% said being physically active



Loveland information board



## Findings

### 3. Positive Community Led Climate Action

#### A) Food system awareness

For many participants, volunteering at Loveland is their way of working towards a more **sustainable food system**:

*'As a zoology student, looking after biodiversity is especially important ... practices like **organic growing is exactly what we need**'*

*'I'm interested in community growing and self sufficiency as a means to **reduce consumption of mass-produced products** that are destroying the environment'*

*'Producing food is critically important. Climate change and biodiversity loss threaten our ability to do that... We must work to **reduce the use of pesticides, toxic chemicals and fertilisers**'*

*'Volunteering at Loveland is linked to my **desire to learn how to create a better food system** that mitigates the climate and ecological crisis'*

*'I've learnt some really cool things about medicinal plants, heritage grains and market garden growing practices. I buy food directly from the FFC grocery, so it's nice to know the food is coming from Loveland'*

Among surveyed Loveland participants...



50%

do not have access to land where they can grow food other than at Loveland



67%

had their food choices affected by attending Loveland volunteer sessions



65%

have their **everyday food choices impacted by the way food is produced**



Potatoes growing at Loveland



Growing in Loveland's polytunnel

## Findings

### B) Climate anxiety and grief



Seedlings in Loveland's polytunnel

Most participants at Loveland were **extremely concerned about the climate and biodiversity crisis.**

63%

Of Loveland volunteers were **extremely concerned** about the biodiversity crisis.

95%

Of Loveland volunteer participants were **concerned** (50%) or **extremely concerned** (45%) about the climate crisis.

### C) Positive climate action

However, involvement with Loveland was highlighted to be of vital importance in **enabling positive action:**

*'Being at Loveland always makes me feel more **positive about the world**'*

*'It feels good to have something so **tangible to channel energy into**'*

*'After years of burnout and national and international climate action...**Loveland provides hope...** I am able to work on a cause I care about without burning myself out'*

*'It provides hope to see so many people with **care about climate change and local food systems**'*

*'[Loveland] provides **space between activism for like-minded people to discuss concerns.** It acts as a **different method of envisioning a better world**'*

# Findings

## 4. Education and Skill Sharing

Loveland was highlighted as an **incredibly valuable education and skill sharing hub**. Participants felt that they had learnt the following skills:

### Growing

- Planting schedules
- Growing seasonal veg
- Agroecological practices
- Testing and monitoring soil health
- No dig methods
- Harvesting and preparing veg
- Organic pest management
- Coppicing

### Traditional skills

- Construction
- Kimchi making
- Making tea from plants
- Cooking
- Wood working
- Charcoal making
- Mindfulness and meditation
- Building a compost toilet



Volunteers preparing the ground



## 5. A space of Hope

Again and again, the word **Hope** arose in our findings, signifying what Loveland means to those involved in the project:

*'I have learnt that a wren can lose its fear in humans. That huddling together in the drizzle in March can be fun. That everyone can contribute something, given the space to find yours'*

*'I have learnt to take time with the earth, and all it needs'*



Loveland growing info

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# Needs and Recommendations

The research illuminated what Lovelands needs, to enable it to continue to achieve its 5 key aims. The recommendations are as follows:

## 1. Volunteer Coordination

**To continue Loveland Saturday volunteer session, ongoing funding must be secured for Eve's role,** currently provided by the University of Exeter Bridging Communities Funding

*'We must never lose those who lead each volunteer day. Without that leadership, it [Loveland] could not be successful. It needs direction. Funding is imperative'*



Finn: Loveland's market garden grower



Eve: Loveland's community grower



Loveland's grains project

## 2. Educational and Skill Sharing Workshops

Below are the topics that participants said they would like to learn more about:

### Growing

- Propagation (seed sowing)
- Companion planting
- Plant and crop ID
- Grafting
- Pruning
- Pest control
- Seed saving
- Composting
- Scything

### Traditional skills

- Cooking classes
- Off-grid living
- Preservation and fermentation
- Processing grain
- Woodturning
- Painting and Art
- Environmental storytelling
- Willow weaving



### 3. Increase accessibility.

80% of surveyed participants had heard about Loveland through **word of mouth**. Of surveyed participants, only 14% grew up in Cornwall or the Isles of Scilly. This suggests that there may be barriers to local communities in accessing or finding out about Loveland. To reduce inequality within the Falmouth and Penryn area, Loveland could work to integrate more of the local community.



Loveland's accessible compost loo



Loveland's cabin and shelter

### 4. Support the relationship between Loveland and the Universities of Exeter and Falmouth

# 54%

Of surveyed participants were connected to the Universities (38% Exeter, 17% Falmouth). Of those who were connected to the universities, 38% were linked to the **Department of Ecology and Conservation** at the University of Exeter.

#### Identified links

- Wellbeing department
- Belmont garden at Woodlane campus
- Eco society
- Green Living society
- Penryn Produce society
- Renewable Energy society

### 5. Future research



# 67%

of participants stated they were interested in being involved in further community research at Loveland

#### Identified research interests

A Biennial report - quantifying food and herbal medicine production, wellbeing benefits, learning and skills development, and community engagement.

Analysis of the benefits of connection with Loveland's intergenerational community.

Monitoring equality, diversity and inclusivity and identifying barriers to engagement and how these can be lessened.



Loveland's debating tree



Loveland's pond

**How can we work together to progress this research and broaden community engagement at Loveland?**

# Acknowledgements

This report is brought to you by the **University of Exeter Bridging Communities Fund**, which is intended to support participatory research through collaboration between community projects and university researchers.

We would like to thank the wonderful Loveland volunteers, for welcoming and sharing their special place with us.

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Loveland feast menu



Loveland's fire pit



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7. All photographs are courtesy of Tim Hughes and George Steedman Jones. <https://georgesteedmanjones.com/>
8. Information about Loveland provided in the report is courtesy of the many Loveland participants who kindly offered their time for conversations and completing our survey. Some quotes have been edited very slightly to correct for typographical errors and include context, without changing their meaning.

Loveland's tea garden

Cover image: Loveland's medicine garden



If you have any questions or would like to get involved in research collaborations, please [contact us](#). Thank you ☺