

Britain in Bloom

transforming local communities

Social, economic, environmental, transformational: the far-reaching impacts of Britain's biggest community horticulture movement



**RHS BRITAIN
IN BLOOM**



Foreword

Transforming Communities

There is no doubt that Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood truly capture the enormous power of volunteers, people who are totally committed to their community giving their time generously and selflessly and often bringing about a life-changing and far-reaching transformation of their local area.

This report includes many inspiring stories of incredible achievement, in some instances whole cities brought back to life through gardening. There are so many examples worthy of mention, but for me, a few that stand out include the people of Moss Side, Manchester, where neighbours who had never spoken to each other before, became firm friends over the hanging baskets; in Cumbernauld Community Park, Glasgow, where swallows and wildflowers have returned; and Brightlingsea, Essex where a small group of residents came together to transform their town and increase local pride, attracting more and more people who care passionately about the environment. All of these significant changes have been brought about by people who believe in community gardening.

These changes are truly transformational, from fostering strong communities and building civic pride, to making the local area a better place to live by reducing crime, helping local businesses, creating investment and employment, along with improvements to social needs such as training the long-term unemployed. But it's also about creating beautiful spaces and improving the wider environment through attracting more wildlife and, of course, having fun.

As this report concludes, Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood are making a major difference in the UK today, perhaps best summed up in the words of a member of an It's Your Neighbourhood group who said that 'since becoming involved we have an area that is looking far better than it did three to four years ago, and it's got people talking as to how we can improve our area further. It's your Neighbourhood and 'in Bloom' is the best thing that has happened to our area'.

I am very proud of every one of the people, across the UK, that make Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood what they are today. I hope you can find time to read this report, it's truly inspirational to see why gardening matters so much to our communities.

Sue Biggs
Director General
Royal Horticultural Society

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Executive Summary

Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) are community horticulture programmes changing the physical and socio-economic landscape of the UK. Organised by the Royal Horticultural Society, they involve over 2,100 communities ranging from small street-level groups to villages, towns and cities, from the Channel Islands to the north of Scotland. Volunteers give upwards of 4.4 million hours each year to improving their surroundings through gardening – the equivalent of £155 million of labour at the national minimum wage. Motivations for participation include the wish to build community spirit and pride; make aesthetic and environmental improvements; boost the local economy; and provide a focus for the community. This report, based on 231 responses to a survey of participating communities and in-depth interviews with a further 12, found that the programmes are having a significant social, economic, environmental and transformational impact on the spaces, places and people involved.

Social Impact

Building community

90% of survey respondents cited development of their community as a benefit of their participation, and it was ranked as the number one benefit of their participation – working towards a common goal and creating opportunities and spaces for people to meet, increase communication, understanding and neighbourliness. An improved visual appearance of an area, due to planting and clear-up activities, boosts community ownership and civic pride. These benefits are felt by participating volunteers and the wider community.

Investment in community

Because individuals feel more positive about the area they live in, they are more willing to contribute to its development. This includes volunteering with “in Bloom” and other civic society activities, taking greater care of their own space and making financial and in-kind donations. “in Bloom” and IYN groups are conscientious at involving other public, private and voluntary organisations within their area, which builds a groundswell of positive action.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

Over half of survey respondents said that a reduction in anti-social behaviour is a benefit of participation, 40% said that a safer environment is a benefit. Increased neighbourliness and strength of community are suggested as reasons for these reductions, as are greater respect for and sense of ownership of local spaces. In addition specific crime reduction schemes, including defensive planting have been used successfully. Reductions in incidences of crime and anti-social behaviour, improved relationships with the police and better communication all lead to a reduction in the fear of crime.

Health and well-being

Many groups grow fruit and vegetables and teach others in the community how to do so. Even with very little growing space, this increases access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Often growing skills are accompanied by cooking skills classes, encouraging individuals, especially children, to include them as a larger proportion of their diet. The physical exertion of gardening and the creation of safe, pleasant spaces to exercise also contribute to improved physical health. Participation leads to decreased isolation (especially for older people), a sense of achievement and self-confidence that support good mental health and well-being.

Economic Impact

Inward investment

The programmes attract money to participating communities. Because areas are better places to be, locals stay and visitors are attracted to spend time there. This brings revenue to local businesses, enabling them to expand and encouraging new investment. Participants also believe that by demonstrating that their area can improve they are able to attract investment from local authority and other agency funding streams. Groups are successful at raising funds to support their work and on average raise £6,044 each per year. This money comes from a range of sources including grants and trusts, events, private donations, local authority schemes and business sponsorship.

Business support

Businesses have proven keen to support community horticulture programmes and some have led local efforts. They are able to see the direct benefit to them of an improved environment, including: more customers, better revenues, and less graffiti and vandalism. Business improvements are reflected in reduced vacancy rates for business premises. Support is given as cash donations and sponsorship, in-kind gifts and volunteer time, and a commitment to maintaining their own premises and immediate environment.

Skills development

Volunteers are able to acquire a range of skills through participating including: communication, team work, organisation, fundraising and horticultural skills. This is helping individuals, particularly those at risk of social exclusion for reasons such as homelessness, long-term unemployment and offending behaviour, back into the labour market, which will have long-term economic benefits for them and their community.

Cost saving for local authorities

Local authorities benefit from the volunteer hours and environmental improvement activities of participants. One local authority estimates that from an investment of £67,000 per year towards their Britain in Bloom campaign they get back as much as £2.6 million from the work undertaken by volunteers. Savings are made in green space management, street furniture maintenance, litter collection, graffiti removal and managing anti-social behaviour. Benefits such as improved community cohesion, enhanced landscapes, revenue generation through successful high street businesses and new community maintained facilities also have a value.

Environmental Impact

Improved surroundings

Participants work to improve the quality of their environment through planting and clean-up and maintenance activities. 86% listed cleaner and greener surroundings as a benefit of their participation and it was ranked the second most valued benefit after community development. 48% of survey respondents said that they were responsible for looking after significant green space; on average these groups each looked after 15 acres of

green space.

Horticultural activities

Participants undertake a wide variety of horticultural activities depending on the type and size of space they have at their disposal and the needs of their communities. This ranges from hanging baskets and tubs on an urban street to community gardens and hectares of parkland. Planting makes places feel brighter, more cared for and a better place to be. Communities are responsible for planting an average of 53 trees, 162 shrubs and 9,921 plants and bulbs per year. If this is extrapolated for all participants it amounts to 115,000 trees, 352,000 shrubs and 21.6 million plants and bulbs being planted each year across the UK.

Clean-up activities

Nearly 70% of groups undertake litter picks, over a third maintain street furniture and a quarter remove graffiti. People value living and spending time in areas that are clean, tidy and well-kept, and it makes them feel more positive about where they live, their community and themselves. This encourages them to take better care of their environment, both in their private space and within public spaces, leading to better maintained areas and reductions in litter, fly-tipping and vandalism.

The natural environment

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said that they had seen environmental benefits as a result of their participation. Communities undertake a range of environmentally focused activities including composting and recycling, conservation and biodiversity projects and environmental clean-ups such as removal of invasive non-native species. In addition, environmentally conscious practices have led to reduced water consumption, decreased carbon emissions and increased wildlife populations.

Encouraging environmental behaviours

Leading by example and communicating environmental best practice has helped to encourage environmental behaviours amongst individual participants and the wider community. Enabling greater access to nature through enhanced green spaces has also promoted an interest in the environment. This has been particularly true in schools, which are engaged in most communities either through activities on the site of community gardens, parks etc or in their own school garden supported by participants.

Transformational Impact

Transformed spaces

The sense that a place had been significantly changed through their work was described by many of the groups. Approximately half of survey respondents listed transformation of disused space as a benefit of participation. Transformation included aesthetic improvements, changes to land use, community spirit and the “feel” of places.

Tackling problematic spaces

Often groups use gardening as a way of tackling problematic spaces: areas that were unused because of crime or fear of crime, or because they had become a focus for fly-tipping and litter. Many spaces were described as an eyesore and as making the area have a run-down and negative feel, which participants wanted to change. Other groups just wanted to make areas that were drab into something more positive and uplifting for their community.

Regeneration

Improving the physical appearance of a place can be the first step in its regeneration. Whether planting takes place on a single street or across a whole town the consequent improvements to how the place looks, and how people feel about where they live, breathes new life into an area. This encourages further action from the community and attracts others to the area, which helps boost business, encourage inward investment and importantly increases community confidence and pride, all creating a virtuous circle of improvement.

Conclusions

The RHS Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood programmes are an important tool successfully used by volunteers, NGOs, business and local authorities across the UK to:

- Foster stronger communities
- Contribute to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Help improve the health and well-being of participants and their wider communities
- Build the skills and confidence of participants
- Boost local economies
- Transform spaces and places
- Enhance natural environments

There are features of the Britain in Bloom and IYN campaigns that communities believe to be powerful in helping them achieve these benefits. These include:

- The creation of a specific goal/purpose to work towards, and the sense of satisfaction in achieving it;
- The structure and assessment criteria, which provide a framework and inspiration for action;
- Support and advice from judges and assessors; communities often really appreciated the comments and advice that they received, and felt that this helped them improve year on year;
- The flexibility about models of delivery enables communities of very different sizes, compositions and needs to determine how they participate in a way that best suits them;
- The competitive element (for "in Bloom" participants); a "bit of healthy competition" was felt by many to help motivate participants.

Local authority support is of very real value to participating communities, and a lack of it or opposition causes barriers to success. Support that communities receive varies but common themes emerged:

Access to spaces to garden: Local authorities can be reluctant to release municipal land for community gardening. Open and creative thinking and appropriate local authority resource and support to communities would enable negotiation of concerns (eg public safety) and prevent communities being deterred or improvements being slowed unnecessarily.

Support in kind: Many groups had had some form of support from their local authority in kind; this included the provision of planting equipment, plants and man power – both environmental services and community development.

Funding support: Local authorities' financial support was also very important. Funds were made available from small "community chest" type awards to major grants, and the financing of whole town and city initiatives. They also provided technical support to help communities fundraise successfully and secured business sponsorship.

Almost without exception interviewees expressed concern about how local authority cut-backs, particularly in environmental services, would impact on their work, but were resolved to continue as best they could with whatever resources they had at their disposal.

Introduction

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has supported grass roots gardening for decades. In 2001 the Society decided to invest in community horticulture in a new way and took on the responsibility of organising Britain in Bloom. Under the RHS's stewardship the campaign has changed significantly over the past 10 years, and now contains two elements, the Britain in Bloom campaign and the It's Your Neighbourhood scheme. Both programmes are aimed at supporting communities to improve their quality of life through gardening. This report is an evaluation of the impact of the programmes for participating communities. It provides analysis of a survey of 231 "in Bloom" and IYN groups and extended telephone interviews with representatives from 12 participating communities. The report focuses on four main areas of impact: social, economic, environmental and transformational. Each area is illustrated by a case study/studies of participating communities.

"in Bloom" involves over a thousand communities each year creating lasting improvements to local environments for the benefit of local residents, workers and visitors. Communities from across the UK participate, including the devolved nations and the Channel Islands. The campaign takes the form of a nation-wide competition (delivered at a regional/devolved nation and then UK-wide level) through which communities vie for a title across a range of categories based on the size of their community and their particular achievements. However, to many communities it is much more than this – it is a tool for building their community, tackling local issues and boosting civic pride and the local economy.

IYN is a scheme designed to encourage new and/or small volunteer-led community groups interested in 'greening up' their local areas to join the wider "in Bloom" campaign by registering for IYN. Although IYN is free to enter and non-competitive, participating entries are visited by assessors who serve as mentors and give realistic and helpful advice on how to make improvements and progress projects. Participants are awarded one of five certificates of achievement: Establishing, Improving, Developing, Thriving or Outstanding. Participation in this scheme has grown rapidly with over 1,100 communities participating in 2010.

Both programmes are managed by the RHS in partnership with the regional and national committees of Britain in Bloom. These committees are autonomous from, but work in partnership with, the RHS to deliver the programmes at a regional/devolved nation level. Participants enter the Britain in Bloom competition under one of 12 categories depending on the size and type of community, for the purposes of this report they have been grouped into the following categories: village, urban community, town, and city; IYN groups are treated separately. Changes have been made to both schemes to ensure that they are assessed on their environmental and community engagement achievements in addition to their horticultural achievements.

All participating communities were asked to participate in a detailed postal survey about their participation in the "in Bloom" campaign and the impact of the programmes in their area. 231 responses were received, an 11% response rate. Valid responses were received from 147 "in Bloom" groups, 69 IYN groups, 12 respondents that represented both "in Bloom" and IYN groups and 3 that did not specify. Not all groups provided answers to every question in the survey. Representatives from the regional and national groups were asked to nominate case study communities that would reflect the breadth of the programmes, geographically and socio-economically. From a pool of 30 suggested case studies 15 were selected and contacted, from which 12 structured telephone interviews were undertaken with the lead contact for the group, each lasting approximately one hour. Supporting information was sought from stakeholders within the communities including local authorities, police, community and business representatives.

Chapter 1 – Survey data

Each community is different in the way that it is organised, the challenges it wants to take on and the specific projects it undertakes. The survey of participating communities found that 64 % of groups are led by volunteers, 13 % by local authorities, and both coalitions of local organisations and partnerships between volunteers and local authorities represent 12 % of participating groups. When asked why they participated in either of the Britain in Bloom campaigns, respondents cited:

- a desire to build community spirit and pride:
“We chose to participate as it is a great vehicle to encourage and showcase civic pride. It focuses on partnership working and provides opportunities for different groups to work together for the good of the community.” (Urban Community)
- environmental and aesthetic improvements:
“The in Bloom improves our living environment including green issues, recycling, cleanliness and innovating open spaces to spaces of beauty for visitors to admire. The in Bloom initiative attracts residents to enhance their own living environment in caring for the place where they live.” (Town)
- boosting the local economy – particularly tourism:
“To add value to what is already being undertaken by the Local Authority. The 'Bloom' aims to boost the local economy by providing a pleasant attractive place to visit, thus increasing spend in local shops and in turn providing employment.” (City)
- providing a focus for the community:
“It gives great incentive to all participants and a goal to work towards.” (IYN group)
- gaining prestige from involvement:
“We chose the in Bloom as it has a good long standing reputation which means any awards achieved are of value especially when promoting our resort.” (Coastal Town).

On average each community involves 44 volunteers, with volunteer numbers ranging from 0 to 500 in the survey data and interviews suggesting as many as 6,000 volunteers in large metropolitan “in Bloom” participants. It is possible that there was under-reporting of volunteer participation, as telephone interviews found that groups would list regular volunteers, but not count ad hoc participation until prompted. A separate survey of Britain in Bloom UK finalist communities found an average of 100 volunteers per group. This suggests that nationally the Britain in Bloom campaign engages anywhere between 96,000 and more than 200,000 volunteers. On average each volunteer contributes 46 hours a year, but hours given by individual participants range from 1 – 800. Overall this suggests that at least 4.4million hours are given by Britain in Bloom volunteers each year.

Participating communities involve volunteers from across the age spectrum, and many are proud of involving children from nursery age through to people in their 80s and older. Just under one third of all volunteers are over 64. 38 % of communities involve volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds, the most common of which are white other (20 %) and Asian or British Asian (18 %). IYN groups are more likely than “in Bloom” communities to involve volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds and within the Britain in Bloom categories, participation from these groups was most common in city and urban communities.

Chapter 2 – Social impact

Survey respondents and interviewees report that the social impact of their work through the Britain in Bloom programmes is manifested in a range of ways, from community building through to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour and improved health and well-being outcomes.

Building community

Development of community is cited by 90% of survey respondents as a benefit of their participation, they also rank it as the benefit that has had the highest impact on their community. In many areas, working on a community horticulture project was the first time that individuals had come together, and in some cases the first time they had met at all. Creating an opportunity for individuals to meet opens up dialogue between neighbours and provides a starting point for conversations when individuals meet. Participants also talk about how the long-term nature of the projects helps to build connections, friendships and neighbourliness.

“By everyone getting involved, it leads to good friends, a community who look after each other.”
(IYN group)

Because people are interacting on multiple occasions over a sustained period of time they are able to build on each interaction, contributing to the development of positive relationships and networks within the community.

“Taking part in this competition over the years has given us a fabulous community spirit and pride – in our town and our efforts to make it a great place to live or visit.” (Small Town)

Many of the groups either construct new or renovate and maintain existing community gardens. By creating spaces that people want to be, they also create new chances for people to meet and share these spaces. This extends beyond participants to all members of the community. The gardens become hubs for the community and in many cases become places where community events take place, including family growing days, fun days and galas, celebratory parties and skills development workshops. For example, in Kilsyth, a small town north of Glasgow, the town park has been renovated and is now the location for an annual gala event organised entirely by volunteers from within the local community. Volunteers say that a lot of drive to improve the park is generated at these days and helps secure additional community support (financial and volunteer) for its ongoing development.

Because people from different parts of the community spend more time together, either directly, through gardening activities, or indirectly, as a result of the improved environment and spaces available to them, improved understanding and trust is built between generations, faiths, ethnicities and other divergent sections of the community.

“We are a large multi-ethnic community and planting has no language or cultural barriers and creates a closer community.” (Large City)

“The group consists of mainly young boys and after an hour of work, they would like a game of football, this initially was a bit of an intolerance to the elderly members – but when they came out of their houses and saw the children’s handy work they started to welcome the children openly. We are all now friends.” (IYN group)

This has helped to diffuse tension and build community cohesion. In Shenstone Road, a street in Birmingham, neighbours from different faiths and ethnicities rarely interacted and divisions between the different groups were building up. A street-wide campaign to bring people together and improve the appearance and feel of the area was started by a small group of residents. The impact that hanging baskets and flower tubs made to the small front gardens of the street, along with the opportunity to meet neighbours in a relaxed atmosphere and celebrate their success with a street party, created new connections between neighbours. In West Didsbury in Manchester worshippers at the local mosque offered hanging baskets and an invitation to a community barbecue for residents, which helped open up communication and resolve tensions that had been building about competition for local parking resources during prayer time.

Many interview and survey respondents said that their participation in Britain in Bloom had led to greater ownership of the area from the community.

“With the help of the parish council, all the other community groups within the village it has been transformed and the people have taken ownership and pride in their surroundings.”

This they believe is because local people play a part in looking after their space, their efforts make it a better place to live and others in the area respect and appreciate that. Because the area and/or specific gardens improve quality of life, people value both the work and the place they live. 79% of survey respondents said that increased civic pride was a benefit of their participation in the campaigns.

“Both campaigns have provided excellent platforms to improve our area and engage with the public. This has led to a huge increase in civic pride and a feeling that Cleethorpes has drastically improved over the last few years.” (Coastal Town)

Interviewees also talked about how because pride has been built, and people have seen changes, their aspirations and expectations for their area have increased. In Holyhead, a coastal town in Anglesey, North Wales, residents now ask volunteers when they can expect to see the next display of flowers because the displays have become a high point for them in the town. In Garrowhill Garden Estate in Glasgow, a member of the community council said:

“The changes have raised people’s expectations of what they should have around them, and made them think about what they can contribute to making Garrowhill a better place to live.”

Encouraging investment in community

“in Bloom” and IYN groups are good at working with other voluntary and statutory groups to get the most out of their work. 62% of all respondents worked with at least one local organisation that was part of a national organisation, such as the Rotary/Lions/Roundtable clubs, the Women’s Institute, conservation groups and uniformed youth organisations. Many also worked with other local groups such as health organisations, faith groups, chambers of commerce and so on. The kinds of activity they undertook jointly included fundraising, planting days, specific landscaping and facilities development projects and local events. This cross-working enables the groups to achieve more with the resources they have and helps to build the network of support for environmental changes in the area.

65% of groups worked with local schools in the area. Interviews indicated that this was predominantly nursery and primary schools, but that some groups were also working with secondary schools or at least involving secondary school age young people. Many groups support children to help out in planting and maintaining gardens, about a third of groups said that they worked in school gardens. Work in school gardens included the construction of gardens from scratch, the development of existing gardens, teaching sessions with pupils, and skills development for both teachers and parents. Participants believe that engaging schools, children and their parents helps build an understanding of and care for their work, which prevent damage and vandalism and encourages people to look after their own area. They also hope that they are bringing on volunteers of the future. In Garrowhill Garden Estate, local businesses and customers of those businesses (including of the local pub who used to be prime offenders of litter) now take greater care of their area, keeping business frontages clean and tidy and dropping less litter.

A number of interviewees talked about how their work had led to other groups and local authorities increasing their investment in the area. The achievements reached through “in Bloom” and IYN activities and the creation of new green spaces encourages others to feel confident. This has led to, amongst other things, new community facilities, a rejuvenation of other heritage and friends groups in the area, environmental and conservation projects. In Kilsyth renovations to the park and community buildings within it have attracted businesses and community investment; a new nursery has opened on the border of the park and a community hall is now a venue for a whole host of activities as well as a boxing club, which has taken on responsibility for refurbishing part of the hall.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

Over half of survey respondents said that a reduction in anti-social behaviour is a benefit of participation; 40% said that a safer environment is a benefit. There are a number of reasons suggested by participants for this, the first of which is increased neighbourliness. Because people get to know one another, they take a greater interest in each other and are more aware when there are strangers in the neighbourhood. They are also more likely to ask questions or make their presence known to ward off would-be criminals. In some cases, such as Hulme, and Newton Heath in Manchester, the groups have taken very direct anti-crime measures using planting, which have led to significant reductions in incidents of crime. In Hulme, planters complete with defensive plants were placed in strategic places to act as a disincentive to possible criminals and improve the appearance of the area. In Newton Heath, new gated alleyway gardens restricted access to potential burglars and created green havens for local residents who previously had no access to a garden.

Anti-social behaviour reductions are put down to engagement of the community. Because people are aware of and/or have played a role in creating something that is an improvement for them, they respect it and are less likely to behave in ways that would undermine those improvements. There is also less tolerance of anti-social behaviour from other community members because they value their space more than in the past; this means they are more likely to make direct challenges to individuals. Interviewees talk particularly of reductions in graffiti and vandalism. In Ahoghill, a village in Northern Ireland where businesses used to pull shutters down at night for fear of graffiti and damage, most now leave them open, confident that their premises will be unharmed. On the Central Estate in Dukinfield, incidences of anti-social behaviour halved between 2005 and 2011.

Because of these reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour, increased communications and increased neighbourliness, there is also a reduction in the fear of crime. People are aware of the reductions, they are also more likely to have a clearer picture of what is happening in their neighbourhood, which helps them to know whether tales of crime are truthful or not. Many “in Bloom” and IYN groups work and build up relationships with the police. This further helps them to both reduce crime and to have an accurate understanding of crime in their area. Residents on Shenstone Road previously had little to do with each other, so when they heard stories of crime they were unable to tell if they were true or not and fear was steadily building. Now that people know each other and talk to each other more regularly, they are quickly able to determine the truth and have found that crime in their street is not as bad as they had once thought. In Nottingham, collaborations between the police and IYN groups through planting and advice have led to both improved relations and reduced anti-social behaviour.

Despite these positive stories a number of survey respondents highlighted vandalism as one of their biggest challenges, especially when getting started:

“Vandalism of Street Furniture funded by group [was a challenge] – regular inspection and repair, cleaning of graffiti swiftly, implementing various creative methods of vandalism proofing furniture has reduced the issue.” (IYN group)

A number described how they went about tackling this, which included: making a greater effort to involve the people from across the community; perseverance – replacing damaged plants and repairing street furniture quickly; working with the local council and police; identifying individuals responsible and engaging them (or in some case their parents) directly to increase understanding. Many felt that over time the problems had reduced:

“Early on in the project there was a little trouble with vandalism to site, but through continued inclusion of local people this has stopped. This is a project well loved by all.” (IYN group)

A quarter of survey respondents involved individuals who had been referred to them through the Community Payback scheme. Community Payback is community service, it is a scheme used by the courts to punish offending behaviour without individuals serving a prison sentence. Offenders undertake between 40 and 300 hours of challenging, unpaid work supervised by the community. About 13% of those individuals who were referred to survey respondents through Community Payback chose to come back to the project once their sentence was complete, indicating a rehabilitative effect of their participation. A number of the interviewees had involved individuals referred through this and other justice and offending schemes. All spoke of how participation had been mutually beneficial, and how the structure of the activity, mutual respect and sense of working towards a common goal had helped in the rehabilitation of offenders. They added that they showed improved levels of self-esteem and had developed new skills, both soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, and horticultural skills. In Brightlingsea, a coastal town in Essex, the teamwork between young men referred through the justice system and volunteers was a real success for all parties, to the extent that there is a plaque in the garden they helped construct commemorating their contribution.

Health and well-being

A number of interviewees and survey respondents discussed the health and well-being benefits experienced by participants and communities. The first of these is healthier diets – because people (and particularly children) are growing their own fruit and vegetables they become a greater part of their diet. This is both because they have a ready, affordable supply and because they are building a better, more knowledgeable relationship with their food. In some cases, such as Dukinfield, cookery skills are also developed through the community horticulture project, so participants and other community members are able to make use of the vegetables grown.

The creation of new spaces in which people felt safe and enjoyed exercising was also a factor in improving health. In Cumbernauld Community Park on the outskirts of Glasgow local residents are now using the park as a walking access route, whereas in the past they drove around it, as well as for jogging, cycling and parathletic training. Other groups with responsibility for looking after parks, such as Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kilsyth, also saw increases in park visitors; in Newcastle-under-Lyme weekly visitor numbers quadrupled.

Other groups have talked about the well-being benefits brought through community growing, with a number making specific reference to older people, who form approximately a third of all volunteers in the programmes. Reference was made to reduced isolation, increased autonomy and increased sense of purpose for older participants.

“The residents enjoy participating and it gives them a sense of achievement and vitality. Our residents are aged 66-96 and being involved created excitement because there was a goal to be aimed for. Residents created and planned which was invigorating and we also had a handsome garden to show for everyone’s efforts.” (IYN group)

For most participants gardening together, improving their environment and feeling safer led to an increased sense of well-being.

Manchester

A city-wide, local level approach changing communities and the city

Summary

Manchester has participated in Britain in Bloom for 12 years, but in recent years has shifted the focus to supporting neighbourhood level community horticulture. With more than 100 IYN groups, transformational changes are being seen in every ward of the city. Communities are tackling issues such as crime, anti-social behaviour, a lack of local safe green space, inter-faith relations and poor health. Communities are being brought together through their new green spaces. They now feel more positive and have a sense of pride in where they live. At the same time their work is bringing benefits for the city; Manchester City Council estimate that the monetary value of this voluntary work is £2.6 million.

Key Facts

Category: **City**

Leadership: **Local Authority**

Size of community: **484,000**

Number of volunteers: **12,267**

Total volunteer hours: **47,640 plus 12,784 undertaken by the Unpaid Work Unit**

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **12**

Background

Manchester is a diverse city, with areas of both intense deprivation and relative wealth. It is also an ethnically diverse city; in one ward of only 11,000 people, 42 languages are spoken. The city’s approach to community horticulture is equally diverse being composed of a patchwork of IYN groups combined with the city council’s own “in Bloom” campaign delivered through the Environmental Services Team. IYN has been used by Manchester City Council and volunteers across the city as a tool for tackling deprivation and poor quality living environments and building communities.

Participation in Britain in Bloom at a community level was sparked by one community’s efforts to improve their area through gardening. Very quickly other communities noticed the difference they were making and wanted to repeat this in their own area, so started their own community horticulture projects. For a while this was confined to four or five groups competing between each other within the Manchester and Britain in Bloom competitions. More communities wanted to achieve the same benefits in their neighbourhoods but were worried that they were not at competition level. The launch of the non-competitive RHS IYN programme in 2006 helped to overcome this and by 2011 Manchester City Council had supported the foundation of 112 IYN groups across the city. Each neighbourhood is slightly different in its make-up and in terms of the issues it faces but all are using gardening as a means of improving their quality of life.

Activities

IYN communities have increasingly become the focus of Manchester's entry into the regional and national "in Bloom" competitions. The city council encourages and supports the involvement of communities in a number of ways recognising the diversity of need and approaches required at a neighbourhood level.

One of the most powerful ways of encouraging community involvement has been word of mouth – as radical changes take place on streets and patches of land across the city, individuals and communities want to know how this has been achieved and how they can achieve the same things. However the Neighbourhood Services team have also found that their communications through press and PR work, banners promoting Manchester in Bloom (in 26 languages) and discussions with community groups have all helped in building interest.

With only two staff to support the 112 groups, the role of the city council has to be one of inspiration and facilitation. Groups register their interest with the council and a local meeting is called, which local residents are made aware of through door-to-door leafleting. At this meeting a member of the Neighbourhood Services team helps the community to think about the context they are operating in, decide what they want to achieve and what they will need to make it happen. They work with the community to draw down funding from the city council or external funding sources and use their bulk buying power to help the community buy gardening supplies at a low cost. Often communities start their efforts with a hanging basket event, with baskets, plants and growing advice supplied by the council. This creates the first opportunity for the community to get growing together and some pretty quick floral results. Frequently these are continued by the groups year on year, and grow from 20 baskets in year one to a whole street or estate a few years later. Over time the city council tries to help the groups to become self-sufficient, but along the way they get involved through chairing meetings, creating opportunities for neighbourhoods to share ideas and work together, and they continue to be on hand to help groups negotiate issues such as health and safety, access to growing spaces and potential blockages to growing in their neighbourhood.

Most communities in Manchester have started an IYN group because they wanted to tackle a particular issue or concern. Many projects have been about turning derelict or unsightly spaces into community gardens. In Blackley, residents were fed up with a row of disused garages that were being used as a dumping ground and the site was full of rubbish and weeds. They got together and secured funding from a range of sources to build a community garden. The site is now a thriving oasis filled with ornamental and productive plants. It is used by all parts of the community from the local primary school to the nursing home. It has become an important location for a whole programme of community events throughout the year. Similar projects have been undertaken across the city with once ugly, glass-strewn crofts now being used as community growing spaces and outdoor classrooms.

Manchester has many areas of back-to-back terraced housing with only small yards and alleyways as outdoor space. In some areas the alleyways had become dangerous places, fly-tipping was prevalent and the local people lived in fear of crime. In one street in Newton Heath, 50 properties backed onto a four-way passageway. With the help of the Manchester Neighbourhood Services team, the residents gained permission to gate off the alleyways and turn them into a garden packed with plants. The alleyways are now a safe green space where children can play and the community can spend time in.

The area has been the site of a whole range of events including parties throughout the 2010 Football World Cup, where each house took it in turns to provide internationally themed food for their neighbours as they watched the sporting action. There are now more than 100 similar gated alleyways across Manchester, many of which contain community gardens.

In Hulme, crime – particularly burglaries – had hit a level unbearably high for those who lived there. In collaboration with the police, the group used planting to help deter criminals and were awarded a grant to buy and fill 75 large planters with shrubs to act as a deterrent to burglars. These were strategically placed around the area and have been welcomed by residents as a means of reducing crime and brightening up their environment. There are now 253 residents actively involved in the project, which also includes a text network for warding off would-be criminals. If any one of the network spots suspicious-looking behaviour they alert others in the group; each member of the network comes to their front door and the potential burglar is scared away. Burglaries are now a thing of the past for residents, who are enjoying their greener, safer surroundings.

Business involvement in Manchester in Bloom has proved invaluable in improving the environment at a neighbourhood and city-wide level. Manchester City Council has instigated a Business Pledge scheme, which encourages businesses to maintain the frontage and rear of their premises and manage refuse. For each business attaining the highest level, Manchester City Council plants a tree with accompanying plaque bearing the business's name. They estimate that 10% of the 1,000 businesses signed up to the pledge have come through IYN activities. Manchester has a high inner-city residential population and through IYN, residents have been able to secure business support to improve both commercial and residential environments in the city centre. Streets are now brightened up by the presence of plants and flowers, and plots of land awaiting development have been given over to community planting.

As can be seen from the examples above, each IYN group has its own unique composition of volunteers and way of working. Across all of the groups, in addition to local residents, other organisations have contributed to their work; this includes faith groups, schools, uniformed youth organisations, women's groups and the fire and police services. In 2010 IYN volunteers planted and maintained a total of 8,000 hanging baskets, 258 planters and 935m² of flower beds. They also planted 205,000 spring bulbs and 2,500 trees. There are now approximately 40 community orchards across Manchester, many of which are already so productive that Manchester City Council has purchased a fruit press to enable the communities to produce their own fruit juice.

City-wide projects have also been supported by the council. For example, 2,000 trees were planted by 2,000 children – the intention being that children will care for and not vandalise the trees they have planted. To increase biodiversity thousands of bird boxes and bug hotels have been built by children and residents and installed all over the city. The council is also seeking to ensure that communities are supported to grow in a way that has a positive environmental impact, through the encouragement of water capture and storage, composting, using peat-free growing media and growing food locally to reduce food miles. Where possible, resources such as water butts and compost bins are sourced for communities.

Many communities have also been helped by members of the unpaid workforce, also known as Community Payback. In 2010 they gave nearly 13,000 hours to Manchester in Bloom, often taking on the challenging landscaping tasks that volunteers would have struggled with.

Communities take responsibility for overseeing and supporting offenders referred to them through the Community Payback scheme.

Lastly, one of the challenges for Manchester, which has two universities, is the transient population of students. The city council works with the universities to get their students involved in community growing where they live. This creates connections and understanding between permanent residents and the more temporary student population as well as helping to improve the quality of life for all residents.

Impact

The local and cumulative impact for the people of Manchester delivered through Manchester in Bloom, and particularly by IYN communities is wide reaching, both geographically and in the breadth of changes that have occurred. Residents have seen improvements to their living environment, reductions in crime, increases in their own health and well-being and have been brought together as a community, often for the first time.

There are very clear correlations between reductions in crime and the work of IYN groups in Manchester. Communities have been able to use planting as a deterrent for potential criminals through the creation of safe, green spaces and places, particularly in the new gated alleyway gardens. What were once access routes used by criminals, are now oases of green used by residents. Also by getting to know one another through gardening, residents now look out for each other and their property, deterring criminal and anti-social behaviour. Manchester City Council also consider that offending behaviour is being challenged through the referral of individuals to IYN groups through the Community Payback scheme. The supervision provided by communities and the nature of the constructive, rewarding work that is community horticulture has brought great benefits to many offenders with a good proportion of them continuing to work on projects after completion of their sentence and others going on to careers in horticulture, reducing the risk of them re-offending. Importantly fear of crime in Manchester's IYN areas has also been reduced. Tackling incidences of crime, as well as improved communication between neighbours and with the police have contributed to more positive perceptions of crime and safety in IYN communities.

IYN communities in Manchester also report feeling healthier and experiencing improved well-being as a result of their gardening activities. With so many communities growing fruit and vegetables, coupled with the education provided by schools and volunteers about cooking and eating, community-grown produce is helping to improve diets, particularly among children. The city council states that well-being benefits have been particularly felt in sheltered accommodation centres, where community gardening activities bring a sense of purpose and pride previously lacking. It also increases communication between residents in these centres and their surrounding community, stimulating cognitive and emotional well-being. Similarly, a collaboration with Keele University found that community horticulture projects helped older people involved by helping them to feel productive, share their skills and knowledge, have autonomy and build social networks.

Some of the most vulnerable people in Manchester have also benefited from Manchester in Bloom. The Booth Centre is a day centre for homeless people in Manchester. In 2001 they invited Mel Kirby of the Neighbourhood Services team to talk about his career path and the possibility of developing a garden for the centre that would provide a safe, supervised space for street drinking service users in the newly alcohol-free streets of the city centre. After an introductory talk and a session planting up hanging baskets there was considerable enthusiasm from service users to tackle the bigger challenge of the garden. They got to work designing and building the garden, complete with benches, planters and a water feature. Staff at the Booth Centre say that creation of the garden and participation in Manchester in Bloom has helped their clients:

“to feel a part of the community, which is particularly important in the city centre, where they often feel on the edge of it. It has also helped build their pride and self-esteem as they have created something that the whole community appreciates.”

The garden has proved a success and went on to win the Manchester in Bloom garden competition in 2003; it also sparked a number of other horticultural projects for the Booth Centre including allotments, partnership with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and a social enterprise *Phoenix Landscapes*, which subsequently won contracts from Manchester City Council for activities such as woodland management, and has now been taken on as a private business by two of the centre’s service users. Of the 50–60 people involved at the start of this project, approximately 20 have gone on to further landscaping roles, voluntary and paid. This is an example of how Manchester in Bloom has acted as a catalyst for change, stimulating and supporting action from organisations within the city.

Environmental improvements in participating neighbourhoods are profound. Every ward in the city now has at least one IYN group. Each of these represents a team of volunteers who make their environment a more pleasant to live in through planting and clear-ups. Many, like those in Blackley, have renovated derelict crofts and rubbish-filled abandoned sites; others like those in Newton Heath have created green sanctuaries in places previously barren of green. All of these spaces are not only flourishing gardens but also hubs for community events and interactions. The ecological footprint of the projects has been borne in mind thanks to the advice and information provided by Manchester City Council. Re-use and recycling are common themes in the gardens, and recycling has increased in the city. Some groups have gone on to adopt woodlands in their locality and become volunteer tree wardens. In community gardens, residents are reporting an increase in insect and birdlife, with the change most noticeable in gated alleyway gardens, which were almost devoid of wildlife previously. Buzzards and peregrine falcons have even been spotted in the city.

Manchester’s IYN groups all talk about how their gardening projects have brought people together, in their street, estate or neighbourhood. The increased sense of neighbourliness and belonging is keenly felt, and sharing in the celebrations at each stage, particularly on the day of the “in Bloom” judges’ visit or achieving an IYN award, builds community pride. Monaco Drive is a cul-de-sac of 40 houses, which has been participating in Manchester in Bloom for 10 years. When they first got involved with a hanging basket day, residents had never spoken to each other. Pleased with both their floral displays and conversations they had while making hanging baskets, they decided to have a street barbecue. Subsequently they have become good friends as they have gone on to tackle new projects and challenges. They have applied for small grants and installed new street furniture including a bench that has become a meeting point for neighbours to catch up and events are planned every year.

IYN activities have also helped resolve community tension and bring diverse communities together. Cheetham Hill is a diverse area in terms of ethnicity and language including people from Chinese, Irish, Jewish and Islamic backgrounds, and the various communities did not always interact. Some members of the community saw the impact that community gardening was having on other areas of Manchester and wanted to achieve the same benefits for their neighbourhood. They called a meeting of all of the local faith and community groups, and invited representatives of Manchester City Council to help them define what they could achieve together. Over time this has been a great deal, both horticulturally – there are allotments, community bulb planting days and roof gardens – and in terms of community cohesion. All that has been achieved has been done collaboratively and through shared community decision and action. The group has had a knock-on impact on the area and has grown to enter the Britain in Bloom competition as an Urban Community. Similarly, in West Didsbury tension was building up between users of the Burton Road Mosque and local residents, as competition for parking became an issue at prayer time. Mosque users made up hundreds of hanging baskets for the residents and invited them to a barbecue. This simple gesture opened up dialogue between the two communities and enabled them to resolve the issue, with the assistance of the local hospital, which agreed to allow free parking during Friday prayers. The tension has been dissipated and the community is more cohesive as a result.

Manchester City Council estimates that the equivalent value of the work undertaken by volunteers through Manchester in Bloom is £2.6 million. In addition, Manchester in Bloom activities have generated an estimated £60,000 of positive media coverage for the city. Areas of cost saving for the council include reductions in graffiti and litter removal, road sweeping, damage caused through vandalism, mowing and care of green spaces, as well as enhancements through environmental improvements through planting, particularly where trees and shrubs have been used. Council staff also believe that Manchester in Bloom has helped contribute to an increase in resident satisfaction with the city council, even at a time of spending cuts. Trust in the council and in the police has also been increased. All of this has been delivered on a budget of £67,000. Because of the impact achieved through Manchester in Bloom, the value of community horticulture in achieving benefits for the whole of Manchester is now recognised by officers and politicians across the council.

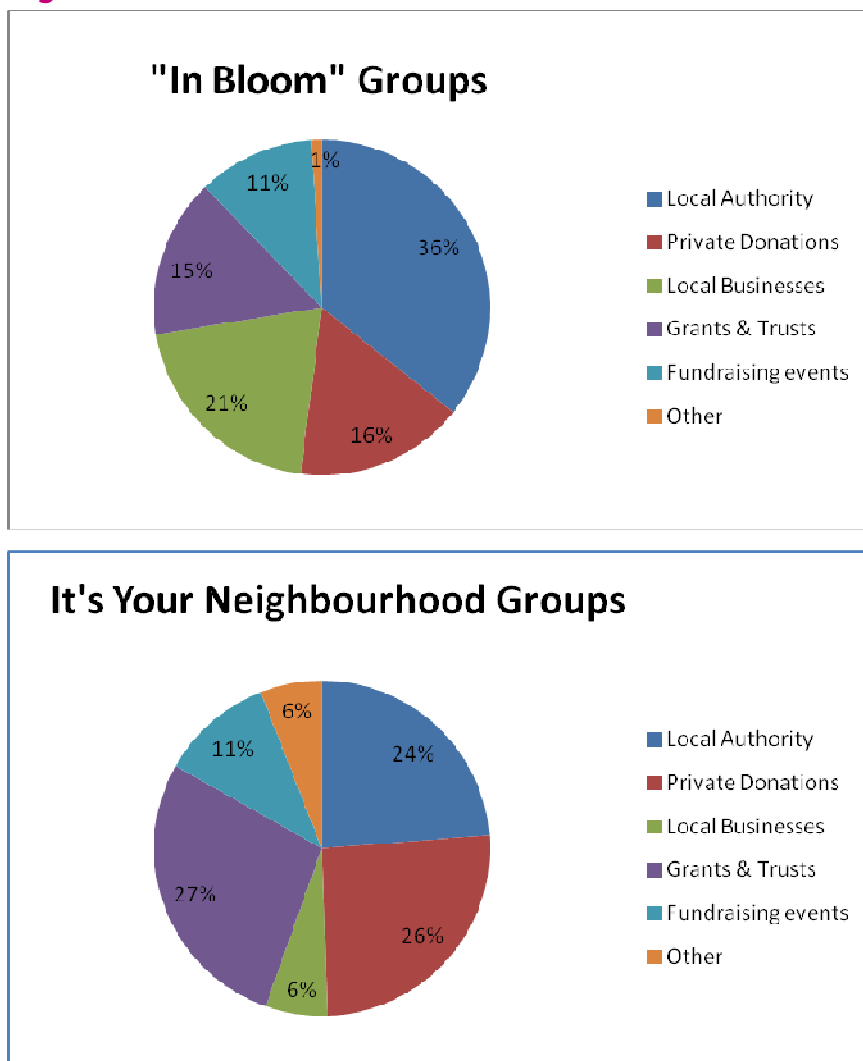
What next?

Manchester in Bloom is now a significant and important part of the fabric of life in the city. Each year the number of communities participating continues to grow. This means that the work of the two Manchester City Council staff has to be used more strategically and sparingly for each community. As the IYN groups mature they become more self-sustaining and council support is less necessary. However, because the council is forced to make spending cuts, there will be fewer funding streams available to communities from the authority, so there will be an increased role for the Neighbourhood Services team in helping communities identify and gain access to new sources of funding.

Chapter 3 – Economic impact

Both survey respondents and interview participants talked of how the economic well-being of their area had been improved as a result of their work through “in Bloom” and IYN. They help attract funds to an area through fundraising, encouraging investment from statutory bodies and attracting visitors. They also encourage locals to invest in their own area through business engagement and sponsorship and community fundraising. Respondents to the survey raised on average £6,044 per group per year, suggesting that funds raised by the campaigns at a local level (ie not including support for the work of the RHS and the regions and nations) could be as high as £13million. Groups led by local authority and volunteer partnership raised the most (£10,293); groups led by local authorities alone the least (£1,648). There were clear differences in the sources of funding for “in Bloom” and IYN groups see fig 1. In addition there is the contribution of volunteer time; if we assume that a minimum of 4.4million hours are given each year by volunteers through the campaigns, this is the equivalent of £155 million of work undertaken at the UK national minimum wage.

Figure 1



Survey participants were also asked to put a value on the in-kind support they had received; on average this was £1,584, with a few groups receiving in-kind support to the value of tens of thousands of pounds. They were also asked whether financial support had increased, reduced or stayed the same in 2010 compared to recent years. 47 % of groups received more support in 2010 than previously and an additional 39 % said it had remained about the same; only 14 % had seen a reduction. Interviewees were surprised that they had been able to continue raising funds successfully in the context of a recession, but were delighted that they had not yet been impacted on. However survey respondents had experienced more challenges as a consequence of the recession, and a number cited recent funding shortages as a barrier to their participation. Both interviewees and survey respondents described their concerns about the future availability of funding streams and, in particular, in-kind support from local authorities because of existing or planned cuts to environmental services budgets.

Business support

Business support for “in Bloom” and IYN groups is common, with 63 % of groups receiving some sort of support from local businesses. Funds raised from businesses accounted for 20 % of funding for “in Bloom” groups, but only 6 % for IYN groups. Interviewees discussed three different types of business support for the groups – donations and sponsorship; in-kind support; and participation through planting and looking after their own premises and volunteering. In some communities the initiative was led by businesses through traders’ associations. Motivations for their participation included corporate social responsibility and a belief that an improved environment would enhance their own trade and the future economic prospects for the area.

The hope that improved environments would lead to an improved local economy was borne out in a number of communities interviewed, particularly in those wishing to attract tourists. Business leaders and representatives talked of how the planting and additional facilities had made the area more attractive to visitors, rejuvenating high streets (improving business environments helps persuade businesses to expand and invest, reducing shop vacancy rates) and the local economy. The plants and upbeat environment encourage people both to come and to linger longer and spend money whilst they do. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has led the town’s Britain in Bloom efforts for more than 20 years. Their Head of Operational Services spoke of how people from outside the city make the journey to Newcastle-under-Lyme because of the attractive environment the city offers, and how the plants contribute to a café culture that encourages people to stay in the town for longer, bringing money to the area.

Also community ownership of an area encourages locals to shop within, rather than travel outside, their own area. Because businesses see the benefits brought about through “in Bloom” activities, they choose to re-invest in the scheme, creating a virtuous circle of investment and improvement. As a result of the successes seen in some communities, “in Bloom” activities are now being used by others as an important part of their regeneration programmes, such as in Holyhead, where changes to the appearance of the town through Holyhead in Bloom are helping it to become a tourist destination, encouraging new business investment.

Skills development

For some people, participation in the “in Bloom” and IYN projects enables them to build up skills and self-confidence, which help them back into the labour market. This is particularly true for people at risk of social exclusion, for reasons such as homelessness, long-term unemployment and offending behaviour. Interviewees suggested that the sense of achievement arising from contributing to a community gardening project is very powerful,:

“We are proud that a group of teenagers who are regarded as having social problems have worked together to design and build a thriving allotment space in a former brownfield site. It creates beauty in the area and makes all participants feel valued and proud whilst learning practical skills.” (IYN group)

People enjoy the nurturing process and watching their planting mature; they also enjoy feeling that they have put something back into the community, and that they are a part of it as a consequence. Interviewees also highlighted the skills that could be developed through participation including communication, team work, organisation, fundraising and of course horticultural skills. The acquisition of these skills has helped a number of participants begin their return to the labour market. In some cases this has been just about having the confidence to apply for jobs; in others it has been the beginning of social enterprises and landscaping businesses, such as for service users at a Manchester homeless centre, the Booth Centre, where experience of running a social enterprise enabled individuals to start a private business.

Cost savings for local authorities

The survey found that local authorities provide over a third of all funding to “in Bloom” groups and nearly a quarter for IYN groups. Most interviewees also talked of in-kind contributions from local authorities including clearance and maintenance (eg grass cutting) of spaces looked after by the community, support in submitting fundraising bids, help negotiating challenges, skills training, provision of plants and growing media. Despite these contributions, interviewees from within local authorities described the cost savings they believed were generated as a result of local participation in “in Bloom” and IYN. For example, Manchester City Council spent £67,000 on Britain in Bloom activities in 2010, but council officials estimate that the value to the council of work undertaken by volunteers was £2.6million. Cost savings are made in green space management, street furniture maintenance, litter collection, graffiti removal and managing anti-social behaviour. There are also benefits that do not necessarily reflect areas of spend for local authorities, but which have a value, such as improved community cohesion, enhanced landscape, revenue generation through successful high street businesses and new community maintained facilities.

Ahoghill

Business leaders use Bloom as a tool for economic development

Summary

In the face of increasing dilapidation and a worrying trend in declining business Ahoghill traders came together to breathe fresh life into their town. Four years on, despite the context of an international economic down-turn, business is good in Ahoghill. The Ahoghill in Bloom team in partnership with other community organisations has renovated the village and created new facilities for its residents, making it a place people want to live and visit, boosting trade and improving quality of life. Ahoghill in Bloom are now thinking of further ways they can use gardening to develop the village.

Key Facts

Category: **Small Town**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **4,000**

Number of volunteers: **15**

Average number of volunteer hours per volunteer: **100 p/a**

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **4**

Background

Ahoghill is a large rural village in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. The village grew to serve the local farming community, but has in recent decades become dormitory, as many residents commute the 30 miles to Belfast. Local traders, concerned about the dilapidation that the village was beginning to fall into and the negative impact this was having on their business (roughly 8 business premises were vacant), formed a business association to regenerate the commercial heart of the village. They believed that the first step towards regeneration was to improve the physical environment and so began participation in Ulster in Bloom in 2007.

Ahoghill in Bloom is primarily a voluntary initiative of the Ahoghill Traders’ Association with no separate “in Bloom” committee. However, they work in close collaboration with Street Reach, a church-based voluntary organisation, and the Ahoghill Community Development Company. Ahoghill receives c£1,000 a year from Ballymena Borough Council for the village to use towards improving its environment. Each year Ahoghill in Bloom raise an additional £10,000–£12,000 through local fundraising and business sponsorship from within and outside the village. To date, no additional funding has been received from government or other grant-making bodies.

Activities

Ahoghill in Bloom started by constructing and planting wooden planters and hanging baskets that were then placed around the village. Keen to promote local businesses, all materials and craftsmanship were sourced from within the village. The 30 wooden planters were built by local craftsmen using wood supplied by the hardware shop, and flowers were provided by a nursery just outside the village. Each business was asked, and agreed, to sponsor a planter and a sign was placed in each one, indicating sponsorship. There are now 250 hanging baskets and planters in the village and every business has at least one hanging basket and planter displayed on their premises. This has made the centre of the village more vibrant. Even the empty premises have received attention from Ahoghill in Bloom; they have been painted and planted so their vacancy has less of an effect on the village.

Leading into the centre of the village are six roads, each of which has been landscaped in a consistent way so that anyone entering the village gets the same floral welcome. Additional flower boxes have been built, planted and placed on each road with a sign welcoming people to Ahoghill. One of the early recommendations from the Britain in Bloom judges in 2010 was that the village should do more to celebrate its heritage. Ahoghill does not have significant historic buildings, so they needed to think creatively about how to do this. The volunteers contacted local farmers in the area who donated large pieces of historic agricultural equipment, such as ploughs and potato pickers. These are now restored and in position around the village as part of the planting scheme, including on the six entrance roads. Information boards are being prepared to accompany the equipment so that visitors and locals alike get a sense of the history of Ahoghill.

The environmental impact (not just the visual) has been taken into consideration by the Ahoghill in Bloom team, following the guidance of the Britain in Bloom criteria. They have built a bowser, which is able to collect water from a stream running through the village, and have also purchased a number of self-watering hanging baskets, which has enabled them to halve the amount of water used in their maintenance throughout the year, and have plans to buy more in the coming years. The local nursery has a plant recycling facility, which they make available for the use of the Ahoghill in Bloom volunteers. The Local Authority has also been persuaded to install additional bins for litter and dog fouling within the village, which contributes to a cleaner and safer environment.

Ahoghill in Bloom has sought to improve facilities within the village for all residents through changes to the landscape. For young people they have worked with Ballymena Borough Council to improve the surroundings of the children's play park. This now has new paths, picnic tables and flower beds, making it a more accessible and pleasant place for children and their families to be. Children are also involved through gardens in the village primary schools. Ahoghill in Bloom cleared the area in front of one school and planted new beds, which the children now tend throughout the year. At another school, each class has their own garden within the school grounds. Children have also been involved in gardening activities around the village, such as the planting of 8,000 crocus bulbs. The school gardens are an important part of the Ulster and Britain in Bloom judges tour and Ahoghill in Bloom ensure that any events or celebratory activities involve children and young people in the village. This, along with their care of the school gardens and involvement in village planting activities, helps them and their families value the new landscape of Ahoghill.

A community garden is also being created in a prominent position in the village centre, on a piece of land previously left unmanaged by its owners who gave their permission for the garden. Ahoghill in Bloom drew up their own plans for the space and had support from Street Reach in undertaking the heavy landscaping preparation work. The garden is being built with the village's relatively large elderly population in mind, so it includes seating and raised beds as well as hedging, shrubs and paths. It is planned that school children will help to maintain the garden. The loss of the Post Office from the village centre to a supermarket half a mile's walk away made accessing it much more challenging for the older population, but now a series of summer seats and benches (again made within Ahoghill) have been installed along the route, which enables them to access the facilities with much more comfort. In summer the seats create focal points where villagers can meet and chat in pleasant surroundings.

Impact

The visual impact achieved through Ahoghill in Bloom is striking. The village now brims with colour all year round, and it looks and feels like a place people want to be. The dilapidated and run-down look has been swapped for a clean, looked-after environment that is attractive to the people who live there and to visitors. Ahoghill used to be a place that people would drive through, but now they choose to stop, bringing in much important trade for the village businesses. Local Councillor Roy Gillespie said that:

“Ahoghill in Bloom have done a tremendous job bringing a very great change to the village, I have never seen it looking so good. The very great changes are bringing enthusiasm, business and employment to the village.”

In addition, village residents who would have once chosen to go further afield for their shopping now choose to use what is on offer in Ahoghill.

Ahoghill in Bloom volunteer and local businessman James Perry believes that Ahoghill in Bloom has “stopped the rot” of dilapidation and degradation that was setting in. The Bloom efforts began in 2007, the subsequent years have been challenging for businesses across the UK, but despite this two new businesses have opened and another two have expanded their operations in the village. This is an indication of the confidence businesses have in Ahoghill as a commercial centre. James Perry said this is important because:

“You could have all the flowers you want, but without a commercial heart, there would be no life in the village”.

The Ahoghill Traders' Association are confident that their “in Bloom” efforts are helping to keep the commercial heart beating. Over the past 14 years, the Ahoghill Community Development Company has raised £1.3million for the construction of a new community centre, one retail and seven business units for the village, which are now complete. Jim Dempsey, Director of the company said that the work of Ahoghill in Bloom has:

“drastically enhanced the village and encouraged new businesses to the area, for the first time in many years. Three units are already let with up to thirty people working in them, and I am confident that the remaining units will also be let in the near future. All revenues generated will go back into improving facilities and further enhancing the village.”

Although the bulk of the work is led and delivered through the Ahoghill Traders' Association, there is clear support from villagers. Their financial contributions play a significant part in enabling Ahoghill in Bloom, some give their time by volunteering on planting days and a few have taken on specific "in Bloom" responsibilities, such as grass cutting and the creation of a wild flower meadow. All these contributions, coupled with the dramatic change to the village appearance and the new facilities on offer have helped to make villagers feel a sense of ownership and pride for Ahoghill. Roy Gillsepie said that the dedication of Ahoghill in Bloom is also acting as a stimulus for the local council who feel that:

"the changes to appearance and economic outlook of the village need to be matched by high quality community facilities, and we want to do more for the area".

Community cohesion and crime rates have both improved in Ahoghill. In the past there were some community issues within the village, but few, if any, incidents have been a cause for concern in the past few years. Similarly there are now very low levels of petty crime and vandalism. Shopkeepers are confident that their property is secure, so now many leave their shutters up at night and the village looks and feels safer. Ahoghill in Bloom believe that this is a result of their work, combined with the work of other voluntary groups in the village.

What next?

Ahoghill has won a series of accolades for their achievements – best small town in Ulster in Bloom three years in a row, Calor Village of the Year and tidiest small town in the Northern Ireland Amenity Awards. Each of these accolades has spurred the Ahoghill in Bloom team on to the next project. They say that the feedback from the Ulster in Bloom and Britain in Bloom judges following their tours has been helpful in setting new goals and exploring how the village environment can be improved further. Building on the recommendations made about celebrating the village's heritage Ahoghill in Bloom are looking at how they can open up and restore an old cemetery within the village that contains ancient gravestones. They hope that the restoration would enable them to work with two local villages that also have interesting Christian heritage to promote themselves to visitors and international tourists.

This innovative thinking and significant achievements of Ahoghill in Bloom have won the interest and support of Ballymena Borough Council, who are now working with the village to help it develop further. Denise Reynolds, of Ballymena's Economic Development Unit said:

"The transformation that Ahoghill in Bloom has achieved in such a short period of time is impressive. It gives a great example to other villages of what can be achieved, and how visual changes can enable other aspects of development to go forward."

Ahoghill in Bloom hope that this relationship will help them to promote the village further and encourage more visitors to the village.

Ahoghill in Bloom are looking at how they can ensure their work is sustained into the future. This includes recruiting further volunteers and looking at models of funding. In the long term the revenue generated from the new business units constructed by the Ahoghill Community Development Company will go towards improvements for the village; this may include a number of significant projects to improve facilities within the village, such as improved street lighting, signage and new public conveniences. They hope such developments will enable Ahoghill to become a visitor destination and a better place to live. They also hope to maintain the relationships they have built up with local business sponsors, whose support, in cash and in kind, has been invaluable to making the work of Ahoghill in Bloom a success.

Brightlingsea

From beleaguered battleground to tourism hot spot

Summary

When animal rights protests threatened to be what put Brightlingsea on the map, residents decided to counter the negative atmosphere in the town using floral displays. A few planted boats rapidly became a town-wide greening campaign involving all sectors of the community. Now Brightlingsea is a thriving tourist destination with businesses, residents and visitors enjoying the benefits brought through Brightlingsea in Bloom.

Key facts

Category: **Coastal Town**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **8,900**

Number of volunteers: **70**

Average number of volunteer hours per volunteer: **“hundreds” p/a**

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **16**

Background

Brightlingsea is a small town on the Essex coast. In the mid 1990s the town had become rundown, its promenade was “stuck in a 1950s time warp”, community gardens were in such disrepair that they were threatened with closure and there were over 15 vacant shops in the high street. Then it became the site of a fierce battle over live animal exports. The town was fast becoming known as a place of conflict, a no-go area. Brightlingsea had planned a major event, Golden Victory Day, to commemorate 50 years of peace since World War Two, with land, sea and air displays. Concerned that the event was in jeopardy and frustrated by the negative atmosphere building up, a small group of local residents decided that some positive action was required; Brightlingsea in Bloom was established and they embarked on a tentative planting exercise. With enthusiasm and a small loan from the local horticultural society, volunteers busied themselves with planting up some of the many redundant boats around the town. They also created floral displays on the approach to the town and in its centre. Brightlingsea began to take on a different feeling and businesses offered their support to make sure that Brightlingsea in Bloom would carry on into the future. Buoyed up by this enthusiasm from business and residents the volunteers ignored poison pen letters from protesters and put aside initial reluctance from the town council and expanded their horticultural plans for the town.

Activities

Brightlingsea in Bloom raises an average of £15,000 per year from sponsorship, a small grant from the town council and donations from residents, local businesses and voluntary organisations. They have also been successful in securing large grants for specific projects. This and the hundreds of hours given each year by their dedicated volunteers and the wider community have enabled Brightlingsea in Bloom to transform the landscape and the fortunes of the town.

A donation of £1,750 from the Golden Victory Day committee and donations of cash, skills and time from local residents enabled an ugly spare bit of tarmac at the main entrance to the waterside areas of the town to become a commemorative garden. The space was landscaped, planted and in memoriam seats installed. The garden has created a visual focal point in what was a dull, disused space.

The area outside the town community centre, once only grass, has also been changed dramatically. Volunteers dug and planted a number of shrub beds in front of and within the grounds of the centre. Based on the success of the new look and feel of their space, the community centre asked Brightlingsea in Bloom if they could extend their planting. They took up the challenge and created an extensive bed including shrubs, trees and grasses. The volunteers also worked to create an exemplary dry garden. Boards on site help explain to local residents in notoriously dry Essex, how a beautiful garden can be created and maintained with no watering at all.

Leading from the town centre to the sea is Promenade Way. For many years this road was poorly maintained and had few interesting landscape features. Brightlingsea in Bloom worked with the town council and local business association to gain support and funding from the district council and Environment Agency to re-tarmac the road and create a millennium garden in which much-needed picnic and leisure facilities were located. Along the road further in memoriam tree planting took place (in addition to Environment Agency tree planting bordering the road) and beds were planted. The road now offers an attractive walk from the town to the waterside and the garden provides a good place to view the landscape.

Springmead Garden was a one-acre garden bequeathed to the town in 1927 but until 2003, when Brightlingsea in Bloom started its renovation, it was neglected and derelict. The garden is now a haven for residents and biodiversity alike, and is used as a teaching tool for local schools. This work was made possible by £115,000 of funding raised from English Heritage, the East of England Development Agency, grant making trusts and sponsorship. Young offenders referred by the Essex Probationary Service were also integral to the garden's development. They put in nearly 4,000 hours and were overseen by Brightlingsea in Bloom volunteers. Their contribution to the landscaping of the site was significant and at the same time they acquired new horticultural and soft skills through working alongside the Brightlingsea in Bloom volunteers.

Brightlingsea in Bloom are bringing on the next generation of gardeners by working with schools and youth organisations. They have created school allotments and organise an annual event where children from the junior school work with residents of a care home in Brightlingsea to plant the grounds of the care home, connecting generations through gardening. In addition young people from local youth organisations have worked with the "in Bloom" team and the town council to create the beginnings of an entirely new woodland.

Community Reach, a local area improvement organisation, approached Brightlingsea in Bloom about ideas for improving the town. The Lozenge was put forward as an idea; this was an uncared for and overgrown area bordering a SSSI owned by the town council. Funding was raised by Community Reach to create a nature reserve and volunteers from the community and local youth organisations worked together with professionals to transform the site. The Lozenge is now maintained by the town council.

Impact

The work of Brightlingsea in Bloom has helped to make Brightlingsea a tourist destination. Before their work began, shops lay empty and there was limited leisure provision for residents and visitors. The town is now thriving, there are no empty shops, new restaurants and bed and breakfast venues have opened and businesses are capitalising on increased visitor numbers. Because of this, Brightlingsea in Bloom is now strongly backed by the town council.

“The close partnership over the last four years of In Bloom with Brightlingsea Town Council, having together created a number of long term horticultural and environmental projects, has helped to increase the appeal of the town in our bid to attract tourists. All the good publicity generated over the years by Brightlingsea’s success in the competitions together with the publicity I have been able to generate as Member with Special Responsibility for Tourism has resulted in a substantial increase in visitor numbers which in turn has helped to boost our local economy. I see the In Bloom project as an essential part of our tourism strategy,” said Brightlingsea Town Councillor Karen Yallop.

Businesses recognise the importance of Brightlingsea in Bloom’s efforts in keeping the town attractive and raising the profile of the town through winning awards at the regional and national “in Bloom” competitions. As a consequence, businesses provide financial support year on year to ensure they continue. Des Rowson, Chair of the Brightlingsea Business Association said:

“Businesses continue to need all the help they can get, and we are fully behind Brightlingsea in Bloom who have helped bring more visitors to the town. We have seen the difference plants and flowers have made; the town now looks clean, looks good and looks thriving and that’s why virtually everyone takes part in one way or another.”

The “in Bloom” activities have brought people from across Brightlingsea together who might otherwise not have met. It has been particularly valuable for older people in the town who make up the bulk of volunteers, reducing isolation and contributing to their well-being. The town has also seen a reduction in petty crime, vandalism and graffiti as civic pride has been boosted and more people have become involved in the efforts to care for their environment.

There is now a sense of pride in Brightlingsea; its inhabitants feel good and care about the town. Councillor Karen Yallop said:

“There is no doubt that the floral displays that are created throughout the town have not only transformed the town’s appearance, but it has also led to a much cleaner and better cared for environment.”

It has become an increasingly popular place to live. New residents have told Brightlingsea in Bloom volunteers that the reason for them relocating to the town is “because of the flowers”. Residents have also made valuable contributions to Brightlingsea in Bloom, not only in their time and donations, but also in improving their own spaces, for example one builder installed new fencing, a paved area and a three-tier wooden planter on a site that was previously run down and an eyesore.

Brightlingsea in Bloom activities have been a catalyst for other improvements and opportunities for the town. New facilities and an upgraded waterside environment, enhanced through the re-landscaping of Promenade Way and the creation of the Millennium Amenity Garden, contributed to Brightlingsea becoming the host of the European Mirror Dinghy competition at the turn of this century. The new facilities added to Brightlingsea's appeal as a venue for this international competition, and the competition itself drew significant visitors to the town, contributing to its economic well-being.

“Funded by local businesses, residents etc Brightlingsea in Bloom injects a substantial sum of money annually into the care and overall appearance of Brightlingsea that the town council couldn't possibly afford,” said Councillor Karen Yallop.

What next?

Although not participating in the competitive element of Britain in Bloom in 2011, Brightlingsea in Bloom intend to continue to maintain all the gardens and green spaces they have created. They are also hoping to work with other organisations in the town to raise funds in order to purchase a site that will be home to a fishing lake, community orchard and much in demand additional allotments for the town.

Brightlingsea in Bloom are now lending their expertise to their district council to look at how similar improvements could be achieved in other local towns.

Chapter 4 – Environmental impact

“in Bloom” and IYN groups look after a significant amount of space across the UK. In doing this they both improve the quality of the environment for the human population and contribute to positive environmental – in the ecological sense – outcomes. 86% listed cleaner and greener surroundings as a benefit of their participation and it was ranked the second most valued benefit after community development. 48% of survey respondents said that they were responsible for looking after significant green space; on average these groups looked after 15 acres of green space. Nearly 80% of local authority led groups looked after significant green space, compared to just over 40% of volunteer led groups.

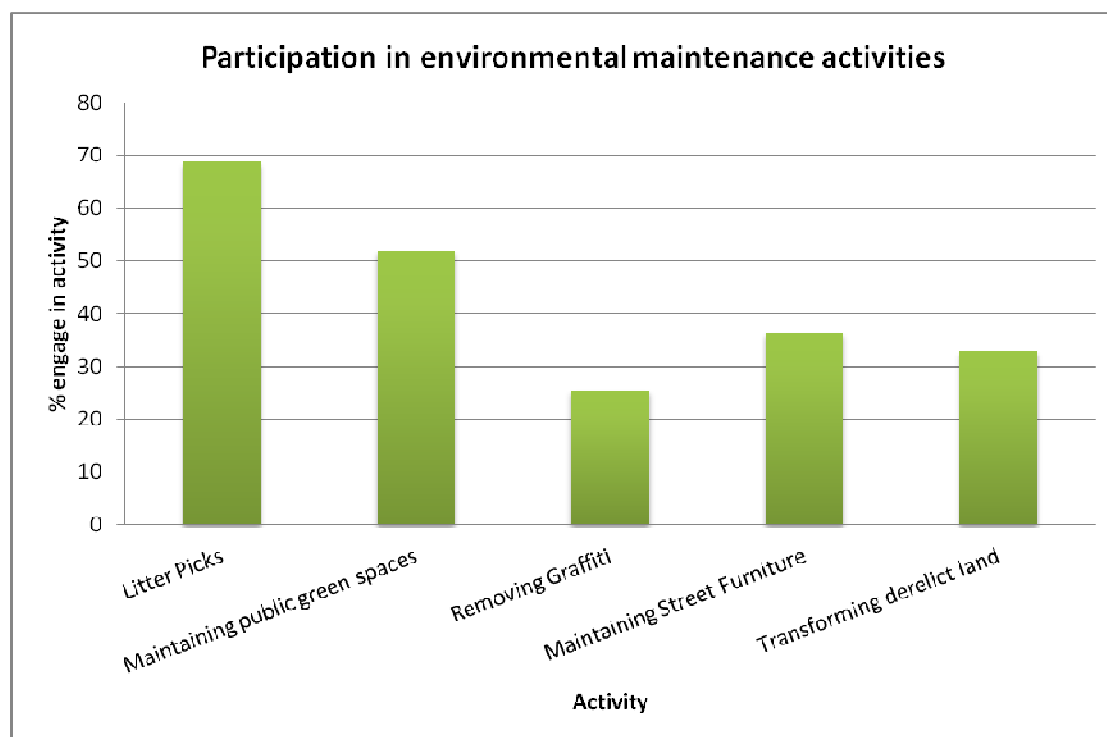
Quality of environment

“in Bloom” and IYN groups work to improve the quality of their environment through planting and clean-up and maintenance activities.

“We wanted to improve our community and in the last five years we have gone from being one of the dirtiest areas, to the last two years being the cleanest area.” (Small Town)

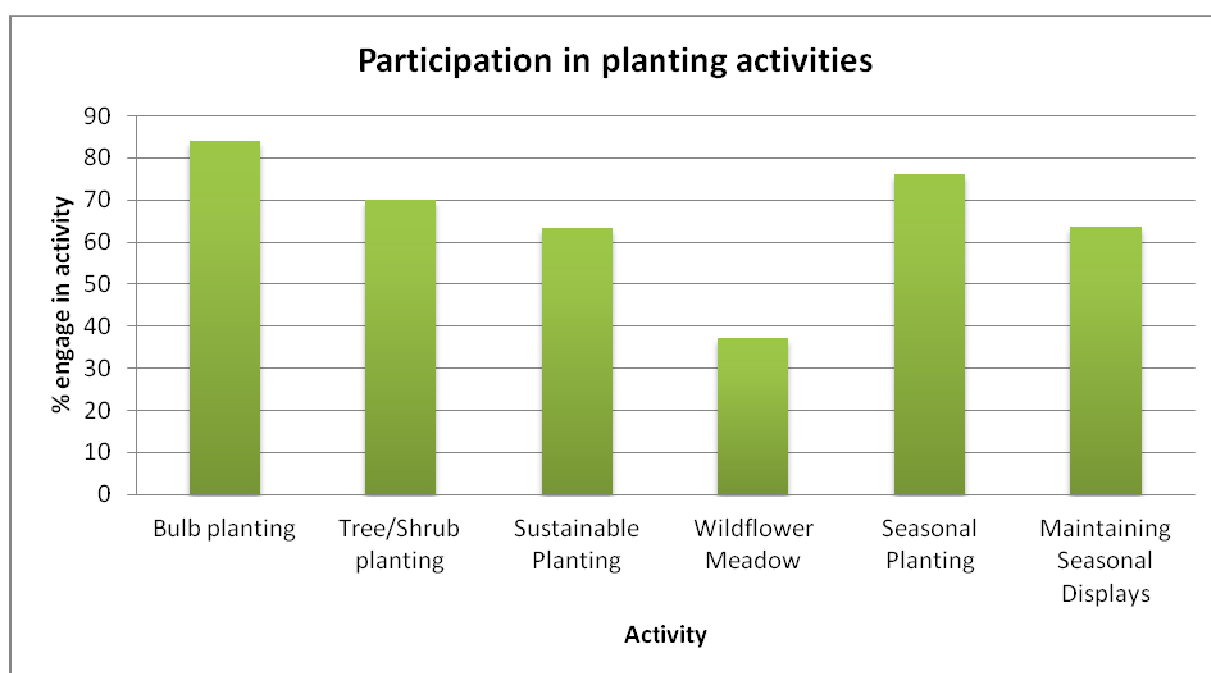
Nearly 70% of groups undertake litter picks, over a third maintain street furniture and a quarter remove graffiti. A third of survey respondents said that they transformed derelict land. Nearly all interviewees talked about renovating spaces, but not all of these were derelict – many however, were neglected before they started their work. Just under half of survey respondents listed transformation of disused space as a benefit of participation.

Figure 2.1



Communities undertake a range of planting activities as can be seen from figure 2.2. “in Bloom” and IYN participants are responsible for planting an average of 53 trees, 162 shrubs and 9,921 plants and bulbs per year each. If this is extrapolated for all participants it amounts to 115,000 trees, 352,000 shrubs and 21.6 million plants and bulbs planted across the UK each year by participating communities.

Figure 2.2



Changes to the physical environment brought about by the groups is sometimes incremental and sometimes dramatic, but interviewees all talked about how, at whatever the pace changes had been made, they had brought about a transformation to the look and feel of their area. The planting, whether a few barrier baskets or an entirely new park, had brought colour and life to places that were previously described as neglected, dull and grey. Interviewees also talked about how people value living and spending time in areas that are clean, tidy and well-kept, and how it makes them feel more positive about where they live, their community and themselves.

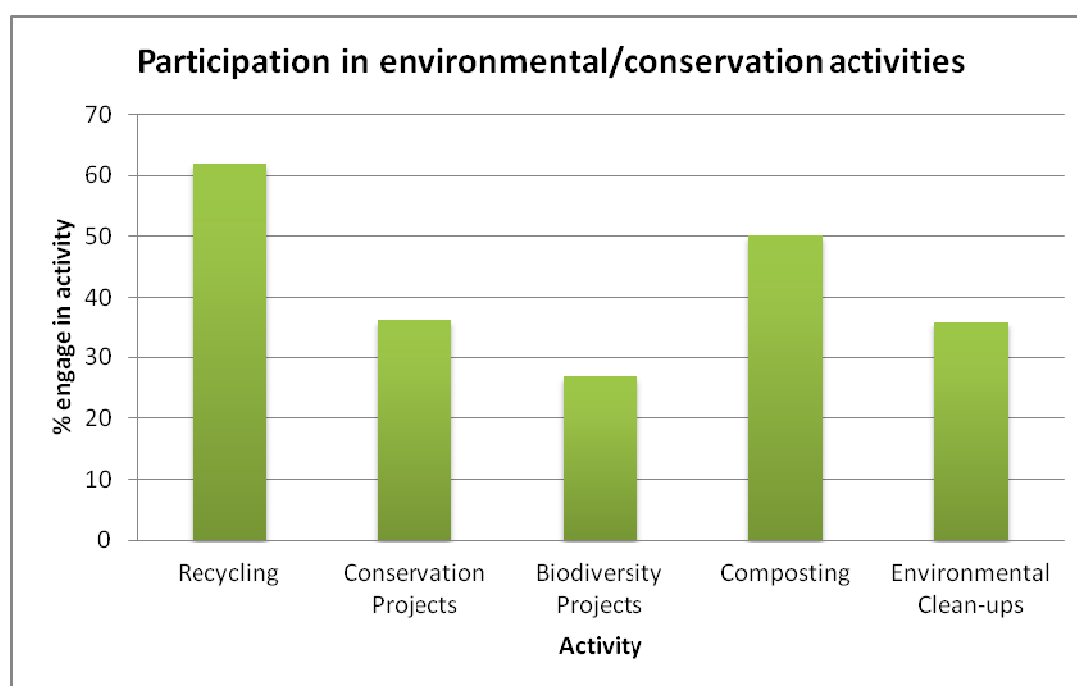
“We are all very proud of our village and by participating in the campaign we can encourage more residents to feel involved and to make more effort to collect litter, tend to hedges etc. All of which enhances the sense of community.” (Village)

As a consequence they take better care of their environment, both in their private space and within public spaces, and reductions in litter dropping and fly-tipping were mentioned by a number of interviewees as evidence of this.

Enhancing the natural environment

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said that they had seen environmental benefits as a result of their participation. Groups are now assessed on their environmental credentials as part of the judging process and many take this seriously. 63% of survey respondents said that they undertook some form of sustainable planting, and on average estimated that just under half of all their planting is sustainable. Communities undertake a range of environmentally focused activities including composting and recycling, conservation and biodiversity projects and environmental clean-ups, such as removal of invasive non-native species.

Figure 2.3



A number of interviewees talked about the focus they had placed on planting that would attract insects and birdlife, and how this had been successful. In some areas, such as the back alleys of Manchester, there had been hardly any plant life and therefore very little wildlife. In others, such as Cumbernauld Community Park, there were few plants providing food and few trees providing shelter, so bird numbers were low. In these cases the planting had brought about increases in both the variety of species and number of birds, including peregrine falcons in Manchester and swallows in Cumbernauld Community Park. A number of projects have included wildflower meadows and borders specifically designed to attract butterflies. Interviewees said that they had seen increases in the butterfly population as a result. Some groups are focused on the creation of environmental conservation areas; others have created them as part of their wider portfolio of planting activities.

The new and improved green spaces cared for by “in Bloom” and IYN groups can also provide valuable eco-system services (services provided to the human population by the environment). These include the health and well-being benefits described earlier in the report, and flood water management and shelter provision, such as is planned in Cumbernauld Community Park through the creation of a wetland areas and planting of trees.

About half of groups are involved in composting and over 60% are involved in recycling. This along with the sustainable planting is an indication of their environmental practices. Interviewees described other activities they had undertaken to improve their environmental footprint, such as self-watering hanging baskets, using peat-free growing media and commissioning peat-free plants and carefully planned planting to promote biodiversity. This has helped to reduce water consumption, reduce estimated carbon emissions and boost wildlife populations. Interviewees also discussed how their work had helped to encourage environmental awareness and positive behaviours in other people.

“There has been a marked increase in the planting of trees and shrubs and more interest in the environment.” (IYN Group)

A number of groups include interpretive boards with their planting, such as in Brightlingsea at the site of the dry garden and nature reserve. The close relationship with schools is also cited as a means of promoting environmental behaviours, children learn on site, either in their own school garden or in the green spaces cared for by the “in Bloom” and IYN groups and become enthused and keen to contribute. Lastly groups believe that those who participate in their projects and/or volunteer on a more ad hoc basis pick up environmental practices such as composting as a result.

“Schemes such as Britain in Bloom, Beautiful Scotland and IYN have raised environmental awareness in the general population and show that people can make a difference in their local areas as well as in the wider society.” (Town)

Cumbernauld Community Park

Creating a major community and environmental resource from disused farmland

Summary

Collaborative and strategic working has enabled the Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park to take 84 hectares of dormant farmland and turn it into a community facility in an area with a serious shortage of facilities for its population of 55,000. Not only is the park a haven for local residents, but also it is now a major environmental resource providing invaluable habitat for a whole range of plant and animal species. The landscaping work will also lead to the provision of eco-system services for the area as the park matures.

Key Facts

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **12,000 in immediate park area, 55,000 in total area**

Number of volunteers: **12 (Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park, many more throughout the year)**

Average number of volunteer hours: **1,250**

(total for Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park volunteers p/a)

Years as It's Your Neighbourhood participant: **3**

Background

Cumbernauld Community Park is an 84-hectare site in the middle of Cumbernauld, a residential area on the outskirts of Glasgow, with a mixed socio-economic profile and a high number of children and young people. Originally farmland, but purchased by the local council, the park had lain empty and unused for 20 years. The park is surrounded by extensive housing developments built in the latter half of the 20th century, with very few community facilities. Prior to the renovation of Cumbernauld Community Park there was little sense of community because there were limited opportunities for interaction. The parkland was so inaccessible that local residents would drive around its borders, rather than walk through it, to get from place to place. Local schools and health organisations including the Scottish Spina Bifida Association (SSBA) and the Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments (SCCMI) were unable to make use of the green space on their doorstep.

The idea of making a community asset out of Cumbernauld Park was first put forward by the Cumbernauld Community Council in 2002. Over time North Lanarkshire Council lent their support and the Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park was established and became part of the Britain in Bloom campaign as an IYN group. Over the subsequent years the Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park have significantly altered the landscape of the park and increased the facilities available for residents. Funding has varied year on year, but the Friends have been very successful at bringing in money from grant giving bodies, and have been supported through match funding from North Lanarkshire Council.

Activities

The Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park volunteers have acted as facilitators and catalysts for changes to the park and community. They have ensured that those around the park have shaped plans for it and been involved in their implementation, which means that it is felt by all locally to truly be a *community* park. The extent of the work achieved in only a few years is remarkable.

The first challenge for the Friends of Cumbernauld Park was to make the parkland accessible. Working with North Lanarkshire Council, £220k funding was secured from the Forestry Commission's Woodlands In and Around Towns programme. This money enabled the thinning of trees around the park, many of which had been planted as a shelterbelt for the housing developments, but had not been cared for since. In addition 4.6km of paths were laid, which began to open up the park, but more were needed. The group worked with local stakeholders including schools, the SSBA and SCCMI to design pathways across the park that would allow people to become familiar with nature in a way that they had not been able to do previously and would be Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. A further £900,000 was raised by the Friends supporting a North Lanarkshire Council Roads and Transport Department bid for funding from sustainable travel charity Sustrans. Additional paths are under discussion and will be laid with labour provided through the local restorative justice programme and materials paid for through the Scottish Proceeds of Crime Fund.

With the park opened up, the Friends of Cumbernauld Park set about encouraging biodiversity and improving the appearance of the landscape. The Friends and the North Lanarkshire Bio-Diversity Officer observed that there were very few birds within the main park. To rectify this they are working with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to create 15 acres of wild flower meadow, inverting the subsoil to allow wild flowers to flourish. It is hoped that, as well as providing a stunning floral display visible from the town centre, this diverse source of food will attract insects and, as a consequence, birds. The Butterfly Conservation Trust provided inspiration and support to the Friends in the aspiration for development of the meadow. This meadow is in addition to a wildflower meadow previously created, which acts as a gateway for visitors into the wider parkland. The latter project was funded by the BBC Breathing Places Lottery Fund and matched by North Lanarkshire's Regeneration Officer.

Having provided a food source it was also necessary to increase nesting habitats for birds. To this end, a series of fields have been selected to become Aidriehead Community Woodland. Over one thousand trees, provided by the Woodland Trust in collaboration with the Royal Horticultural Society, as well as a number of trees grown on by a local gardener, have been planted so far. Native, broad leaf tree species have been set out in drifts and at random to simulate natural growth patterns. Bark and compost to aid planting was provided by the local garden centre. The local community, including parents and children from neighbouring housing estates and volunteers from local businesses planted the trees. Members of drug and alcohol addiction rehabilitation charity Phoenix Futures were also involved in this work, as well as planting and woodland thinning in other parts of the park; this contributed to their rehabilitation programme. This woodland planting provided the launch event for the 2011 Keep Scotland Beautiful Campaign with the team from Stirling taking part and contributing 120 additional hedging plants.

Following a request from local schools the Friends located an area in the park for use as an outdoor classroom. With support from a North Lanarkshire Countryside Ranger, who taught pupils bushcraft, the young people advanced their knowledge of and respect for the natural environment. Based on the success reported by the schools, it is planned that such activities will be expanded in the future. Schools are an integral part of the Park's development, with pupils and staff contributing to ideas for its improvement as well as getting their hands dirty in planting and maintenance activities. The Friends are now exploring ways to get slightly older young people involved and interested in the park.

The Keep Scotland Beautiful campaign, part of Britain in Bloom, has helped to drive the work of the Friends of Cumbernauld Park and their many volunteers. Through Keep Scotland Beautiful the volunteers have been able to identify which aspects of the park they should focus on and opportunities to build on the work they have already undertaken. The competition also generates enthusiasm amongst volunteers and the community, as does winning accolades such as the 2009 North Lanarkshire Award for Best Community Environmental Project, and in 2010 the silver medal award from Keep Scotland Beautiful and a Thriving Award (level four of five) through the IYN programme.

Impact

Cumbernauld Community Park is now a very different space from what it was just a few years ago, and continues to change every year. The new accessible parkland and facilities within it are now a resource for the local community. People make use of the park in a whole range of ways, not previously possible, with positive impacts for them as individuals, the community and the environment.

Each development within the park has been carefully considered to ensure that it brings benefits to the environment as well as the residents of Cumbernauld. New habitats and food sources have been created through meadow and woodland planting. The woodland and planned wetlands area will also, over time, provide eco-system services for the park and population through provision of shelter and floodwater management. All these changes have created and will continue to create an attractive landscape for residents to enjoy all year round.

People are now much better able to get close to, experience and understand the nature around them, which it is believed leads to more positive environmental choices throughout their lives. Environmental understanding is further enhanced by the learning that now takes place in the park. All local primary schools make use of the park and have contributed in some way to its development. The pupils of these schools now have a good comprehension of what it takes to look after the environment around them and are inspired to do so. Gordon Wright, Chair of Westerwood Community Council said:

“The Friends of the Park have included the local community and the pupils of the two primary schools bordering the park to get involved in the planting of trees and flowers. This has given the school children a sense of ownership of their areas of the park.”

Although it's still relatively early in the park's development, biodiversity has already risen. Surveys and observations have found increases in numbers and species of plants, insects and birds, such as swallows and campion and ragged robin wild flowers. The Friends are ensuring that existing populations of deer, rabbits and foxes are protected as the park is developed further.

Previously there were very few facilities locally where children and adults could spend their leisure time. Now the park is encouraging healthy lifestyles, through enabling people to get out of their homes to play and exercise in the open air. The park is now used for playing, running, cycling, and elite parathletics training amongst many other pursuits. Furthermore, now that the park has been made accessible to people with disabilities, the Scottish Spina Bifida Association and the Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments can use the park for therapeutic benefits with their service users. Andy Wynd, Chief Executive of the Scottish Spina Bifida Association said:

“The Scottish Spina Bifida Association has been delighted to be an integral part of the Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park, who have been instrumental in generating a huge amount of enthusiasm for community benefit. The Association’s Headquarters are located within the park boundaries and the benefit to our children and young people, many of whom are wheelchair users, has been superb. We now have a very rare but extremely welcome DDA compliant cycle and walk way through our ground to link the park to the local retail park. Not only do our service users benefit by the reduced gradient but the whole community have remarked on the extent to which access has been significantly improved. Plans for further development of the park are well under way and the extent to which our service users’ views have been taken into account are greatly appreciated. It’s absolutely essential that everyone has equal access to the benefits of the outdoors.”

Because of a lack of facilities there were also few community events. The first Fun Day that the Friends of Cumbernauld Park organised attracted nearly seven thousand people. The Cumbernauld Community Forum has drawn inspiration from this success and has subsequently revived its events programme for the area. Making use of the Friends’ contacts they have organised a number of successful events attracting many residents into the park. Such events, along with volunteer planting days and the day-to-day opportunities for interaction that simply were not possible before the renovation of the park, have started to connect the local community and build a sense of place for Cumbernauld. Gordon Wright said:

“Before Friends of the Park started their campaign to reinstate the park, very few, if any, of the local residents realised that the area was in fact a public park. Since then, thanks to the Friends of the Park installing footpaths, this has now become a well-used recreational space. Thanks to the activities organised by Friends of the Park, culminating in the hugely successful Fun in the Park day, which attracts somewhere in the region of 5,000 people each year, the park is now well established in the minds of the community and will continue to grow and be used by the community.”

Other aspects of civil society have benefited from the Cumbernauld Community Park developments. For example there are a number of “Friends” groups in the local area, caring for local parks and heritage sites. Many of these have been reinvigorated by the work of Friends of Cumbernauld Park and are tackling new challenges of their own, as well as working in collaboration with the Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park.

The Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park have been able to achieve so much, in part because of their collaborative approach. The range of local organisations they have worked with, including schools, disability organisations, community groups, businesses and local government, has enabled them to make the park a vibrant asset for all and to bring in funding from a range of sources to make their aspirations a reality. Along the way they have experienced set-backs when some landscaping projects have not worked quite as planned, but have learnt from each one and persevered and achieved their goal eventually or rethought and adapted original plans to ensure their success over time.

What next?

A number of projects are planned in the near future within the park. These include: the construction of a natural, accessible play park; extensions to the wildflower meadow and woodland planting; the creation of a wetlands area including a 1,300 square metre pond; arts and heritage projects celebrating the Roman and later history of the site – there are connections with Mary Queen of Scots, Robert the Bruce, drovers and recently Stone Age hammers have been found. There are plans for additional paths to open up areas of the park that are not yet easy to reach, including an over-bridge across a ravine, which will also make for a DDA compliant path from the Carrickstone Estate (a housing development) and enable access to the local cemetery.

Perhaps the most significant piece of work for the future is a major Cumbernauld-wide consultation about the future of the park. The Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park are planning to make contact with all members of the community through questionnaires, the community forum, local organisations, open days and public meetings to determine priorities for investment and development in the park. The Friends have shown the great potential of the park as a community asset; they now want to work with local people to set out long-term plans for the park and build community ownership for the future.

Garrowhill Garden Estate Community Group

Growing community ambitions changing a local landscape

Summary

Although Garrowhill Garden Estate is, by its very name, an area with a good deal of gardens and green space, much of the municipal green space had become untidy and uncared for. Streets were grubby and uninteresting and, as a consequence, people cared little for their surroundings. What began as one man's desire to tackle a single scrappy piece of land has turned into a community project to clean-up and green-up Garrowhill. Only three years into the project volunteers have drastically improved the local environment through planting and litter picking. They have inspired residents to do the same and are now advising other parts of Glasgow about how community horticulture can transform a neighbourhood.

Key Facts

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **3,000 houses**

Number of volunteers: **12 regular plus volunteers from local schools**

Average number of volunteer hours per volunteer: **120 p/a**

Years as It's Your Neighbourhood Group: **3**

Background

Garrowhill Garden Estate is a 1930s development in the east of Glasgow. It was the first community of its kind built by private investment in Scotland. Although conceived as a garden estate where all residents would have a high quality of life and, as part of this, access to their own green space, over the decades the communal green spaces have not been maintained and the physical environment had become uncared for.

Garrowhill Garden Estate Community Group began as one man's desire to tidy up a scrappy junction but quickly became a community effort to green their estate. Garrowhill resident Barrie Linning won £80 of garden centre vouchers for the local best-kept front garden competition and decided to spend them for the community's benefit. Barrie wanted to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Garrowhill Garden Estate with a floral display and identified a large and neglected space at a junction near the main parade of shops in the area. Barrie contacted the local council, who were initially reluctant for a member of the public to work on municipal land but, with perseverance, involvement of local councillors and a commitment to take on a lease and public liability insurance, Barrie won them round and began gardening.

Activities

The junction was an untidy space about 200m long, with rarely cut grass that was full of litter and bottles discarded by passers by and users of a pub that overlooked it. Before any plants could be put in, a lot of work was required to clear the plot. The local council agreed to clear the site of litter and cut the grass, but a good deal of digging was required to get the bed ready for plants. Barrie set to work and, as locals saw the junction begin to change, other volunteers came forward to help and the bed was planted up with a floral display showing the date of the estate's construction. This was all the planting that Barrie had planned, but with additional help and growing community interest, more and more plants were added.

Residents were so pleased with the celebratory garden that the volunteers decided they would plant it up for the following spring. They worked with children from the local nursery and primary school to plant bulbs for the following year. So many tulips and daffodils flowered that year that locals nicknamed the spot "Little Amsterdam". The local shops started commenting on the improvements to the environment and staff at the neighbouring pub began to ensure that the garden and area around it were free from litter. Over the three years of the project, this area, known as Barrachnie Cross, has had further planting added, which now includes hanging baskets, street planters and a Victorian tiered planter all supplied by Glasgow City Council's Land and Environmental Services department, and planted up by the volunteers and children from nearby Barrachnie Nursery. The Garrowhill Garden Estate Community Group (GGECG) have worked with other local community organisations, for example in 2010 the local Brownies got involved and a display was planned and planted to celebrate the Girl Guiding UK centenary. GGECG also supports the Garrowhill Community Council to improve the environment of Garrowhill Station, which serves a good number of local commuters.

Inspired by the success of their first project, and having achieved an Improving Award through the IYN programme, the growing group of volunteers, most of whom are over 65, decided to carry on with and expand their work. The group identified another location in need of improvement. At this site two large beds had become overgrown and were also mismatching because one had been cobbled around its borders whilst the other had no firm border at all. A request went out to Glasgow City Council who agreed to supply additional cobbles free of charge. These were laid and the beds were dug over and replanted, and local residents made donations that enabled the group to purchase a good collection of shrubs and bedding plants. As the plants have started to mature, the feel of the space has changed significantly.

Another successful project completed, the volunteers moved onto an additional plot, near their first garden. Again the space had been mostly neglected and looked unattractive, contributing to a run-down feeling in the area. A new bed was created with shrubs and bedding plants. Residents and users of the local shops were so impressed by the changing appearance of the area as it was developed that they would stop to talk to volunteers and make unsolicited donations of cash and trays of plants. Some people passing through would even interrupt their journey and get off the bus find out more about what was happening on the site and admire the horticultural display.

As children have enjoyed their role in creating gardens and floral displays, the GGECG now work with the local primary school developing a garden within the school grounds. They have constructed raised beds, and children are growing a whole range of fruit and vegetables supported on a weekly basis by GGECG volunteers. The school has also obtained a small grant to purchase 14 planters to provide more space for gardening, and GGECG approached Glasgow City Council who supplied compost to fill them.

Keen to get more of the community involved in greening up the area, the GGECG held an open day in 2010. They erected a gazebo and created a display showing before and after photos of the areas they had renovated. Support has been growing from local businesses following the improvements to the parade and most helped out in some way in providing prizes for a raffle, which was held to draw people in and help raise funds. The day was a success with a great number of people showing an interest in and support for the environmental changes that had been made to their area.

Impact

From starting with very modest ambitions, the GGECG has gone on to significantly improve the aesthetics of Garrowhill. The new flowerbeds, planters and hanging baskets around the estate are not only bringing colour and interest but also they make the area look clean, tidy and cared for. Local resident and Garrowhill Community Council member Katrina Kirkpatrick said:

“There is a better environment for everyone, the spaces that were derelict and are now gardens brighten up everyone’s lives, they join together the nice spaces in Garrowhill and cheer everyone up”.

Another local resident who has lived on the estate for 72 years, Mrs Stewart said:

“Before, these spaces were just nothing, now when you step off the bus and walk up the drive the displays are excellent and it’s all nice and clean. This has made a vast difference, and is an incentive for people to live in the area.”

The planting and regular litter picks undertaken by the volunteers have prompted local residents and businesses to take greater care of their own surroundings.

“The changes have raised people’s expectations of what they should have around them, and made them think about what they can contribute to making Garrowhill a better place to live,” said Katrina Kirkpatrick.

Less litter is dropped and more is picked up; this is particularly true of the area outside the pub – very few bottles find their way into the flower bed now and those that do are quickly collected by the pub staff. Volunteers have also noticed that people are tidying the patches of pavement and road in front of their houses, and there is a growing interest in gardening.

Members of the community continue to donate cash and plants to the GGECG, frequently unsolicited. This and the greater care people are taking is an indication of the growing community ownership of the project and of Garrowhill Garden Estate. There has also been a good deal of publicity in local newspapers and magazines, which has helped to boost local pride in the area.

The gardening activities at the primary school have been so well received that a garden is being planned into the landscape for the new school, which is due for completion in 2014. Children have been growing and selling plants to parents and the community to help raise funds for a new greenhouse and polytunnel so they can expand their gardening activities. Parents are getting increasingly involved in the school garden and, as a consequence, gardening skills are being developed across the generations. The school and children from the nursery are also going to lend a hand with beds that the GGECG have leased from the council in Garrowhill Park.

The work of the volunteers has proved an inspiration to other community groups in Glasgow. People have seen the impact that planting and looking after a space can have and want to achieve the same thing in their communities. A number of groups have visited from the West End of Glasgow to see what has been achieved and learn from the GGECG how they did it so successfully.

Although the local council showed some reluctance initially for the community to take over these spaces, they have quickly turned this reluctance into support. They have provided a good deal of support in kind for the group, such as planters, hanging baskets, cobbles, compost and labour time in clearing spaces ready for community growing. Thomas Thomson of Glasgow City Council's Land and Environmental Services group said;

“The work of Barrie and his team has been of great help to Land Services. The volunteers are able to maintain the areas they have leased from the council to a high standard. The area is transformed and is providing inspiration for other communities locally.”

The volunteers have been careful to ensure that they always have the appropriate insurance, permissions and, where necessary, leases before gardening starts, and are supported to do so by the Land Services team; this puts both parties at ease. Without the work of the GGECG it is unlikely that the council would have provided these resources because the ongoing costs of maintaining them would have been high. There is growing interest from Glasgow City Council in the work of GGECG and in the area more generally.

What next?

Other than those plants that have been donated and some shrubs, nearly all the plants used by the Garrowhill Garden Estate Community Group were grown by volunteers from seed or plug plants. This helps to keep costs to a minimum, and the group has been successful in gaining support and sponsorship from local businesses including a grant from the Garrowhill Co-operative supermarket. However as the project and community aspirations expand, the group are looking at how they can bring in additional funds to carry on growing.

Now that the group is established and is making a noticeable difference to Garrowhill, and has received a It's Your Neighbourhood Thriving Award (level four of five), they are keen to enter the UK Britain in Bloom competition because they believe it will be a further motivation for them and the community to continue to care for and improve their environment.

Chapter 5 – Transformational impact

Transformation was a word used by both survey respondents and interviewees. The sense that a place had been significantly changed through their work was described by many of the groups:

“Our churchyard was semi-derelict, a total no-go area. We have transformed it into the green heart of our community, bringing people together.” (IYN group)

Transformation included the aesthetic improvements, changes to land use, community spirit and the “feel” of places. Participants also cited transformation leading to regeneration.

Transformation of derelict or unused spaces

About a third of groups said that they transformed derelict land, however nearly half described the transformation of disused space as a benefit of their participation.

“We have entered the competition for 23 years, commencing 1988. When the judges first visited we did not take them along the marine parade – it was just too derelict and run down. Now we have replaced the rose arbours, made a children’s play area, also a lovely fenced picnic area with recycled plastic seats/tables. [There is] now a garden at cliff lift and an anchor garden. The area is now outstanding – and we are very proud of all the work being carried out.” (Coastal Town)

Groups proved flexible and resourceful in their approaches to finding spaces to renovate. This included a whole host of traffic-related areas such as junctions, car parks, roundabouts, verges and disused garages. Other spaces, such as alleyways, fields, derelict parks and gardens, and unkempt grass patches surrounding houses and businesses, were also used by groups. Once identified, these sites have received a whole variety of planting, from total re-landscaping involving heavy machinery, to the creation of basket, pot and tyre gardens. These gardens are then used for floral displays, community fruit and vegetable growing, outdoor classrooms, and seating areas amongst other things.

Often the reason groups tackled these spaces was because they had become problematic – they were unused because of crime or fear of crime, or because they had become a focus for fly-tipping and litter.

“We participated in ‘In Bloom’ to turn local ‘grot spots’ into ‘beauty spots’ and to raise the profile of the community. We have much improved an area that suffered from vandalism and neglect.” (Urban Community)

Many spaces were described as an eyesore and gave the area a run-down and negative feel, which participants wanted to change. Other groups just wanted to make areas that were drab into something more positive and uplifting for their community:

“To improve the appearance of our neighbourhood. It raises the spirits of all those seeing the bright and cheerful displays.” (Large Village)

Interviewees and survey respondents clearly felt that they were able to make a positive impact for the community because of the transformation of these spaces. This could be at the very simple level of “brightening up the place” or at a more fundamental level of providing new facilities and opportunities for the community. Interviewees described how the transformation had given their area a new lease of life and how it was building the sense of community and encouraging investment by community members, businesses and other agencies in a way that would not have been possible before. A number talked specifically about how their local authority seemed to be showing a greater interest and thinking about the area differently to before.

Community horticulture as a tool for regeneration

The interviews revealed that the “in Bloom” and IYN programmes are being used by some areas to drive and contribute to regeneration.

“The main reason [we participate] is as a regeneration tool. [Ours] is an area with a fair bit of deprivation. Its background is coal, iron, chemicals, railways. We are determined to rebuild our communities and bring back a sense of pride. We want to become a green, sustainable area. Progress has been made – five years ago we could not have entered but we are changing for the better.” (Large Town)

Housing associations, voluntary organisations and local authorities have recognised the breadth of benefits that can be gained from “in Bloom” and IYN and are using them to transform the fortunes of their area.

By improving the visual appearance of an area through community action, not only is the environment enhanced, but also community ownership and pride is boosted. This helps the community to feel more positive about its outlook and contribute to further improvements. These benefits of increased civic pride, community confidence and how a place feels can be intangible concepts that are hard to measure, but interviewees all described how important they were to the people who lived there. One example of how changes can be measured is Central Estate, Dukinfield in Tameside; the area had become so run down and unsafe that people were leaving the estate, and between 40 % and 60 % of housing was vacant. Community gardening has helped change that, and now, only a few years on, there is a waiting list for housing on the estate.

As was described in chapter three, economic opportunities can also be created for individual participants and for the area as a whole. The combination of soft and hard skills development and environmental improvements helps to boost the economy. They are also instrumental in keeping people and revenues in the area, which helps support the sustainability of the economy over time.

Central Estate, Dukinfield

Housing association and resident partnership change fortunes of an entire estate

Summary

When Central Estate residents began their IYN group, their estate was renowned for crime and anti social behaviour, the appearance was run down and the situation had become so bad that people simply did not want to live on the estate – 40 to 60 % of properties were vacant at anyone time. Strongly supported by new landlords, the New Charter Housing Trust, Central Bloomers began changing the look and feel of their estate. The visual impact has been impressive, but perhaps more notable is the change in community and quality of life for residents. Crime and anti-social behaviour are down and all generations are enjoying interacting in places and ways that were not possible before. So profound has the change been there is now a waiting list of people wanting to move in.

Key facts

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer in partnership with Housing Association**

Size of community: **1,100**

Number of volunteers: **24+ additional volunteers on planting days and for specific projects**

Average number of volunteer hours per volunteer: **Unknown total, but 900 three-hour sessions in gardening compound p/a**

Years as an It's Your Neighbourhood group: **5**

Background

Central Estate Dukinfield is a large social housing estate in the Metropolitan Borough of Tameside in the North West of England. Tameside is a local authority committed to promoting and supporting community horticulture activities, particularly through IYN groups. Built in the 1970s, the housing stock is of concrete construction, arranged in balconies with a large proportion of one-bedroom flats. At the turn of this century there were significant issues of drug abuse, anti-social behaviour and crime and most people considered the estate to be unsafe and violent. As a consequence there was very little sense of community and it was not a place people wanted to live; there was a vacancy rate of between 40 and 60 %.

In 2000 New Charter Housing Trust (NCHT) took over Central Estate. They recognised that significant steps needed to be taken to turn the estate around, and knew that community engagement would be essential for success. A residents' group (Central Residents Action Group – CRAG) was brought together to look at ways of improving life on the estate. This group decided that they wanted to undertake projects that would both bring the community together and help participants to gain some sort of qualification. Community horticulture was settled upon and “Central Bloomers” was formed. They became an IYN group in 2006, and in 2008 a greenhouse and gardening compound was opened.

Central Bloomers applied for £12,000 funding through the group from the GMVCO for running a project called 'Towpath', aimed at tackling worklessness and developing volunteering in the community – available to anyone unemployed or socio-economically deprived – in the Greater Manchester area. Aiming for 10 people to complete the project in the first 12 months, the group succeeded in actually progressing 38 people. Since this point, gardening and the IYN programme have been central to the development of the estate with some impressive results.

New Charter Housing Trust provide support to the community through a team of committed regeneration and neighbourhood management staff, £7,500 funding for planting barrier baskets, ad hoc funding for particular projects and in-kind support through grounds maintenance contractors. They also work with CRAG and Central Bloomers in putting together external fundraising applications.

Activities

To start the project New Charter Housing Trust (NCHT) provided barrier baskets that were planted up by the volunteers and hung on balconies across the estate. There was an immediate visual impact with the drab concrete buildings brought to life by flowers. Very quickly these were followed by additional barrier baskets and tubs, which were built by residents. People across the estate started to take greater care of their surroundings and took responsibility for tending the plants outside their front door.

Encouraged by this success, CRAG worked with the NCHT to win a £12,000 grant from environmental regeneration charity Groundwork to establish a growing compound where sowing, growing and learning could take place. It is now the hub of community horticulture on Central Estate and is run by the Central Bloomers. Over the years the compound has become better equipped; it now contains a greenhouse, well-stocked tool shed, raised beds, fruit trees, facilities for reclaiming pallets and wood for planter construction, and refreshment and sanitation facilities. The compound is open at least three days a week for the use of all residents and is staffed by IYN volunteers. NCHT has paid for and supported volunteers to gain an NVQ Level 2 qualification in horticulture. They use their new knowledge to teach other residents about gardening, especially how to grow fruit and vegetables in a small space because most properties on the estate have balconies rather than gardens. Some volunteers have now also been trained to teach basic cookery skills so that people can make the best use of their new crops.

Residents can also bring seeds to the compound, which are grown on by the volunteers and they collect them later in the year to plant in their own tubs and barrier baskets. A small donation is made and Central Bloomers volunteers use about 20% of the plants grown from seed in planting schemes throughout the estate. Volunteers also produce hundreds of hanging baskets each year, which they exchange for a small donation to the compound. Their reputation has spread so well that the baskets are bought by customers from within and beyond Central Estate. To ensure that those residents unable to make it to the compound due to old age or disability do not miss out, volunteers prepare and mount hanging baskets for them on their own houses. Informal discussions about life on the estate and possible improvements take place regularly on the gardening compound, which now acts as an outdoor community centre. Advice given there by volunteers ranges from growing seeds to seeking employment.

Residents are kept abreast of the volunteers' work and invited to contribute ideas/areas of concern through a quarterly newsletter and more frequent leaflet drops to the estate, open meetings and an accessible website, all delivered jointly by CRAG and NCHT. Although well-supported by the NCHT, CRAG and Central Bloomers retain their independence and this is an important distinction for all parties. NCHT also state that their transparency, honesty and visibility have been important factors in creating an atmosphere of trust. Initially residents had concerns that their approach, known locally for being hard line would bring further conflict to the estate. However, the level of engagement and frankness between NCHT staff on the ground and residents has meant the opposite is true. NCHT are careful not to raise unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and work to respond quickly to requests for help and resources. In terms of community gardening, although NCHT ask residents to talk to them before taking on new growing projects, they are rarely turned down.

As volunteers and residents have become more confident and enthused about their gardening skills, planting has spread beyond baskets and tubs to individuals' private balconies and now onto green spaces all over the estate. Some spaces are formal beds shared or cared for by particular groups or individuals, others are more informal with new shrubs and trees, and wild flower meadows. Although a good deal of the growing activities are led by the main group of volunteers, the wider community gets involved in planting activities in different ways and on planting days many residents turn up to lend a hand. There are also other community groups in the area, such as a dad's group, children's centre etc and all have become involved in planting in one way or another. In addition £7,000 has been raised for specific children's growing facilities, which are based within the estate's primary school.

When the estate was first built a children's play area was included. However, over the years this fell into disrepair and bit by bit the play equipment was removed, leaving nothing but a few trees and some grass for the children. The estate is also surrounded by three busy roads and the nearest play park is on the other side of these roads, which were unsafe for children to cross. To tackle this play deficit another significant project for NCHT, CRAG and Central Bloomers has been the design, fundraising and now construction of a new, safe community garden that, it is hoped, will be a vibrant hub of community interaction. An extensive consultation exercise was undertaken and children, young people and families were all involved in the design of the garden. £47,000 of funding was secured through the Big Lottery Fund's Community Spaces programme for its construction.

This garden provides new natural play features together with seating and picnic areas, community artwork and sensory planting that will provide a space for the whole community to interact.

CRAG hopes the area will *“promote more physical activity and improved health and well being. It will enhance our community events and encourage more interaction between young and old people. The Monkey Park will improve quality of life and encourage people to stay on the estate. This in turn will improve the stability of our community.”*

Impact

The visual impact of the estate is completely altered; year round it brims with plants, shrubs and trees on balconies, in barrier baskets, raised beds, flower meadows and across the landscape. The quality of the whole environment is being improved. NCHT report that because residents now feel that *“it is their home, their land, their community”* they take greater care of their surroundings, resulting in less litter and fly-tipping. They are also looking after the plants outside their houses and around the estate. There have also been reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour – incidents of anti-social behaviour halved between 2005 and 2011. Perhaps because people are now more in touch with the natural environment they are also pushing for improved recycling facilities.

Previously there were few spaces and facilities where residents could interact, and people felt trapped in their flats. Now they are enjoying making use of the land around them and interacting with their neighbours. This, combined with fruit and vegetable growing, cooking lessons, physical activity and access to services through the gardening compound is having a positive impact on health, which has been remarked upon by the Primary Care Trust. The PCT now signposts their service users (amongst whom there are high levels of obesity, smoking and long-term conditions) to Central Bloomers and gardening activities to help them manage their health issues. The NCH health team also support referrals to the gardening projects, and one health trainer said:

“Having green space in our communities is great for promoting health and well-being and there is no cost. As a Health Trainer the main part of my role is to promote healthy living and reduce health inequalities in areas of deprivation. I encourage and support young people and adults to take part in physical activity. Not only is gardening a great way to increase physical activity, it can also help with mental illness such as depression. It is a good way to socialise and get to know other members of your community and help you feel less isolated.”

Through both the gardening compound and multiple growing projects across the estate, residents have got to know and understand one another better. This has been particularly noticeable across the generations, where there used to be high levels of mistrust. Not only do residents now enjoy spending time together, but also they talk about how they can make further improvements to their surroundings. They are increasingly identifying opportunities themselves and are pursuing them with less assistance from the NCHT. For example sales of hanging baskets to local businesses have helped bring in additional funds for the residents’ groups and residents are considering the development of Central Bloomers into a social enterprise. Already through sales and fundraising they have bought their own gardening equipment, including lawn mowers, and are looking after aspects of grounds maintenance on the estate with a view to reducing service charges. Based on this success, they hope to extend the social enterprise to NCHT grounds maintenance contracts.

The gardening compound has created a safe space where people can work with others to tackle their own issues; health, self-confidence, employment and so on. Recognising this, the NCHT has set up a work club to help people get back into employment, which has worked with 80 individuals so far. Through group and one-to-one sessions individuals look at how they can build their skills and confidence to get back into the work place. In many cases their first step is to become a volunteer at the compound. Regular sessions and structured activity help them get back into the routine of work, communicate with others and feel confident in their own capabilities.

The striking achievements of Central Estate residents could make their work sound easy. However NCHT say that one of the main challenges has been building the skills and self-belief of residents so that they feel they can volunteer. Many have issues relating to health and life circumstances, for example being out of work for a decade or more, which mean that they lack confidence. The support that NCHT and peer volunteers have been able to give has been vital in enabling them to participate with confidence and success.

NCHT say that involvement in IYN and Tameside in Bloom has helped boost residents' pride in their surroundings. They are delighted at their efforts being recognised at a regional and national level, and to be associated with the Royal Horticultural Society.

Perhaps the starkest contrast between now and before the work of Central Bloomers is that the vacancy rate has been reduced to less than 1% with a waiting list of people wanting to move in. Central Estate has become a community and place people want to be a part of.

What next?

Partly because of the high proportion of one-bedroom dwellings, the estate has a transient population. Central Bloomers hope that the changes to the landscape and community will encourage people to stay longer. They also recognise that the turnover of residents mean that there will always be new people to teach the skills of gardening to. If a grounding is achieved whilst people live on the estate, who then take their skills on to a new location, this is of benefit for now and for the future, and for the wider area. Plus volunteers will continue to be kept busy on the compound.

Notwithstanding the ongoing tasks, there are new projects to embed and nurture through their first few years, including young trees, the new play area, and a community garden that is being constructed on the site of a demolished building and will include allotments for residents. Central Bloomers intend to continue to engage with residents to see how they can take ownership of these projects and determine priorities for the future.

NCHT are keen to support CRAG and Central Bloomers to become more self-sufficient and believe they now have the skills, confidence and training to be so. However, their concern is that changes to funding due to the economic downturn will make it harder for volunteers to access resources to support their work, and that the sorts of funding that are now available require professional level submissions, which make the task even more challenging.

Lastly, delighted with what has been achieved on Central Estate, NCHT are seeking to extend the success of community horticulture across the 18,000 homes that they manage.

Holyhead

Using Britain in Bloom as a tool for regeneration

Summary

Designated by the Welsh Assembly Government as an area in need of major regeneration, Holyhead has been using community horticulture as a tool and catalyst for boosting morale and economic development. Although still in the early stages of their work, significant changes have been made to the aesthetics and atmosphere of the town. Holyhead in Bloom have already brought improvements but they are in it for the long haul and have high aspirations for what can be achieved in years to come.

Key Facts

Category: **Town**

Leadership: **NGO and community partnership**

Size of community: **c11,500**

Number of volunteers: **45**

Average number of volunteer hours: **c1,800 (total for all volunteers p/a)**

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **2**

Background

Holyhead is a port town on Anglesey off the North West coast of Wales. Although situated in beautiful countryside, Holyhead experiences significant economic deprivation; six of the seven wards fall into the most deprived quartile of wards in Wales. Holyhead has been identified by the Welsh Assembly Government as an area in need of major regeneration. People in the town live on relatively low average incomes; there is a low level of formal qualifications and high unemployment: two of the town's three main employers experienced major redundancies in 2009 and this has had a dramatic impact on unemployment claimant levels. Of the seven wards in Wales with Job Seekers Allowance claimant rates over 10% in March 2011, three were in Holyhead. The town's housing stock is dominated by older terraced and public sector built housing. Holyhead has an historic centre, but this has been affected by a major retail development on the outskirts of the town leading to significant commercial vacancy.

Holyhead in Bloom was started and continues to be supported by regeneration charity, the Plas Cybi Partnership (PCP), who are using it to bring positive changes to the town. The PCP leads a range of projects to stimulate community action and encourage sustainable community and economic development. It is supported through the Welsh Assembly Government's *Communities First* programme to lead on community-based regeneration in Holyhead. One of the major strands of their work is an environmental demonstration project focusing on improving the green spaces within the town. A central plank of this has been Holyhead in Bloom, which started in 2010; staff and volunteers are sure that their greening efforts are contributing to an improvement in the appearance and morale of the town.

Activities

The Plas Cybi Partnership believes strongly that bottom-up community action will best drive improvements to Holyhead, and the activities of Holyhead in Bloom to date have been focused on getting communities interested and enthused about planting, believing that their efforts will be successful and taking the lead in making Holyhead a better place to live. The PCP team have worked with Holyhead in Bloom volunteers to engage the local community in determining priorities for greening across the town through community meetings, open days and an office in the town centre, which people can drop into. Together they have kick-started a wide range of community horticulture projects.

Dewi Lloyd, Principal Development Officer at Anglesey County Council said that they have:

“become a major driving force in the improvement of Holyhead in recent years. It is very much a grass-roots organisation, which successfully engages and involves the local community, as evidenced by their team of volunteers and their excellent work with schools and young people. They are able to quickly respond to community wishes and rapidly implement local initiatives which the public sector would have great difficulty in delivering.”

Six members of staff are employed by the PCP to deliver the environmental demonstration project. These staff are supported by the Holyhead in Bloom volunteers and, on any day, at least four volunteers will be working alongside them, bringing an estimated 1,800 volunteer hours to the project each year. These volunteers are drawn from across the community, including people with learning disabilities and young people on work experience, and Wales Volunteer of the Year winner. In addition more volunteers from across Holyhead help out on an ad hoc basis, especially on planting days.

In order to get members of the community interested in growing, simple, fun events such as hanging basket days and herb and potato planting days take place throughout the year. These give local people the beginnings of a garden in hanging basket, pot or bucket form. It enables them to make a start on their own garden or street and see that growing can be achieved in small spaces and with very little resource. The days also help Holyhead in Bloom organisers and volunteers to raise the profile of their activities, gain community buy-in and encourage new volunteers to get involved. Hanging baskets are also a fundraising tool for Holyhead in Bloom; volunteers, from toddlers to pensioners plant up baskets, which are sold to local businesses and residents. In 2011 more than 50 volunteers (of all ages) planted hundreds of baskets. The improvement they have brought to the town already means that demand for them is increasing year on year, bringing in additional income for Holyhead in Bloom. Holyhead inhabitants are also encouraged to participate in the Holyhead in Bloom efforts through competitions with prizes for best street, front garden, hanging basket, allotment and container garden.

Other improvements throughout Holyhead include: new shrubs and bedding in long-neglected brick planters in the town centre; sustainable planting using grasses and shrubs as well as some bedding plants in the beach area; planters, beds and hanging baskets outside Holyhead Station and the port area and a major overhaul of the main roundabout on entry to the town, which scored as the "most liked" recent regeneration initiative in a public feedback survey by the county council.

Children and young people have been getting involved in gardening through the Ready, Steady, Grow project, a collaboration between Holyhead in Bloom (through the PCP) and Holyhead Council. With support from environmental and youth service teams, school gardens have been created in the 10 primary schools in Holyhead complete with allotments and polytunnels. Schools are supported by Holyhead in Bloom to develop and deliver a gardening plan for the year to make the most out of the growing space they have. The schools are also supported to share ideas, successes and challenges, bringing inspiration to each other and the children involved. All schools are using the produce they have grown in their canteens and sell excess produce to parents and the community.

Holyhead in Bloom have established a number of new committees to take their work forward. Young people on the schools committee have called for the development of a school garden in the town's high school to enable them to carry on developing their horticultural skills. In collaboration with the school, funds have been raised to construct and develop a new garden. Over time it is hoped that support from Holyhead in Bloom can be phased out and that the school will take complete control of the garden. Holyhead's youth centres have also been supported to create growing spaces through joint working between Holyhead in Bloom, the PCP and the town's youth services. This has sparked an interest in growing and a number of young people are now involved in Holyhead in Bloom, litter picking, planting and tending gardens.

Impact

Holyhead was a town with very little and very tired planting, contributing to a down-at-heel feel. The efforts of the Holyhead in Bloom team with the support of the Plas Cybi Partnership are beginning to change that, as was observed by the Wales in Bloom judges in 2010, when the town won the competition in its first year of participation. The impact has also been recognised at a local authority level.

“Plas Cybi and Holyhead in Bloom have been responsible for introducing a variety of floral displays in and around the town centre where previously there were none, and this has had a very significant positive impact on the appearance of the area, and people's pride in their community,” said Dewi Lloyd, Principal Development Officer at Anglesey County Council.

Expectations and aspirations have been raised for what Holyhead can look like and achieve. People now expect and look forward to planting throughout the town and increasingly are taking an interest in the green space around them, both private and public. This is evidenced by increasing numbers of volunteers, customers for hanging baskets and attendees at fun days. Holyhead in Bloom volunteer, Bill Hart said:

“I have lived in Holyhead for many years now and I have never seen the town looking so good. Flowers and plant displays welcome you from the moment you leave the train, ferry bus or your own car. Throughout the town there are mini gardens, planters and hanging baskets all designed beautifully to enhance our surroundings. At Newry Beach the gardens have been rejuvenated and are a real pleasure to see. All in all, our town richly deserves the title of Winner of Wales in Bloom.”

Creating new opportunities for the community to work together towards a common goal has helped to build community spirit. This coupled with the new look of the town is creating a more positive atmosphere within Holyhead. PCP believes the work has also contributed to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour. Between 2009 and 2010 there was a 4% reduction in crime, a 14% reduction in anti-social behaviour related crime and a 12% reduction in other incidents of anti-social behaviour. Because of all these changes there has been a growth within the community of a belief in and commitment to the regeneration of Holyhead, by residents and business.

Improvements to the appearance and feel of the town centre are a central part of the multi-agency regeneration plan for Holyhead, and Holyhead in Bloom is beginning to play an increasing role in these developments. The PCP are now involved in community tourism, including managing a new visitor centre for the town, organising a series of family fun-day events, and arranging guided tours for the increasing numbers of cruise ship passengers. In the past year, four major cruise ships carrying 3,000 passengers have docked at Holyhead, and 12 visits are planned for 2011, a reflection that Holyhead is becoming a destination. There have also been several major private investment plans announced in and near Holyhead recently including a large holiday village complex, a major waterfront marina development, new industrial uses and a new power station. Although it is likely to take a number of years for the impact of these projects to be felt, it is a sure sign that there is improved confidence in the town.

Getting children and young people involved has led to improvements in knowledge about food and, as a consequence, healthier eating habits. Because the young people have been involved with the planting they now have a respect for the environment around them and there is less vandalism, which was previously a significant problem for the town. Encouraging young people to work alongside other volunteers of all ages has also helped to build understanding and trust between the generations, further increasing the sense of community in Holyhead.

The achievements of Holyhead in Bloom have encouraged Holyhead Council to step up their approach to greening the town, and they are making increasing investments in Holyhead in Bloom. Richard Jones Deputy Town Clerk said that the work of Holyhead is “*wonderful*” and that “*it improves people’s sense of well-being. It definitely does help the town*”.

Using resources from the Department for Work and Pensions Future Jobs Fund, Holyhead in Bloom and the PCP provided employment-based training and skills development for a number of young people, many of whom had never worked before. Receiving gardening and grounds maintenance related training as well as working alongside the Holyhead in Bloom volunteers gave the young people involved valuable new skills and confidence and prepared them for the workplace.

The PCP believe that the Britain in Bloom campaign brings sustainability to community horticulture in Holyhead. The judging criteria create a framework for improvements and the balance between horticultural, environmental and community achievement is a useful tool for guiding the work of the Holyhead in Bloom team in both their in Bloom and regeneration efforts. The PCP believe that the competitive element of the campaign, along with external recognition of the achievements of the volunteers and winning the Wales in Bloom title have been a real motivating force for the Holyhead in Bloom team, and the town more widely.

What next?

To formalise Holyhead in Bloom and step up community engagement and achievements of the group, six sub-committees have been established and will be taking forward particular aspects of “in Bloom” activities. The six committees are: environment; schools; funding; volunteering; community participation; and history and heritage. Each group has been tasked with ensuring that relevant stakeholders from across Holyhead are brought into their work. This should build the profile, support base and long term sustainability of Holyhead in Bloom. The volunteers and PCP believe that community horticulture is a path to regeneration in the town and are looking to ensure that Holyhead in Bloom continues for decades into the future.

Embedding gardening across the community and raising sufficient funding are the priorities for the immediate future. Holyhead in Bloom are holding meetings with a wide variety of community organisations across the town to bring them into the campaign and determine and co-ordinate community horticulture and regeneration efforts. It is hoped that this will build community ownership and leadership of Holyhead in Bloom, something that has been challenging in some areas of the community to date.

Holyhead in Bloom is also seeking to win grounds maintenance and horticultural contracts from Holyhead Council and Anglesey County Council and, through doing so, create employment opportunities for local people. Any profits gained will be re-invested in community horticulture and regeneration activities throughout the town.

Because of their success within the two original wards in Holyhead, the PCP community environmental project has been extended to cover all six Communities First wards on Anglesey, four of which are in Holyhead and two are within other smaller towns on Anglesey. The PCP has also been awarded the status of “community environmental demonstrator project for Wales”.

Conclusions

The Britain in Bloom campaigns are making a major impact on the physical and social landscape of the UK. Millions of volunteer hours are given each year to improve, care for and often transform the living environments of small and large communities. There is a whole range of models used for delivering these improvements, which reflects the breadth and reach of the two programmes across the UK.

The research undertaken for this report found that there are a number of ways in which communities are enhanced as a result of their participation in the RHS Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood programmes.

- **Stronger communities:** Individuals within communities are brought together through direct participation in planting activities, new spaces to interact, new and/or improved community facilities and the shared experience of pleasant surroundings. As a consequence of this, communication is improved, barriers are broken down, neighbourliness is increased and community pride is boosted. In many cases this creates a virtuous circle where individuals feel better about where they live and so invest more in it, further improving the place and increasing positive feelings and so on.
- **Reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour:** Because people feel better about where they live and their community they are less likely to cause it harm. Also because people build relationships with each other, and in many cases the police, they are able to work together to prevent incidences and fear of crime.
- **Improved health and well-being:** Participation in community gardening can increase physical and mental health. The physical exercise involved in gardening, coupled with improved diets that often arise as a result of communities growing their own fruit and vegetables, helps participants to stay healthy. Mental health and well-being is enhanced because people, many of whom are vulnerable or at risk of isolation, spend time in the company of others. Their involvement in a positive and rewarding activity increases their sense of self-esteem and builds confidence.
- **Development of skills and confidence:** Most participants develop their horticultural skills in one way or another through their involvement. Others, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, eg long-term unemployed, homeless, offenders or those at risk of offending, are also able to develop a whole set of soft skills through their involvement. These skills include communication, teamwork, responding to a structured environment and organisation.
- **Stronger local economies:** Improvements made to the physical environment, and the way that people feel about places as a result of these changes, helps develop local economies. By creating places, particularly high streets and tourist destinations, that people want to be, inward investment is attracted. This may be at a personal level (people choosing to visit or shop in an area) or at a business level (where businesses choose to open or expand). In some cases community and business investment stimulates local authority investment to help accelerate developments. Community horticulture programmes can be of significant monetary value to local authorities in terms of the hours contributed and improvements made (at a physical and social level).

- **Improved physical surroundings:** As a result of participation places look better and have less litter. This is both as a direct outcome of planting and additional green spaces as well as greater community pride. Because locals are more satisfied with their environment they take greater care of it, tending their own space (be it personal or business), dropping less litter and encouraging others to do the same.
- **Enhanced natural environments:** The additional planting and maintenance of green spaces provides additional and varied habitat, which supports a range of biodiversity. Groups are also careful to minimise their negative environmental impact through measures such as sustainable planting, reductions in water consumption and use of peat-free growing media. A number of communities also undertake focused environmental conservation activities.

There are a number of features of the “in Bloom” and IYN campaigns specifically that communities highlighted as particularly helpful to them, this included:

- The creation of a specific goal/purpose to work towards, and the sense of satisfaction in achieving it;
- The structure and assessment criteria, which provide a framework and inspiration for action;
- Support and advice from judges and assessors; communities often really appreciated the comments and advice that they received, and felt that this helped them improve year on year;
- The flexibility about models of delivery enables communities of very different sizes, compositions and needs to determine how they participate in a way that best suits them;
- The competitive element (for “in Bloom” participants); a “bit of healthy competition” was felt by many to help motivate participants.

Many participants discussed the value of local authority support and the challenges they face if it is lacking. The support that communities required varied from place to place but common themes emerged:

- **Access to spaces to garden:** A number of respondents cited the difficulties they had in persuading local authorities to let them garden on municipal land. Often local authority concerns included health and safety, public liability and long-term maintenance of sites. All of these are legitimate concerns but they can all also be overcome fairly simply (for example the RHS has a scheme where participating communities can purchase insurance at a low cost), and in some more supportive local authorities it was their officers who helped communities negotiate them.
- **Support in kind:** Many groups had some form of support from their local authority in kind; this included the provision of planting equipment, plants and man power – both environmental services and community development.
- **Funding support:** Local authorities’ financial support was also very important. Funds were made available from small “community chest” type grants to major grants, and the financing of whole town and city initiatives. They also provided technical support to help communities fundraise successfully and secured business sponsorship.

Almost without exception interviewees expressed some concern about how local authority cutbacks, particularly in environmental services, would impact on their work, but were resolved to continue as best they could with whatever resources they had at their disposal.

“There is only one thing we can say and that is, since we have become involved with It's Your Neighbourhood and “in Bloom” we have an area that is looking far better than it did three to four years ago. And it has got people talking as to how we can improve our area further. It's Your Neighbourhood and “in Bloom” is the best thing that has happened to our area.” (IYN group)

Appendix

Cemaes Bay

Whole village effort to transform seaside resort

Summary

Cemaes Bay is a village on Anglesey, an island off the North West coast of Wales. With high levels of unemployment, it is a fairly deprived part of the UK. Cemaes in Bloom was started in order to boost trade, tourism and the appearance of the village, and despite the recent economic downturn it has successfully achieved this. New landscapes and woodland have been created, the group has completely overhauled neglected council land and community facilities, and the villagers are now proud of where they live with litter, graffiti and vandalism dramatically decreased. The activities of Cemaes in Bloom have got the whole village gardening. The new look and feel of Cemaes Bay is bringing more visitors to the area and boosting its economy.

Key Facts

Category: **Village**

Leadership: **Volunteer led**

Size of community: **c850**

Number of volunteers: **20**

Average number of volunteer hours: **varies from a few hours per week to almost full time**

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **6**

Background

Community horticulture in Cemaes Bay was kick-started by the Village Trade and Tourism Association in a bid to boost visitor numbers and make the village more attractive to residents. Initially competitions were run for the best village hanging basket and best planter. These initiatives quickly progressed, developing into Cemaes in Bloom and more ambitious ventures. Where council land was previously little cared for, except for the efforts of one lone guerilla gardener, now patches of public space have been brought back to life thanks to the Cemaes in Bloom volunteers. And even the lack of funding did not deter the group, who boosted any grants they received with money raised through a bric-a-brac shop they run in the village.

Activities

Within Cemaes Bay is a community owned and run heritage centre, car park, village hall and snooker hall, all of which the Cemaes in Bloom team have been hard at work improving through gardening. The heritage centre has a tearoom, visitor information centre and IT facilities and, thanks to Cemaes in Bloom, it now has a garden, which serves as a great meeting point for the community and is a fantastic attraction for visitors.

The once barren and ugly village car park has been given a new look using sustainable planting; while raised beds now sit outside the village hall, filled with well-tended plants, creating an attractive addition to the environment and a focal point for the hall’s users.

Knowing that the snooker hall is a favourite with the village's young people, the Cemaes in Bloom group quickly realised they could engage with the teenagers further by offering them the chance to do some legal street art on the boarded-up windows of the hall. The murals provide bright colour to the building and can be changed often to allow everyone the chance to have their work displayed.

Not forgetting the village's youngest residents, the Bloom group has worked with the local primary school to create a space for outdoor learning, helping to teach gardening through sessions with the pupils, which focus on ornamental planting and encouraging biodiversity. In return the Bloom group now has help from some of the school children when it comes to watering around the village.

New woodland was created on the outskirts of the village in a joint project between Cemaes in Bloom and Cwmni Cemaes, the community company that runs the heritage centre. Five acres of land owned by the local council had become a site for fly-tipping, attracting rats and other vermin, and so in a bid to overhaul the site, Cwmni Cemaes bought the land for a nominal fee from the council and raised over £30,000 from the Forestry Commission in Wales. The funding was used to clear the site, create paths and plant approximately 6,000 native trees, an activity with which nearly all members of the village got involved. The woodland is maintained by Cemaes in Bloom and provides the villagers with a sense of pride in their achievements. It has brought new visitors to the village, offering a pleasant walk, not to mention a natural screen between the village and nearby Wylfa Nuclear Power Station.

Impact

Cemaes in Bloom's original aim was to improve the appearance of the village and in turn bring more visitors to the area – two objectives that have definitely been met.

Dull and neglected municipal land is now full of planting and colour all year round, while the new attraction of the woodland has helped to bring footfall to the area and increased income for the local shops. For the residents, new enlivened facilities like the snooker and village hall, coupled with a general interest in gardening sparked by the activities of the Bloom group, have united a community and helped to reduce the feeling of isolation felt by some of the older residents.

Cemaes in Bloom volunteer Pauline Roberts said:

"The area really has been transformed. We now have lots more visitors – a regular motorcycle club now come to the beach on a regular basis at weekends and visit the cafes. There must be 100 or so of them and it's great because it's such a pretty village now. The woodland attracts walkers and we're working towards making it access friendly for wheelchair users. We've created some green maintenance jobs for local people too, so that's good."

Cemaes Bay residents now have a greater pride in where they live, with litter, graffiti and vandalism all reduced. New skills have been learnt and a passion for plants ignited, evident in the window boxes that adorn the village and the residents' desire to visit the local community allotment.

Michael Thomas, Senior Development Officer Tourism & Marketing at Cyngor Sir Ynys Mon (Isle of Anglesey County Council) said:

"The dedication and vision of Cemaes in Bloom individuals is to be congratulated. Cemaes Bay looks great, and this has enhanced the area for both visitors and locals alike. This is an inspiring example of how residents can bring back community spirit and really make a difference to their local area."

What next?

Another major landscaping project is planned – a planted walkway that will lead from the village to the bay through the Wygyr Valley. Over £30,000 has been raised for this three-year project, with new footpaths and crossings having to be created to improve accessibility, while associated planting will be used to encourage biodiversity in the area.

It is hoped this work will help to raise the profile of Cemaes Bay and cement Anglesey's reputation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). For, as one Wales in Bloom judge said, the permanently planted beds facing the bay are "some of the best in Wales".

Kilsyth

Weaving a community back together, the social impact of Britain in Bloom

Summary

Kilsyth, north east of Glasgow, is a former weaving and mining town that suffered and fell into neglect when the mining industry began to disappear in the 1980s and 90s. Resident Bill Craik said, “The town was a dump, shops were closing and the town just wasn’t developing.”

But the determination of a small group of people breathed life back into the town and helped to pull their community back together, changing the fortunes of Kilsyth for the better – and it all started with Burngreen Park, an ‘unused and uninteresting’ public space.

Key Facts

Category: **Small Town**

Leadership: **Volunteers with support from council**

Size of Community: **23,000**

Number of volunteers: **500**

Number of volunteer hours: **Unknown**

Years as in Bloom/IYN participant: **Started in 2004 and in 2009 became part of Beautiful Scotland (Britain in Bloom in Scotland)**

Background

Historically, Kilsyth was a community divided; a parochial place with little communication between the different parts of the town. However, agreement was held on the fact that it should be the council’s job to undertake improvement works to the place – that was until a small group of individuals decided to take it upon themselves to tackle the problem of Burngreen Park.

The Friends of Burngreen Park formed and quickly began conversations with the council. They were promised a small amount of start-up funding and support to help them apply for grants from places like the National Lottery, so they could begin to rejuvenate the park. This partnership approach between the Friends and the council, especially with the grant application support, has been key to the success of the project.

Activities

Despite the lacklustre attitude of the town's residents, the Friends began to galvanise support for the park and the work that needed doing. Today they have created a wildflower meadow, planted by volunteers from the local primary school, council and businesses; designed a butterfly border with plants grown from seed or donated and planted by volunteers; built a more welcoming entrance to the park by laying new paving, turf and fencing and renovated the 1930s bandstand complete with new floodlighting, which is being used for all sorts of events for the first time in years.

Within the park there were several run-down buildings, neglected over the years, of no real use to anyone and ready for demolition. Today, these have been transformed into a nursery for pre-school children and a boxing gym for use by the town's residents. A fruit and vegetable plot has also been dug out and planted up – an addition that serves the local primary school and park nursery, helping to teach children about where their food comes from.

Getting community involvement has been tough over the years, but as people began to see what was being achieved in the park, particularly with the new pre-school nursery and creation of the gym, support has grown and spread to other projects within Kilsyth. Lately there has been good participation from unemployed community members and 21 groups/organisations in the area including the Brownies, Scouts, churches and Rotary Club, who all get involved with planting, often providing the plants and bulbs themselves. Different groups undertake litter picks on a regular basis around the park and town, while also tending and improving their own grounds. Schools in particular have got very involved by either creating their own gardens or tending plots around the town

Kilsyth Cllr Jean Jones said:

“With the work and efforts of the Friends of Burngreen Park, major improvements have inspired other residents to start looking at their own local areas and form community groups to start improving their environment.”

After five years of hard work, the Friends of Burngreen Park went on to become Beautiful Kilsyth as part of the Beautiful Scotland campaign.

Local organisations and businesses, including the town's community council, have supported the town's entry into Beautiful Scotland. In the early stages, businesses made small cash donations and gifts in kind and volunteered staff time for planting and landscaping work, but today nearly every high street business supports the campaign, participating in a best-dressed window competition.

Continuing, Jean Jones said:

“Kilsyth in the last few years has become a pleasant place to stay and housing developers have recognised this and commenced the construction of many new houses. I am sure that the local shops and businesses will benefit from the improvements taking place. I look forward to the town becoming an even more desirable place to live and operate a business in.”

Impact

The work of The Friends of Burngreen Park has served as a catalyst to literally bring life to back Kilsyth, attracting new business and housing into the area as a whole. Bill, who has lived in Kilsyth for 22 years, believes Burngreen Park has acted as a catalyst.

“The level of interest taken by the community in the change that was happening started to encourage business into Kilsyth.”

Today new housing, canal redevelopment, a marina, fishing lake and climbing centre are all planned. Gone is the sense that Kilsyth was nothing more than separate street enclaves and in its place is a town community that feels much more like a village.

Now around 300 children visit the nursery and the supervised play that takes place within the park; while some 50 local young men use the volunteer-run boxing club and gym, which is open four nights a week from 5.30–10pm, ensuring the park is nearly always in use. Without the Friends’ work, this development would not have happened. The park feels safer, so the number of children and families making use of it has increased.

The knock-on effect of improving the park is far reaching. Schools and businesses have taken up the mantle, offering physical support, cash donations and gifts in kind. Biodiversity in the area has increased as the park has come back to life, not to mention the other gardening projects undertaken because of the residents’ enthusiasm. Surveys by the Butterfly Society of Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trusts have shown increases in biodiversity with bird life in particular on the rise.

And finally tensions between local teenagers and the police, fuelled largely by underage drinking in the park, have all but evaporated. This is thanks largely to the park’s new role as a family-friendly, safe and well-used resource.

What next?

The Beautiful Kilsyth team is continuing to raise awareness of their work and gain further support from across the community. Residents are now asked to identify areas they think are in need of environmental improvement and, in return, the Beautiful Kilsyth team go out and take a digital photo of the spots to share with council officials. The hope is that this will lead to more rapid improvements across the town and help people take pride in, and responsibility for, their area.

Following the model of Burngreen Park, a new ‘Friends of’ group has been established for another park in the town, in the hope of bringing the same level of improvements to that area.

Nottingham

Getting neighbours talking again, the transformation of a city

Summary

Nottingham City Council has used the Britain in Bloom initiative as a way of reaching the diverse communities that exist within the city. The council has supported local residents to improve their own areas, boost community relations and bring pride back into their neighbourhoods, by offering gardening advice, support and materials where needed.

Key Facts

Category: **City**

Leadership: **Local Authority and volunteer**

Size of community: **286,000**

Number of volunteers: **6,000 through IYN groups, plus others through city council planting activities**

Total volunteer hours: **unknown**

Years as Bloom participant: **20+**

Background

Nottingham is located in the East Midlands and, like any big city, it includes areas of affluence and some of deprivation. HM Revenue & Customs and Boots are large local employers and the city is home to two top universities; however some wards rank as the most deprived in the UK with one in four children and adults living in relative poverty. The city has a high proportion of young people aged 15–29 (partly due to the universities) and a low proportion of 40–64 year-olds, reflecting the city's lack of family housing.

Nottingham in Bloom is run by the city council in partnership with residents, businesses and the community. It has a long history of performing well in Britain in Bloom both regionally and nationally and in 2008 won the acclaimed Champion of Champions category. The city council counts the “strong network of community volunteers” as valuable to them and in monetary terms this is the case too, with cost savings for the council totalling over £69,000.

The city's profile has been improved with impressive reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour, especially in areas that have participated in Britain in Bloom. Six thousand people took part in the city's 2010 IYN and Britain in Bloom campaign. An evaluation showed that: 71 % of respondents reported a better environment; 64 % commented on an improved community spirit; and 25 % said the scheme helped to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Nottingham City Council delivers its green space agenda through the IYN and Nottingham Green Spaces programme. The council funds one full-time post and provides in-kind and cash resources to the 160 IYN groups across the city. Around 30 staff from across Nottingham City Council are trained as IYN assessors to give help, advice and support to local groups. One success story is The Meadows, made up of terraced housing, a 1970s estate and home to around 7,500 people. Previously littered with rubbish, the communal areas have now been planted with cherry tomatoes, sunflowers and courgettes, all for the locals to pick and eat.

There is a definite change for the better and most neighbours now talk to each other and keep an eye on each other's properties.

“Because people are outside watering their plants in the evening, this leads to better community cohesion and promotes safer neighbourhood,” said resident Jackie Lehuquet.

Previously ‘undesirable’ areas have become desirable to live in, thanks to Bloom activity. A boom in allotments; re-introduction of horticultural shows; investment in existing allotments and other food growing spaces have all benefited the local community, while one IYN group is planning to feed themselves entirely on produce they have grown themselves. These projects have had a real impact on bringing diverse communities together, providing a safe space in which people can grow, harvest and eat together, learning and sharing new skills as they go.

Activities

The activities undertaken as part of Nottingham's ‘in bloom’ efforts are vast and varied; ranging from footpath maintenance, hedge laying and invasive species control carried out by the IYN groups, Nottingham City Council groundsmen, Nottingham University students, park rangers and over 1,286 volunteers, through to hanging basket sessions and bulb and bedding plant giveaways for local residents.

Since winning the Champion of Champions title in 2008, Nottingham City Council altered its approach to Britain in Bloom, deciding instead to build grassroots support and use the Bloom initiative to support its priority of ‘Transforming Nottingham's Neighbourhoods’. The idea was to encourage people to transform their own areas through environmental and planting initiatives, building pride and community spirit and instilling a sense of ownership.

For every IYN group formed in 2009 and 2010, a £100 gardening material starter kit was provided by the council. Take-up was tremendous, resulting in the 160 groups now involved. Each group was encouraged to learn horticultural skills from the free events organised around the city, while council officers offered to put up wall brackets and provide street planters so the residents could maintain their own little bit of green.

The Nottingham Crime and Drugs Partnership ran environmental action weeks across the city for groups and DART Training have made horticultural training available to all 160 IYN groups across the city for free.

Director of Nottingham Crime & Drugs Partnership, Allan Breeton, said:

“The community spirit fostered by the neighbourhood Bloom initiatives is a perfect complement to the environmental clean ups and inspires residents to take pride in their neighbourhood.”

The Meadows

The Meadows sits in Nottingham City Council's Bridge Ward. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 puts parts of Bridge Ward in the worst 10% nationally for measures of: outdoor living environment; crime and disorder; children and young people (education, skills and training); health deprivation and disability, and income deprivation affecting children and older people.

Consisting of old terraced houses originally built for workers of the Great Central Railway and a newer 1970s housing estate, the Meadows is home to around 7,500 people. Ten years ago local people established a Pride in the Meadows campaign to bring the community together and promote a positive image of the area. Over the past few years, a number of active Tenants and Residents Associations have been instrumental in improving the environment and community spirit. An important part of this has been a growing involvement in the Bloom campaign.

In 2008 four local groups entered IYN; this year the whole area got together as one group and achieved a silver award in the Urban Community category in the East Midlands in Bloom competition, taking home the regional trophy for the category. Local resident Di Clausen said:

“The Meadows has an undeserved reputation across the city, often promoted in the media, which through our success in the Bloom awards, we are beginning to change. We are very proud of all the groups and individuals who have got involved, and we like to celebrate their success.”

Today the Meadows is a bustling place, mainly thanks to the hard work and tenacity of the local residents working alongside the city council. Their ambition and sense of pride has fuelled a community into action. The planting up of hanging baskets was a natural activity to help foster community spirit. With the help of the council and Community Payback scheme, planters were provided and brackets attached to the walls. Visiting the Terraces now, you see row after row of hanging baskets, planters and street benches. The neighbours talk to each other, keep an eye on each other's properties and water the plants as they go along.

Impact

Crime and anti-social behavior are on the decrease in Nottingham's Bloom areas, which is attributed to high levels of local involvement and concern about damaging the horticultural work carried out by community members. This has led to local support from the police for IYN as they see the benefits that having a sense of community creates.

PS Steve Price, City Central Neighbourhood Policing Team, who was involved in the East Midlands in Bloom competition said:

“The activity involved preparing for the competition with all the local community, including hitherto disassociated sections, namely residents of Cliff Road working closely with volunteers from a nearby homeless hostel. This helped overcome previous hostility that had been felt towards the users of the hostel from these local residents and has since seen improved attitudes.

“Furthermore, it brought together all aspects of the community, for example young people worked closely with elderly members of the community, sharing enthusiasm, experience and knowledge in activities, often for the first time for the youngsters. In summary it instilled an overall pride in the area and improved community cohesion.”

Environmental improvements and stronger community cohesion mean that people no longer want to leave IYN areas once considered “undesirable”. Strong community spirit can be seen on the Strelley Estate. Sara Williams, Housing Manager of Nottingham City Homes, said:

“I am actively involved with the Bloomin’ Strelley team and have worked alongside them to help plant the communal greens. They have also worked with the local primary school and housing association landlords in an attempt to bring the estate together. The group have added colour and vitality to the area and are a fantastic group of individuals who have worked tirelessly to improve the estate in which they live and bring back a sense of pride within the community.”

All estates within the city have inspections based on general condition and cleanliness with 0 star being the worse and 3 star being the highest. Strelley Estate, once ‘colourless and dull’ is currently rated as a 3-star estate.

Other neighbourhoods are now collaborating to enter “in Bloom” as urban communities and some groups and individuals are acting as ambassadors or assisting other groups to get an IYN group established.

The Ackroyd Meadows Community Garden, now in its 10th year, is used by every faith, race and social group who live in the Meadows area.

“If you took away the garden, this neighbourhood would go into decline and we’d be back to where we were 10 or 15 years ago. Now people mix with each other. Being part of the Britain in Bloom campaign gives us a sense of achievement and recognition – a hugely important thing when so often the Meadows is ignored and ghettoised by the city,” said Rachel Hemmings, Community Garden Educator.

The IYN and Britain in Bloom campaign supports the city’s successful ‘Respect for Nottingham’ campaign, which has seen agencies working closely and effectively together to tackle anti-social behaviour including enviro-crimes such as littering, dog fouling and graffiti, as well as low level crime and more serious crime. Latest figures reveal that between June 2003 and November 2010, reported crime in the city dropped by 50% – that’s 37,000 fewer incidents a year compared with 2003. It also means that Nottingham has hit its 2012 crime reduction target two years ahead of schedule and crime levels are at their lowest for 30 years.

What next?

Funding will be sought to continue support for IYN and extend it to 170 community groups in deprived areas of Nottingham.

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Social Impact: linking urban and rural communities together

Summary

Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire is a market town two miles west of the neighbouring city of Stoke-on-Trent. The city has a densely populated urban centre and rural boundaries with a mix of deprived and affluent wards. Its population is largely white with a lower than average BME (black and minority ethnic) population.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Newcastle-under-Lyme in Bloom has flourished with an emphasis on community involvement and greater communication between once parochial smaller villages. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has used Britain in Bloom as a tool to help bring different communities together and promote environmental sustainability to residents of all ages. The council has also taken great steps to ‘refresh’ the traditional image of the campaign locally to help people understand that it is about far more than just flowers.

The local “in Bloom” campaign has been very successful this year, winning the small city category in Heart of England in Bloom for the fifth year in a row and picking up a silver medal at the national competition.

Key Facts

Category: **Small City**

Leadership: **Local Authority led**

Population: **97,000 (122,030 according to 2001 census)**

Number of volunteers: **Unspecified but 50 groups**

Number of volunteer hours: **Unknown**

Years as in Bloom participant: **21**

Background

Newcastle-under-Lyme’s “in Bloom” efforts began 21 years ago with a strong horticultural and floral focus, mainly due to the town’s pedestrianisation and high number of parks and gardens complete with hanging baskets and street planters. But the last decade has seen the initiative grow and the focus shift, as the council has realised the benefits of Britain in Bloom extend beyond the upkeep of green spaces.

Today Newcastle-under-Lyme’s campaign is community-centred, pulling in individuals and groups from across the borough. Where historically the urban parts of the town had little to do with the outer lying villages, now there are strong ties between the two.

The borough council spends some of its budget on floral displays and there is a small pot of funding available for community groups. Members are encouraged to get involved with their local community groups while its Streetscene staff help with planting activities, and groups receive design advice, financial assistance and help with funding applications. Britain in Bloom is widely publicised by the council in local media and online, helping to bring even more people into contact with the work of the Bloom volunteers.

Activities

There are around 50 groups involved each year, including friends groups, allotment societies and residents' groups.

Newcastle-under-Lyme keeps "Bloom" activities going all year round with local schools and community groups. During winter, bulbs and native broadleaf trees are planted, along with hedgerows to attract wildlife. Schools and allotment associations have also planted wildlife gardens. In spring, there is a children's painting competition to get young people involved and interested in the environment. This year more than 880 children entered the competition.

Increasing participation has been central to the "in Bloom" team's efforts and more people are now getting involved. 2011 saw a theatre group stage workshops in schools and parks culminating in performances in the Queen's Gardens on the regional and national judging days. Local artists have also been commissioned to create artworks to celebrate the impacts of the campaign: Richard Queen's "Gloom to Bloom" showed how anti-social behaviour can be tackled by bringing communities together through the encouragement of recycling, tree planting and wildlife conservation.

Cllr James Bannister, Cabinet member for culture and active communities, said:

"We have built up a very strong reputation in Britain in Bloom over the past 21 years and continue to thrive. It has given us the chance to educate children and young people about the importance of being active in their communities, having pride in their neighbourhoods and working together in a fun and engaging way."

Impact

2011 saw £32,000 raised from local businesses, keen to support the town's Britain in Bloom campaign and raise their profile through sponsorship of roundabouts, town centre gardens, parks and green spaces. Britain in Bloom has succeeded, thanks to the quality of the campaign and its far-reaching benefits in bringing people together, enhancing biodiversity and improving the look and feel of the town.

TEG Environmental Ltd recently provided residents and community groups with 10 tonnes of free compost to help them develop their gardens and schemes. This was recycled from residents' garden waste as part of the council's recycling and waste service. Cllr Marion Reddish, Cabinet member for environment and recycling, said:

"We have seen recycling rates increase from 27 per cent to more than 50 per cent while saving £500,000 and gaining three national awards this year alone. Grass, leaves, twigs and hedge cuttings are collected every two weeks, turned into high-quality compost and used on local farms."

People come to Newcastle-under-Lyme to spend time and shop because of its attractive environment and this is particularly true for cafes and bars, which benefit from being in attractive surroundings. There are very few vacant premises and all sites are well cared for. In turn, this is encouraging people to make their own neighbourhoods more attractive, clean and tidy.

In one of the most deprived wards, Britain in Bloom has helped transform the area. Residents in Cross Heath had seen how horticulture could improve an area and wanted to do this for themselves. Using equipment provided by Aspire Housing they created a community garden, including seating areas and railings, on the Meadows estate. People used horticulture as a tool for improving their neighbourhood and now they also take part in litter picks and inspections of parks and play areas.

What next?

As budget cuts bite, it will be a challenge for the borough council to stay so involved so it is looking at more ways of developing the skills of volunteers and continuing to improve the sustainability of public displays, but it is hoped the residents, businesses and council in Newcastle-under-Lyme will continue to thrive and support communities to get involved in improving their local areas.