

Prudential Grass Roots

Supporting communities to improve their local environment



CASE STUDY

Thornhill Community Garden, Cwmbran

At Thornhill, near Cwmbran, South Wales, community groups have been working together with conservation charity BTCV and volunteers from Woolworths and Asda to create a vibrant garden from derelict wasteland. The community garden is situated in the borough of Torfaen near the Prudential-owned Cwmbran Shopping Centre where Woolworths and Asda are among the tenants.

"Cwmbran shopping is delighted to see that the work and dedication has paid off and that a positive difference has been made to the quality of the local environment for the people of Thornhill. I'm sure that this revitalised area will be a source of pride for residents in years to come."

GERRY HUTCHINGS, MANAGER, CWMBRAN SHOPPING CENTRE

This is an ambitious project in an area where 40 per cent of the population is under the age of 19 and where there are few community resources. By providing support and training to the local community group, Prudential Grass Roots has helped to transform a once neglected area, suffering the effects of anti-social behaviour, into a valuable community resource.

Prudential Grass Roots was launched in 2001. It is run by BTCV, the UK's leading practical conservation charity, and funded by Prudential plc.

The programme is helping to drive regeneration for people and wildlife in communities around shopping centres and business parks throughout the UK, owned by Prudential plc and managed by Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd.



PRUDENTIAL

Asking people what they need

Cwmbran, South Wales

Local residents and tenants decided that it was time to take action to improve their community after years of enduring only basic recreational facilities for young people. An 80ft section of waste ground next to the local Community Centre was identified as an area which, through creative planning, could be turned into a multi-purpose area which would benefit the whole community.

By talking to residents and local community groups, particularly Thornhill 4 U, the Monnow Court Action Group and the centre's playgroup, BTCV developed plans which would have something for everyone, benefiting local youth groups and helping young people to value their local environment.

An important element of the project was to leave a legacy to the community which they could sustain themselves. Using nature conservation as a tool, the plans presented opportunities to target disaffected youth groups within a scattered community and engage them in activities which would have a positive effect on their quality of life.

Taking practical steps

Well planned community projects take time: detailed plans for landscaping, digging, equipment and construction needed to be drawn up and discussions with contractors and suppliers all had to be finalised before the practical work could begin.

Volunteers as well as contractors were needed to create an area which would appeal to as many people as possible. A series of activities was planned around the construction and planting tasks which involved Thornhill Youth Club, students, artists and staff from Cwmbran Shopping, who all helped in a range of ways including:

- Removing slabs and old paving
- Constructing steps and a new handrail
- Building garden furniture from recycled materials
- Installing vandal proof and soft play equipment
- Weeding and planting perennial shrubs
- Creating personally designed tiles with help from ceramics students
- Building a community barbecue
- Potting and watering sessions
- Fixing planters and building raised beds



Key statistics

40 % of Thornhill's population is under 19 years of age

99.1% of Torfaen residents are white

24.8% of Torfaen residents have had a long-term illness or disability

13.9% of Torfaen residents describe their health as 'not good'

Source: 2001 Census, OSN

Tailored support for individual needs

Cwmbran, South Wales



Communities can face many barriers to practical action: from simply not knowing who to talk to for information, to lacking the skills and confidence to get the job done. BTCV's approach has been straightforward – by listening closely to the aspirations of Thornhill residents and looking at the issues they face, the Prudential Grass Roots project has been able to provide an individually tailored mix of support and practical help.

Enhancing community pride

Building safer, cleaner and greener spaces helps to create bonds by encouraging active citizenship and giving people a renewed sense of pride in their community.

Thornhill's community garden enables people of all ages and backgrounds to meet in a relaxed, safe and open atmosphere in attractive surroundings, underlining the direct correlation between the quality of the environment and the quality of life. It is the first project of its kind in the area.

Improved access to the site will allow the garden to be enjoyed by everyone, including disabled and elderly members of the community. Banking has been planted with shrubs and plants to attract wildlife, providing food for birds, insects and mammals living in the surrounding woodland. A fresh outlook on the living world on their doorstep will also give children the opportunity to learn about the environment and biodiversity, as well providing a longer-term educational tool for local youth groups.

"The garden will be beneficial for all people in Thornhill of all ages, from 5 to 95! It's a means of restoring pride in the community and bringing people together."

BOB CLARK, CHAIRMAN OF THORNHILL 4 U

Ensuring the project is sustainable

Cwmbran, South Wales

Building on two earlier projects in Thornhill – Monnow Court in Bloom and Snapshot of Britain – local BTCV staff recognised a significant opportunity to develop their partnership with the Communities First Trust and forge closer working relationships with community groups and residents through the Prudential Grass Roots initiative.

Through its work with local volunteers from the community, BTCV and Prudential are promoting new partnerships and building much-needed cross-community links. The Thornhill Community Garden project is an excellent model of a partnership which brings together local businesses, community groups and the voluntary sector. The lessons learned from the Thornhill project will be shared with other community groups and organisations, which will help establish similar projects in other areas.

The longer-term sustainability of Thornhill's garden has now been established. A weekly gardening club has been set up and has already attracted a wide range of members including people with physical and hearing difficulties.

The garden will continue to be planted and maintained by the community and involve the local youth clubs, which will help to reduce the risk of vandalism. The chairman of community group, Thornhill 4 U, is a retired landscape gardener and, since the project's inception, he has used his practical and management skills to ensure that the planting is planned to bring out the best of the garden throughout all four seasons.

Project Costs

Prudential Grass Roots funding of £10,000 contributed to the many costs of this project, including materials and construction costs. As a result of Prudential's support, a further £10,439 was received from The Communities Trust Fund and Torfaen Community Halls Department.

"This has been a real journey for everyone. There's now real excitement about seeing the garden finished and hopefully we can sign up people from all ages and backgrounds, young and old, to help look after it and enjoy watching it flourish."

STEVE DIXON, BTCV TORFAEN COMMUNITY PROJECT OFFICER

Achievements

- 80 school children involved in educational and conservation activities
- 25 community members contributed time and skills
- 70 people attended community event
- Significant reduction in vandalism and crime
- Opened up access to disabled community
- Enhanced the image of the Thornhill area of Cwmbran
- £8,100 worth of volunteer hours
- 70,000 people had an opportunity to read about the project in local media

Project partners

BTCV • Cwmbran Shopping • Prudential plc • UWIC School of Art and Design • Thornhill 4 U • Race Farm • Thornhill Playgroup • Plastic Building Materials • Communities First Trust

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