

From Grey to Green:



Phase One

Some Blooming Good Ideas



Report produced and presented by



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From Grey to Green
Phase 1: Some Blooming Good Ideas
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1. Preface

This report is the account of a pilot project entitled “Grey to Green” carried out in three selected places within the Great Yarmouth Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) during the first three months of 2007. The intention of the pilot was to outline a way forward for dealing with the many littered and unused communal areas, which had been identified in the NMA by earlier community consultations.

Community Connections, an infrastructure community organisation based in Great Yarmouth, received funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) in order to gather residents’ perceptions of their environments. The main aims of Community Connections are:

- To promote community development and engagement
- To encourage local people to become more involved in their community
- To offer help and support for disadvantaged people and groups
- To make the connections between the strategies and services of local organisations and the needs of local people and communities.

The present project reflected the above aims in that local people would be trained to undertake representative survey work that would assist public sector partners to deliver parks and open spaces that met the need of local people. Community Connections led this project in partnership with the Neighbourhood Management Team (ComeUnity) and Priory Research Services who delivered the training.

The shorthand description for selected spaces, which ranged in size from a few metres square to large areas of derelict and contested land, was soon established as “grey spaces”. The “Cleaner, Safer, Greener” national agenda gave us the cue for the second part of the title.

The initial object of the pilot was to obtain more detailed, first hand information from residents living in the immediate vicinity of the spaces identified. If the

pilot were to be successful then the project could be rolled out on the basis of that success. Its later stages would then cover the design, implementation and eventual management of the transformed spaces by the local community.

Consequently, a group of volunteers from the local community formed the core of the team. They, together with the key community workers, took part in a one-day training programme on Community Action Research, delivered by Priory Research Services (PRS). This provided a solid basis for the method and practice, which the team developed as the pilot progressed. At each key stage of the pilot a member of PRS acted as observer and fed back their findings to the team at debriefing meetings. This ensured quality control of both method and practice during the pilot development process.

Early in the pilot, the team agreed that to repeat the kind of consultation used before in the areas concerned would be to court disaster. The core value of the Community Action Research method adopted is to listen to the issues the community raises unprompted, and then to respond appropriately involving the community at each stage of the process. Prescribed questionnaires do not achieve this. Furthermore, prescribed questionnaires, which appear to the communities concerned to be carried out for the purpose of completing central government returns, have not generated the trust necessary for community ownership and pride in the resulting facilities. A new approach is required.

The volunteers for the pilot project were also by coincidence all members of a larger community project, the Street Scene Assessment team. The training for that project, in measuring the quality of street cleaning services, was to prove invaluable for the Grey to Green team. The total number of Grey to Green team members varied between seven and nine, depending upon the locality and its particular character in each case.

The independent account that follows describes the context, method and results of the Grey to Green pilot project. It makes recommendations on the basis of these and concludes with a note on future activities.

2. National and Local Context

The physical environment is a real reflection of the society in which we live. Areas where communities reside should be appreciated and positively accepted by all that use them, from the very young, to the older members of society. Recently, there has been much discussion around improving local parks, much less around what has been termed as grey spaces. Grey spaces are defined as forgotten areas where it is often found that there is fly tipping, graffiti and criminal damage, in many of these land ownership and maintenance responsibilities are an issue. In research commissioned by CABE Space (<http://www.cabe.org.uk>) it was identified that 91% of the population considered that improved public spaces contribute to the overall well being of the community. This includes not only improved physical health but also improved mental health status.

It is acknowledged that Central Government is keen to support the improvement of public spaces. With relevant funding and effective partnership working by agencies and organisations there has been a sea change in the way that the issue of public spaces has been addressed. However, it can be seen that moves are being made across the country to get on board in improving public spaces and parks. For example in the local Great Yarmouth area, it is aimed to transform a public place i.e. the St. Georges park 'into one that will qualify for a prestigious Green Flag in a parallel scheme of excellence to Blue Flags for beaches'¹ Similar moves are being made to improve alleyways, bleaches and communal squares that are often hidden from sight but very pertinent to those who reside close by.

Evidence of the importance of these spaces was obtained from the Resident's Perception Study undertaken in November 2006². Further community consultations carried out with Central and South Great Yarmouth Community Partnerships highlighted and raised resident's concerns about the local environment. It was found that whilst many concerns were generic, there were

¹ The Eastern Daily Press (Tuesday March 20th, 2007).

² Great Yarmouth Neighbourhood Management Programme: Resident's Perception Survey, Priory Research Services, Smithurst, S. (2006)

those that were specifically focused on particular issues around hot spots for fly tipping, graffiti and other forms of criminal damage.

It was also apparent through consultations that there was a perceived lack of open space, readily accessible to community members. It appeared that in some of the heavily concentrated residential areas, these issues added to the occurrence of anti-social behaviour and increased community tensions. An example of this can be seen in one local area where it was recorded that increased community tensions were evident around young people using an open space for ball games. Some of the older community residents noted their frustrations about the noise and damage to local properties. Similar issues have arisen in Tower Hamlets in an inner city area of London, which shows that this is of national concern (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

The Neighbourhood Management Action Plan identifies that the Neighbourhood Management Programme should address the issue of these disused and littered 'grey spaces' into usable 'green spaces' that fulfil communities' recreational and public health needs (LIV3) (Neighbourhood Management Action Plan and Delivery Statement) 2006). Therefore, through the Neighbourhood Management Programme, the Stronger Safer Communities Fund has supported the Grey to Green pilot project. The pilot was the result of a successful bid to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, supplemented by funding from the Neighbourhood Management Programme.

3. Method

The initial stage of the project involved identifying grey spaces that lay within the Great Yarmouth Neighbourhood Management areas (Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LLSOAs): 005C, 006A, 006B, 006C, 006D and 006E) that are not considered as a highway, a pathway or as a green space.

Previous experience and expertise enabled the Neighbourhood Management Officer to access and carry out desk and documentary analysis on data gathered from community consultations, which was completed prior to the present project. These consultations included issues that had been raised by the community about such spaces. Following this, the Street Scene Assessment Co-ordinator and the Neighbourhood Management Officer carried out a visual audit of the identified grey spaces. This also helped with the identification of other possible grey spaces. Using the 2 methods, 45 grey spaces were identified in the Neighbourhood Management areas and were plotted on a map.

The 45 areas were narrowed down to focus on 3 this was done through accounting for a number of factors. These included the areas being geographically spread out but still within the Neighbourhood Management Areas, areas where there had been previous community consultation, areas with existing community groups or potential groups to take forward the project and areas that have different types of issues. There was also the thought that in these areas it would be possible to initiate actions for any issues raised in a short time scale. This was seen as a positive aspect in terms of keeping up community engagement and morale. The 3 areas are:

Peggotty Road play area



Photograph 1: Shows the Peggotty Road play area, one of the three focus areas

St James's Walk (to include surrounding passages)



Photograph 2: Shows the green on St James Walk



Photograph 3: Shows just one part of the passageways surrounding St James Walk

Swirles Place (including surrounding area)



Photograph 4: Shows the green in Swirles Place



Photograph 5: Shows one part of the area surrounding Swirles Place

To find out how the 3 grey spaces could be developed, a community consultation was envisaged to take place during February using a survey schedule. A survey was designed by Priory Research Services to research local issues and solutions, along with the possibility of residents becoming involved in resident and community forums to help carry the project forward. The results from this would be the bases of future street meets in each of the areas.

The Grey to Green group, made up of members from the Street Scene Assessment Team (a group of community volunteers who had been trained in a Community Action Research Methods workshop), the Street Scene Assessment Co-ordinator, a Community Development Worker, a Community Liaison Information Point (CLIP) Worker and a member of Priory Research Services would have completed this. The Street Scene Assessment team were approached to be actively involved in the Grey to Green project, as they were already involved in the Street Scene Assessment volunteer work. This was thought to be a useful way to keep individuals engaged in the project.

Due to the amount of community consultation that had been carried out by various initiatives, it was considered that there be potential of respondent fatigue. To avoid this, the views of younger people, children and parents were to be sought by the Grey to Green team in the half term holiday. The Peggotty Road play area and football pitch would be the setting to consult the community using an opportunity sample.

For the other two areas, the consultation method was further developed. Leaflets were posted out prior to the events, to raise the awareness of the street meets that were called 'Blooming Good Ideas'. The team were able to access a marquee along with refreshments for community members who may attend the event. To record peoples' views, ideas were written onto flowers made from card and placed into plant pots full of sand to help display residents' views and opinions.

To help with the recording of the events, consent forms for the residents involved to be photographed were completed so that a member of the Grey to Green team could capture images and evidence of the community consultations. A short film was also produced to help explain the processes involved in holding a 'Blooming Good Ideas events. It will also be a good measure to see if / how the process adapts over time in the future events.

At each of the events, a CLIP worker and a Community Development Worker were present. This meant that valuable information was available for the community members to access, for example:

- Information on Making a Difference workshops
- The promotion of meetings (for example Community Partnership meetings, safer neighbourhood team meetings)
- South Yarmouth Community newsletters
- Information about the Citizens Advice Bureau

PCSOs were also in attendance at the last event, providing support and information to the local residents.



Photograph 6: Shows the South Yarmouth CLIP Worker attending the street meets, providing a 2 star CLIP Service



Photograph 7 : Shows the CLIP Information available to residents

4. Results

The results are presented for each of the individual consultations that took place during February and March 2007 where a total of 150+ homes received flyers promoting the consultation days. Through the promotion of the events, 41 local residents accessed and participated in the opportunity to give their opinions and views of their local area. There were a total of 73 ideas raised by the residents leading to 31 of these issues being forwarded to other agencies.

4.1 Peggotty Road

On 7th February 2007, the Green to Green group aimed to attend the children's play area at Peggotty Road Community Centre to consult with young people, children and their parents. This date was during school half term, and it was expected that this might be the most likely time that children would be using the area to help give their opinions on the development of the area. However, this was not the case, there was no one using the area, possibly due to bad weather.

To make the most of the Green to Green group being in the area, it was decided to approach residents living the closest to the park, those who would be directly affected by any developments through a door knocking exercise. Informal chats took place on resident's doorsteps where they were asked if they would mind giving their opinions of the park and how they would feel if changes were made to it. The information gathered from this raised a number of issues and common themes were found.

Residents showed different levels of interest regarding the park. One suggested a lack of interest in developing the park:

"Do what you like with it"

Others gave full accounts of their experience of the park and how it could be improved, being in total support of the project.

There was a mixed response when finding out resident's views and experiences of the park:

"I get no problem here, I'm pretty lucky here as there is no noise"

Other residents were not so content:

"Odd groups hang over in the door way, 16-17 year olds"

"Older teenagers hang over in the doorway "

This was reported to be a particular issue:

"Late evenings at the weekend and in the summer, sometimes until 2-3am, where they kick the ball against the Community Centre wall until late"

Thoughts on park as it stands now

One resident said that they have seen young children (9-10 years old) climb up the fence and onto the high roof of the building behind the park.

The park was thought to lack important facilities for certain aged children:

"There are no swings for the younger children, the ones where the seats are like baskets."

The fence on the front of the playground used to be a high fence, but it is now low. It was reported that sometimes children play football in this front part of the area and the ball keeps being kicked over the fence into cars.

“Someone threw a cone over and smashed the back window of my car, I now park further up the road”

Reports of children being bullied and beaten up in the park, which has led to parents not letting them use it. One family have received death threats. One child cannot walk to school due to being too scared of the anti-social behaviour that goes on, and being perceived as a target. The child is now on medical supervision as a result.

This household also feels that they have to park their car elsewhere due to repeated incidents of vandalism. They are desperate to move out of the area by swapping their house, but no one else wants to live there.

Again it was mentioned about young people hanging out making noise until 2 a.m. in the summer, kicking the ball against walls and windows.

Further abuse includes verbal and physical attacks, residents being spat at by users of the playground that vary from pre to late teenagers. Some residents reported that they have lived on the estate all their lives and this is the worst it has been. Reports have been made to the council, but the residents perceive that the council do not want to know.

When asked their opinions on what could be put in place so the young people would not loiter outside the community centre until late at night, it was reported that youth groups have happened before, but it was thought that these did not work.

Developments

A mural was suggested to be a good idea as it gave children and young people a chance to get involved with designing it.

When asked for their opinions about having the football pitch's flood lights on a timer until 9-10pm, responses were generally positive.

“I have no problem with that”

There was a suggestion that the playground could be made to be more exciting for the children and that they could:

“Ask children at local schools to tell you what they want”

“I have not seen the PCSOs recently. Maybe they could have more presence on the weekends and at night times.”

Involvement

There were expressions of interest when asked whether they would be interested in being involved in the upkeep and general running of groups. Residents were interested in roles such as administration, painting and other practical work.

Recommendations

- Interview service providers who have put on activities for children previously to find out why they did not work and how they could work in the future
- Interview people who own the building that the children climb to find out what they think about this and how to prevent it happening
- Talk to CPSOs / police about issues that are arising (abuse, bullying, vandalism and late night noise and drinking)
- Use community members to help the development and upkeep of the facilities in attempt to keep them fully engage and empowered, leading to them taking responsibility of their neighbourhoods.

4.2 St. James' Walk

On Saturday 24th February 2007, the Grey to Green group facilitated the pre-publicised Blooming Good Ideas event at St James' Walk for the residents living here and in the surrounding passages.



Photographs 8 and 9: Show the Grey to Green group consulting with residents of the St James Walk area

Residents of all generations came to the marquee to note some of their ideas on the flowers. There were 3 types of comments made by the residents' they fell under the headings of: Issues, Ideas and Immediate Action.



Photograph 10: Shows some of the flowers made by residents with their comments

Issues raised by the community included a lack of safety, antisocial behaviour such as people making noise, drug and alcohol problems and there was reported to be a problem with people:

'Urinating in the Passage'

Generally, it is seen that there is a lack of respect for the area with a suggestion that this can be partly attributed to the large number of rented properties in the area. It was also suggested that the green is taken up by older children:

'Big boys playing football'

There were comments upon issues that may lead to health, hygiene problems and safety concerns. Comments were raised relating to waste, with people fly-tipping and dumping rubbish. There was a suggestion that a reason for this is that:

'Household bins are not emptied often enough'

If the bins were emptied more regularly, this may prevent the problems of rubbish dumping and fly-tipping.

There is an issue of family pets excreting in the area, with references made about dogs and cats.

Some residents have seen discarded syringes in the area relating to the drug use mentioned earlier.

In terms of vehicles and traffic, it was suggested that:

'Taxis speed down York Road'

and that someone needs to:

'Stop mopeds riding through the alleyways'

Relating to the safety of residents in the area, there have been reports of bonfires on the green. If left unattended, this could result in the fire going out of control or the possibility of children getting hurt.

Ideas for improvement

Ideas to improve the area included activities for children such as:

- A portion of the green for a play area
- Gates to keep the children on the green
- Playground
- A swimming pool
- Sandpit.

There were also some suggestions relating to the green:

- Public bench/ seating/ common seating
- Get rid of the hole
- Put fence around the green
- Put some plants/ trees
- Grass cutting
- Small patio
- Barbecue area
- Campsite.

A common bin for the residents was a suggestion, possibly as a solution to the fly tipping and dumping issues mentioned earlier.

There were some ideas to improve the surrounding passageways that focus on safety and crime prevention issues:

- Gates
- More lighting
- Maintenance of the pavements and pathways

In terms of the whole area (including the green and the passage ways), some residents highlighted the need for CCTV and more lighting in the area to help

improve the safety for young people and other residents. When looking at the issue of hygiene, it was suggested that pathways could be jet washed, drains could be cleaned out regularly and a road sweeper could work in the area. Signs could be inserted in the area to warn people about dog fouling and littering, informing people of fines that may be incurred if rules are broken. For the aesthetics of the area, it was suggested that plants and trees could be placed here.

To tackle the speeding vehicles on York Road, it has been suggested that speed bumps could be put into the road as a preventative method.

It has been suggested that an environmental action day where the following could be held as 'immediate action':

- Electricity transformer opened and rubbish removed
- Fly tipping removed
- Drains cleaned
- Front and back gardens cleared
- Alley cleared
- Paving jet washed
- Electricity box repaired

4.3 Swirles Place

On the 7th March 2007, the Grey to Green team held the second 'Blooming Good Ideas' event at Swirles Place and the surrounding area. Similar to the previous event, residents of all generations attended. Issues were lifted from the suggestions written on the flowers with certain issues being raised.



Photograph 11: Shows residents with their 'Blooming Good Ideas'



Photograph 12: Shows local residents handing their Blooming Good Ideas to the Community Development Worker

There was a comment that was relating to the pub near by, suggesting that there was:

'Too much noise'

Again, drugs were suggested to be a problem with the perception of dealers living in the area.

There was also the issue of:

'Bins not being adequate'

The presence of rubbish and fly tipping could lead to health implications if they are not cleared up quickly.

It was also suggested that the:

'Drains need to be emptied more often'.

It was considered that there are:

'Some inconsiderate young people'

and that people should:

'Stop the football'.

This could be related to the fact that there is a lack of facilities for children and young people in the local vicinity:

'No play area for the kids'.

There were some ideas suggested by the residents for Swirles Place and the surrounding areas. On the green in Swirles Place, the main suggestion was for there to be a play park / play space for children.

Someone also suggested that the green could be landscaped, with a seating area and fences.

For Cobbs Place and the garage area there were some further suggestions including the need for a club of some sort:

'Community centre for children, with art classes and hobby groups'

'Need for a park or a community centre'

It was again mentioned that there is a need for a park for local children or a football / basketball area or a playground.

In terms of the whole area, the following suggestions were made:

- A need for more / decent lighting
- Activities for children and young people (somewhere to play football, playground, community centre, indoor play area, youth groups for fun and educational activities)
- Tackle fly-tipping (possibly by having cameras/ communal skip)
- Possibility of cameras to stop drug dealing/ other criminal activity

For the roads in the area, it was suggested that there should be:

- Speed bumps on Middle Market Road
- Cleaner streets
- More parking
- More lighting
- Reduced speed limits (20 mph)

Strengths and Weaknesses of project

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>Community involvement:</i> The community have been involved in giving their views and are also being fed back what has come out of the project so far. This will help to keep these members engaged when making them aware of actions that have been completed.</p>	<p><i>Community involvement:</i> Can sometimes be slightly more time consuming to involve residents in each part of the process</p> <p><i>No guarantee of funding:</i> As part of community involvement, groups need to complete funding applications. These do not have a guarantee, so if rejected this could affect the momentum of a project and the morale of such groups.</p>
<p><i>High amount of professional expertise at events:</i> Allows a lot of support, information, advice and guidance for residents</p>	<p><i>High amount of professional expertise at events:</i> High cost for each of the events to take place.</p>
<p><i>Constant reflection and development of the processes involved:</i> Helped the team with ongoing development the methods such as from door-to-door to street meets. This also includes smaller factors such as taking a gas stove to make teas and coffees for the residents that attended the events, using a marquee, carrying out a leaflet drop to promote the events.</p>	

5. Outcomes

In the pilot stage of 'Grey to Green' more than 150 homes received flyers for the 3 events that were attended by 41 local residents. 73 ideas and suggestions were provided by attendees and 31 other issues were raised. These have been forwarded to the relevant agencies and service providers.

Since the community consultations were completed, some immediate actions that were raised by the residents have already been completed. For example, the Dynamic Environmental Response Team (DERT) who are part of GYB Services, were contacted by the Community Development Worker involved in the Grey to Green group with some of the issues raised by the residents living in the St James Walk area. Fly tipping waste has been removed, drains have been cleaned, front and back gardens cleared of rubbish, alleys cleared and pavements have been jet washed (02/04/07).

At the outset of the project, the Street Scene Assessment Team Co-ordinator perceived it mainly as an environmental project. Since it has developed, the Co-ordinator stated that:

“Initially I thought that this project would be environmentally based and would focus on the physical aspects, but I can now see and have learnt that they are secondary to social needs”

This can be highlighted by issues raised in the consultation where anti social behaviour was seen as a serious issue by some residents in some of the areas. These residents were signposted by the CLIP Worker for South Yarmouth, to Neighbourhood Action Team Meetings, which they have since attended. They have also visited the South Yarmouth CLIP, based at St James' Health and Resource Centre. Details of other and more serious anti social behaviour issues have been passed on to relevant agencies to help support such residents.

A further outcome of this project has been the development of a community group called the Sunshine Crew. The consultation gave the Community Development Worker and the community group a chance to meet and have since met to develop their ideas. The Sunshine Crew is a group led by young people who are working towards a summer holiday programme for other young people who reside in the area. They have their first informal meeting planned on the green in Swirles Place (04/04/07). They have already posted leaflets to promote the event to local young people.

Other issues that require environmental changes, improvements and upgrading are thought to take longer to organise. This is due to problems such as ambiguity with land ownership and responsibilities. One example of something that has taken longer than originally expected is the removal of rubbish that has been dumped in the electricity transformer cage. There is a contact number of the organisation responsible for the transformer on the cage, but attempts to contact this organisation have been unsuccessful.

6. Future Activities

The success of the pilot project has informed a proposal now being considered by the Board of Trustees for the NMA (ComeUnity). It is aimed to have a 'rolling out' of the Grey to Green project into other areas identified in the initial stage of the work (See p.5 above).

In addition to repeating the successful "Blooming Good Ideas" method of community action research to collect residents' perceptions in six other locations, the proposal envisages moving forward in the areas already reached, with a second phase of Community Planning. This will involve supporting the residents identified in the first phase as they work on practical proposals for their spaces. (See Timeline in appendix below)

This part of the project envisages that residents will be supported to do this by the services of a professional landscape consultant and a community worker with a professional architectural and conservation background. The aim will be to provide realistic, properly costed solutions, which can pass the hard tests of planning permission, building regulation approval and budgetary control. The establishment of local residents' associations, with proper constitutions, at each space will be enabled through the support of Community Development Workers at this stage.

The next, third stage of the project will see the delivery of three completed schemes to their local residents' associations. This will involve the professional skills of the consultant and architectural community worker in acting as agents for the local residents. These professionals will prepare tender documents for the work and obtain quotations from suitable contractors. They will then assist each residents' association in selecting a suitable contractor for their scheme and in supervising the construction process through to completion.

The aim of the final stage of the project will be to train, support and empower local residents to manage and maintain the completed spaces themselves, without in any way adding to the existing burden of maintenance work for the local authority. Training for residents in community grant and fund finding and appropriate sources of non-local government finance will be an essential component of this stage of the project. The aim will be to deliver a sustainable, maintainable, very local asset to the community for the foreseeable future.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, three consultation days were carried out with residents in each of the three areas during February and March. The methods that were used have evolved throughout the project. For example, a door-to-door consultation was used for the first area, adapting to a 'street meet' method (used for the other two consultations). These were seen to be more effective and efficient ways for collecting the views and opinions of issues and ideas for improved liveability from the local residents.

At a national level, the Government is very keen to see that there are improvements to public open spaces, with the community feeling more involved and have shared ownership in what happens in their local area. It is hoped that this will lead to residents taking responsibility for the areas in which they live. This notion was reflected in Great Yarmouth through the involvement of volunteers undertaking the research element of the survey and the large numbers of residents participating in the consultation process.

The combined key findings are listed below:

- Antisocial behaviour and health issues were the main issues raised in the 3 areas. More specifically, issues relating to:
 - Lack of facilities for children and young people
 - Drug and alcohol abuse
 - Young people hanging around late at night
 - Fly-tipping and rubbish dumping
 - Car vandalism
 - Physical and verbal abuse
 - Speeding vehicles
 - Improvements to be made to the aesthetics of the physical environment

In Phase One of 'Grey to Green' Actions from of the residents' comments have already been completed and some are ongoing. The continuation of this project aims to provide public open spaces and facilities that are needs led, situated close to residential areas, are aesthetically pleasing, contribute to improved mental and physical health of communities, and improved quality of life.

Reaching the aims of this project are also in line with meeting wider national Government targets such as those set in the Respect Agenda³ and the Every Child Matters Framework (ECM)⁴. In particular, for everyone to:

'Be Healthy, Enjoy and Achieve, Stay Safe and Make a Positive Contribution'
(ECM 2003).

³ Give Respect, Get Respect. Home Office (2006)

⁴ Every Child Matters. Cm 5860. Crown Copyright (2003)

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Appendix 1: Timescale

