

Leigh Neighbours PROJECT

Our Green Journey



Why go green?

Green spaces add value to local areas, enhance quality of life for local people and encourage a greater sense of civic pride. Green spaces provide an additional resource for schools, community groups and churches, whilst greening projects can act as a catalyst for both building community spirit and for encouraging volunteering.

Creating green spaces doesn't have to cost the Earth. And projects come in all sorts of shapes and sizes to suit any urban landscape.

Which is why it made so much sense to us to explore a variety of ideas that would make our project area greener and give us a platform to foster even greater community engagement.



Alley Greening

When we originally began the project, we held a series of public meetings. At one of these meetings, residents from Grasmere Street said they'd like to have a go at 'alley-greening' - a way of making back-alleys, sometimes grey and barren, into interesting, attractive and useful green spaces.

We leafleted all of the houses which backed onto the alley and then, one bright Saturday in May 2011, arranged for compost and plants to be delivered to the alley and set about planting anything that we could find. Lots of residents, young and old, joined in and helped transform the alley.

Local residents, including one green champion, took up the baton and applied for funds to create planters, and to purchase wall mounted baskets and additional plants.



Public Consultation

Our next consultation exercise saw us use an interactive platform called **Planning for Real** to collect the views of 750+ local people, altogether garnering more than 3,000 suggestions.

The ideas from residents covered a range of issues, from crime & community safety, housing and traffic & transport.

Included in there were a number of environmental improvement ideas, such as:



Idea	Number of suggestions
Community garden	1
Community composting service	6
Wildflower Meadow	7
Nature Trail/Reserve	8
Fruit and Veg – locally produced	8
Community garden wanted/needed	9
Planting to encourage wildlife	9
Street flower beds	10
Village Green to be created	10
Community vegetable garden	11
Growing and selling food – locally grown	11
Flowering shrubs to be planted	15
Landscaped park areas	15
Trees to be planted in specific locations	16
City Farm	17
Allotments needed here	20



The Community Garden

As a result of the responses we'd received through consultation, we turned our attention to a piece of derelict land on Gordon Street, next to a local school.

The land had been the site of St. John's the Evangelist Church, which was demolished in 2008. The people who had demolished the church had taken the gates, knocked down half of the boundary wall and left a site covered in shale and dog waste which was used as a dumping ground for old Christmas trees and road signs.

Over a period of months, and with the help of volunteers from the Prince's Trust, the Community Payback Service and Wigan Council together with a group of hard-working residents, we transformed the space into a community garden, featuring lawns, raised beds and flower beds.



Our ambitions were quite modest when we started – simply to turn a derelict piece of land into something a little more attractive. But what we've ended up with is a green oasis which is valued by local people. Indeed, one neighbour is so proud of the garden, he donated a picnic table for local residents to use at leisure.

Meanwhile, other residents have made cash donations towards the upkeep of the garden, whilst one local couple who tied the knot used it as a backdrop to their wedding photos.

Leigh Neighbours also regularly use the garden for their events, whilst a small area within the garden has been earmarked for the cultivation of fresh fruit and vegetables which are subsequently donated to the local foodbank.



Hanging Basket Workshops



Hanging basket workshops for local residents help to brighten up the area and act as a catalyst for bringing people together. We've held Spring and Autumn workshops for three years now – usually three workshops in different locations across the project area. Over that time, we have developed a loyal following of residents, schools and community groups. For the first time ever, we recently had to order extra plants part way through a workshop, such was the level of demand!



Leigh Neighbours In Bloom

Over the past two summers, we have held an *In Bloom* competition, designed to inspire more people to get involved in greening projects of their own. We're hoping to encourage more people to get involved in 2018 when we plan to introduce a new 'Incredible Edible' category.

Resident's Fund

We encourage local people to take responsibility for improving the area themselves by making funds available for ideas which match our Community Plan themes. Our funding stream is called the 'Resident's Fund' and it provides sums of up to £500. We've made money available for:

- Spring bulb planting on Windermere Grove
- A greenhouse at St. Mary's CE Primary School
- Saplings to replace storm damaged trees in the Parish Church grounds
- A 'Peace garden' in the grounds of Kingsleigh Methodist Church
- Refurbishment of two traffic calming areas on Walmesley Road (pictured right)





Prince's Trust Community Projects

Since The Prince's Trust originally helped us to develop the Community Garden, we have continued to benefit from their support, most recently through their Team Programme, a training scheme for young people. To help them develop practical skills, students have delivered a number of environmental improvement projects in our area, including:

- Refurbishing a memorial garden at Sacred Heart Parish Church
- Creating a planted area in the grounds of Leigh Central and Sacred Heart schools
- Tidying up traffic calming areas on Walmesley Road (pictured above)

Railway Road

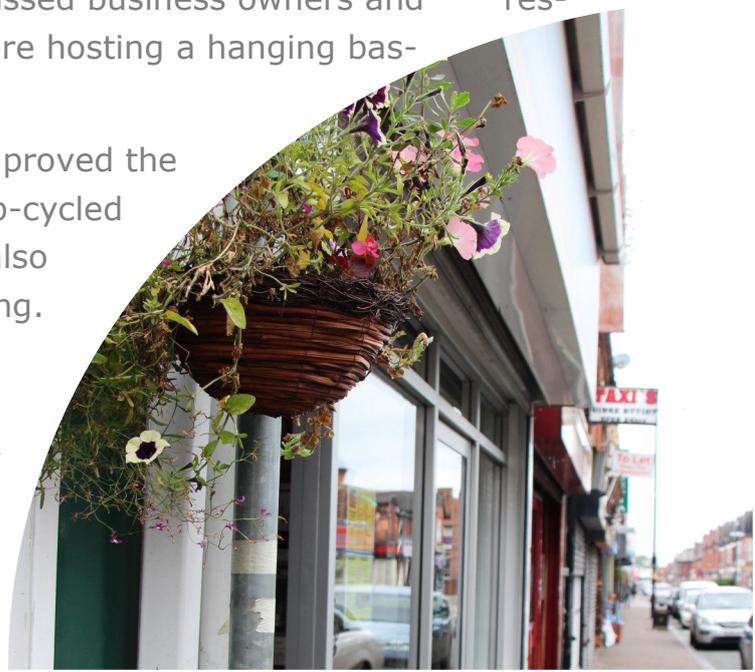
This year we decided to try and use the hanging basket model to brighten up the main retail street in the area: Railway Road. We canvassed business owners and residents and arranged for brackets to be fixed before hosting a hanging basket workshop specifically for this audience.

In addition to this, two of our Board members improved the grassed areas on Railway Road car-park using up-cycled car tyres to create a mixed planting area which also acts to deter dog fouling and inconsiderate parking.

Urban Planting Schemes

We've also worked with different agencies to tidy and plant grassed areas with perennial plants:

- Corner of Kirkhall Lane and B&Q car-park
- Corner of Kirkhall Lane and Leigh Road



Greening Culture



We're proud to have helped develop a greening culture which recognises the benefits of environmental improvements. The tangible benefits accrued so far include:

- the physical, aesthetic value of flowering areas, hanging baskets and green spaces
- the improved community spirit which comes about as a result of our workshops
- the greater sense of community cohesion as people strive towards a common goal
- the changes in perceptions when groups, such as those involved with The Prince's Trust, are involved in community projects. Young people are often portrayed in a negative light in the media and the very visible projects that they engage with helps to challenge these negative perceptions.

Incredible Edible

We've already touched upon how Leigh Neighbours is adopting the principles around 'Incredible Edible', especially in support of those people in our community who are living in straitened circumstances. There are several facilities in our project area which provide warm meals for those who are homeless and on the breadline, including a shelter, two foodbanks and a community café which offers meals on a 'pay as you can' basis. We believe that adopting 'Incredible Edible' principles, and encouraging other organisations to do the same, will help play a part in supporting people in need in our community.



What would we like to do in the future...

Green mapping

We're going to identify all of the green spaces in our project area, as well as spaces that are derelict which could be greened, map them and begin negotiations with the landowners to plant them with a range of edible herbs, plants and fruit bushes..

Spaces that we've already identified are:

- Land on Leigh Road next to the Asda store and owned by them
- Lawns in front of Kingsleigh Methodist Church
- Traffic calming on Windermere Road
- Traffic calming on Walmesley Road
- Corner of Kirkhall Lane and Leigh Road
- Planters on the Civic Square

And there are bound to be more!

Working with partners

We recognise that we can't do everything ourselves, and that there is no point in us doing things if there are others better equipped to do them.

We've an ambition to turn Railway Road into an urban orchard, with fruit trees forming an edible avenue along the length of the road. We'll need to work closely with Wigan Council to do this, as they have the expertise to identify where services are buried, who owns the footpath, and to undertake the digging and planting, etc. To this end, we will continue to develop relations with the appropriate officers, including the Chief Executive.

We have a good relationship with the headteachers at all of our local schools, and we will continue to build on this. We hope to explore a range of ideas for environmental projects with them to encourage buy-in from the wider community.

We also want to build on our existing relationships with other community stakeholders including social clubs, providers of sheltered accommodation, nurseries and community groups, so that we can roll out accessible environmental improvement schemes right across the project area.

