



# Strengthening Local Communities Programme Evaluation: Priors Park Project

September 2020

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This report is part of a series of evaluation reports on the Strengthening Local Communities Programme, and should be read in conjunction with the Summary and Synthesis Report.

### Acknowledgements

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### Further information

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# Priors Park Project

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## 1. Introduction

This document sets out the final evaluation of the Priors Park Project, delivered as part of Tewkesbury Borough Council's contribution to the Strengthening Local Communities programme. It documents the development of the project model and the delivery of key project activities with attention to the context, rationale, perceived benefits, challenges and learning. The final section summarises progress up to the second year of the project and identifies themes that distinguish the project.

## 2. The project model, its origins and host agency

Following conversations with local agencies and ward councillors, Tewkesbury Borough Council selected Priors Park as the project area based upon its high relative deprivation, well-defined geographical boundaries, and the potential to build upon previous work. There was a perception that the area had received a lot of input in the past, but that some of this work had only led to limited impacts.<sup>1</sup> The social housing provider GreenSquare was approached to act as the lead agency given its local - and relatively impartial – track-record and its wider experience in community work across the county. GreenSquare Housing Support team had experience of reaching out to people in their homes and addressing a wide range of issues beyond those narrowly linked to housing. The agency already had a presence in the area, with a space at Priors Park Neighbourhood Project (PPNP), to provide housing and benefits advice. The lead staff role for the project – a Community Engagement Worker (CEW) - complimented the existing community-based initiatives at PPNP and potentially supported the social prescribing work at the local GP practice. The project has been able to access wider support through the Borough Council's community development team of three officers and one community-funding officer.

The aims<sup>2</sup> of the project were to enable:

1. Individuals to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to lead healthy lifestyles and self-care.
2. Local residents to benefit from a social movement that promotes personal responsibility and the importance of health and wellbeing.
3. Communities to benefit from easily accessible health and wellbeing support and advice.

The CEW position was for 25 hours a week, initially for 18 months. The role description<sup>3</sup> focused on enabling “the Priors Park community to help itself to be a healthier, more active, more engaged and more resilient community”. This included developing an understanding of the neighbourhood and key local issues, developing trusting relationships and bringing people together to take action. The role has a focus on influencing individual and group action planning for health. This role fed into a project plan set out as sixteen key tasks, expressed as follows:

1. To build links and relationships with organisations who currently work within Priors Park.
2. To build links with residents within Priors Park.
3. To build links with health professionals within Priors Park and the wider Tewkesbury area.
4. To gain an understanding of the current activities and events within Priors Park.
5. To gain an understanding of what residents require to improve their health
6. To facilitate solutions from within the community.
7. To ensure better communication and partnership working with local organisations.
8. To promote volunteering, incorporating learning and training.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview Aug19

<sup>2</sup> Job description 2017

<sup>3</sup> Job description 2017

9. To work with those hardest to reach within Priors Park.
10. To monitor and evaluate the project.
11. To plan, co-ordinate and promote events and activities.
12. To attend the Tewkesbury Groundworkers' meetings and other relevant meetings.
13. To assist the community in sourcing external funding, where required.
14. To build up community resilience, pro-activeness and self-confidence.
15. To attend meetings and community events as required, including evening / weekend work.
16. To build links and share good practice with Community Engagers in the other 5 districts.

The expected outcomes<sup>4</sup> of the project were:

- Reduced GP visits
- Increased engagement
- Healthier, more active community
- Greater trust within the community
- Greater self-reliance and pro-activeness within the community
- Increased participation in activity
- Individual action planning for health – case by case basis

While the aims, role and project tasks set out a framework, those closely involved felt that it was quite hard to explain the project in an accessible way to outsiders<sup>5</sup>. Put more simply the role has been described as “getting out of the office and getting stuck in”, “putting the stats to one side and working with good aspects of the community”, “being able pick up and run with local ideas” and “cajoling and encouraging individuals in the community”.

### 3. Profile of the project area

Priors Park is bounded by the old town of Tewkesbury to the north, and main roads or nature reserves at the other extremities. It has a population of approximately 4,200, with a younger profile than the county average. The area has a higher proportion of White British residents than the Gloucestershire average. The area has mixture of housing stock, with an area of social housing including flats in the centre and north, and private properties to the west and south of the neighbourhood. Around 37% of properties are in the social housing sector. Proportionally more residents in the area live in overcrowded homes than the county as a whole. Priors Park is part of a rapidly developing part of the country: in terms of housing development, Tewkesbury is the fastest growing district outside London<sup>6</sup>. Compared to the county average, educational records indicate a higher level of free school meals eligibility, a higher proportion of children with special education needs, lower GCSE attainment, and more adults with no qualifications. While reported crime is relatively low, residents are more likely to experience criminal damage.

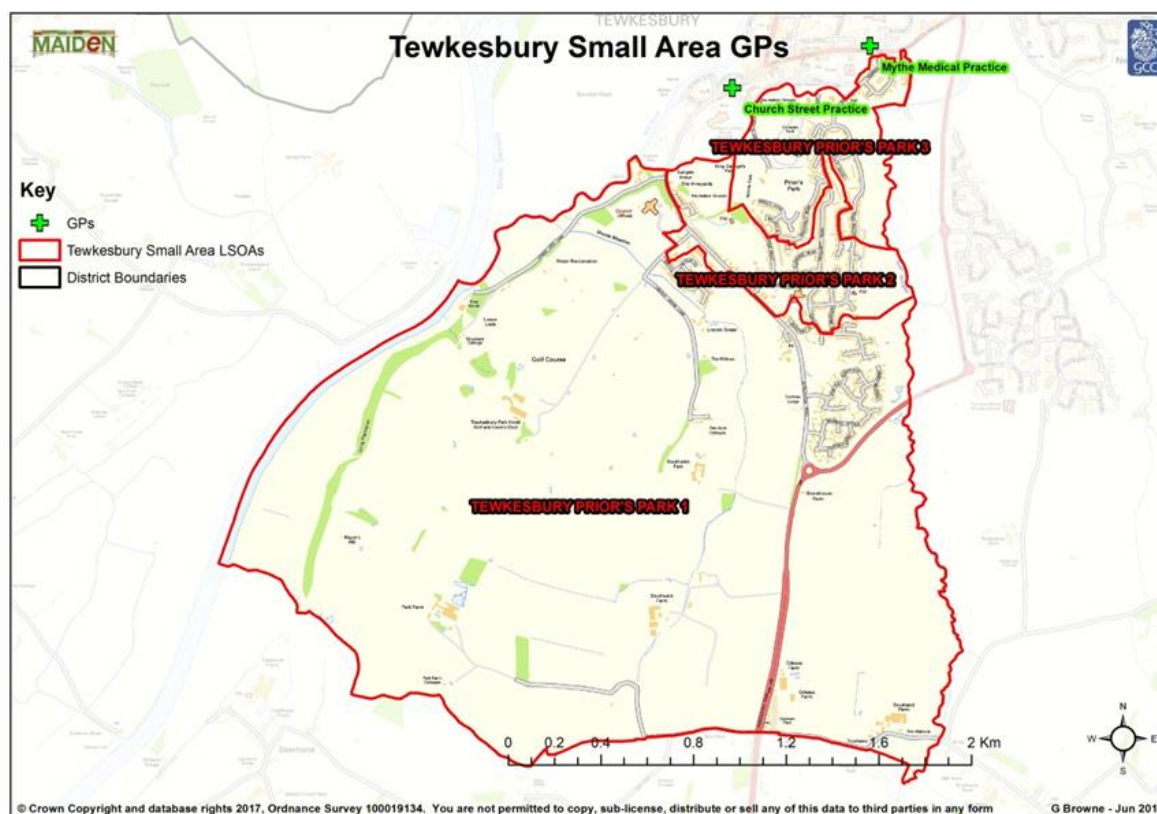
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<sup>4</sup> Information Gathering Sheet 2017

<sup>5</sup> Mar18 CEW1 Interview; Aug19 CEW2 Interview; Aug19 LA Interview

<sup>6</sup> Aug19 Interview TBC

Figure 1: Map showing Priors Park, and GP's within and nearby to the area



The local Health Profile shows relatively high levels of need compared to the county overall:

- Self-reported health and caring responsibilities – 19.4 % of residents report having a long-term health problem or disability that limits day-to-day activities.
- Unpaid care provision – lower than county average, however 23% of those providing unpaid care are providing 50 hours or more a week.
- Children’s Health – In 2013-15 there were 150 births to mothers in Priors Park.
- Breastfeeding initiation is lower compared to county average but of those that do commence breastfeeding, 75% continue fully or partially to at least 6-8 weeks after birth.
- Hospital activity – Priors Park residents have had high rates of attendance at emergency departments and minor injury units and emergency hospital admissions.
- Mythe Medical Practice and Church Street Medical Practice disease registers report that Priors Park patients experience higher prevalence of the following conditions in comparison to county average: depression, dementia, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, obesity, chronic kidney disease and diabetes (see table below).

Table 1: Reported prevalence of conditions at nearby GP practices, 2015/16<sup>7</sup>

	Church Street Practice	Mythe Medical Practice	Gloucestershire
Mental Health Prevalence (all ages)	0.5%	0.7%	0.8%
Depression Prevalence (aged 18+)	6.3%	8.4%	7.7%
Dementia Prevalence (all ages)	1.1%	0.7%	0.9%
Coronary Heart Disease Prevalence (all ages)	3.5%	3.1%	3.2%

<sup>7</sup> GP Practice Profiles

Hypertension Prevalence (all ages)	16.0%	13.4%	14.0%
COPD Prevalence (all ages)	2.1%	2.0%	1.7%
Asthma Prevalence (all ages)	7.5%	5.8%	6.5%
Obesity Prevalence (aged 18+)	13.0%	12.5%	9.4%
Cancer Prevalence (all ages)	2.7%	2.4%	2.8%
Chronic Kidney Disease Prevalence (aged 18+)	8.4%	5.6%	6.6%
Diabetes Prevalence (aged 17+)	7.2%	6.6%	6.4%

## 4. Main activities and project developments

### 4.1 Overview

This section sets out the main elements of the project. At the point of the interim report, the project is set to run for a further six months. Figure 2 provides a summary timeline of key events for the project.

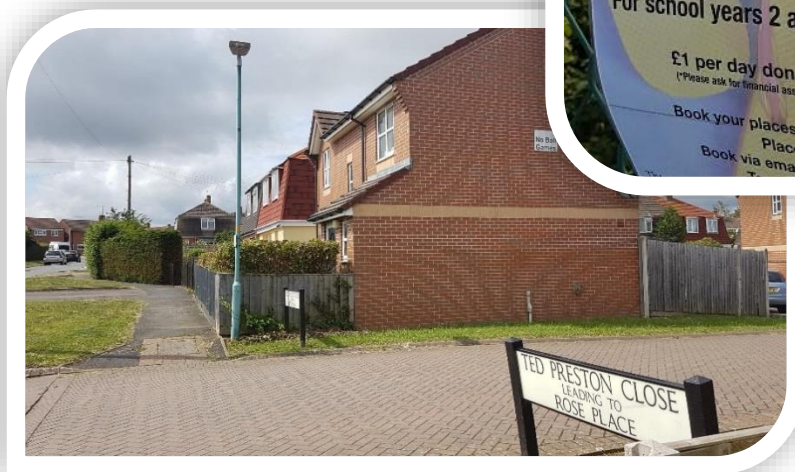
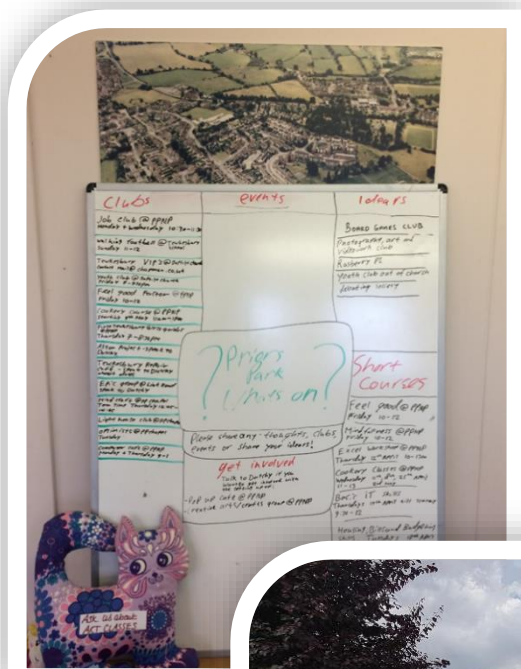
**Table 2: Summary timeline of project events**

Project timeline		
<b>2017</b>	July	Programme approval Gloucester PH team produce Small Area Profile for the neighbourhood
	August	
	September	
	October	
	November	Advertisement for the lead post
	December	
<b>2018</b>	January	Appointment of project staff lead (community engagement worker) and training through GreenSquare
	February	
	March	Initial contacts with local agencies Community asset mapping
	April	Locally developed questionnaire card to support community engagement work
	May	Start of community activities such as parent-child group and community sports
	June	
	July	
	August	Staff lead resigns from the project
	September	New staff lead in post A break in the staff handover leads to some delays in project delivery
	October	Parent and children activities
	November	Revised community asset mapping
	December	Funding awarded for men's shed project materials at PPNP
<b>2019</b>	January	Engagement in supporting local heritage and festival events
	February	
	March	
	April	Volunteer chef steps back at PPNP. Some groups relocate to Priors Park Chapel. Start of parent and child group Start of gentle exercise group in a supported residential housing scheme

	May	Collaboration with New Friends Network on medieval pageant festival
	June	
	July	
	August	
	September	
	October	
	November	
	December	
2020	January	
	February	End of project lead contract
	March	

**Figure 2: Photos illustrating: PPNP, Priors Park Chapel, local housing, project publicity**







## 4.2 Community asset mapping

Priors Park has a wide range of local community facilities and services, many of which are well established and have developed to meet the interests of specific local groups. The second CEW collated information on these assets through a mapping process. Box 1 summarises key community assets below.

### Box 1: Community assets relevant to the project

**Priors Park Neighbourhood Project** supporting a range of community groups and events, and the base for the SLC project.

**GP surgeries** that serve Priors Park are Mythe Medical Practice and Church Street Practice – both located at the Devereux Centre. This is walking distance for Priors Park Residents.

**Queen Margaret Primary School**, an education provider for children, with rooms for community use.

**Link Road Youth and Community Centre** works with young people aged 10 –19 (up to age 25 for people with a learning difficulty/disability or in care and in full time education).

**Priors Park Chapel** runs Christian faith based groups led by the Community Church team and has a room hired out for various community groups.

**Priors Park Allotments**. Private allotment holders are free to come and go to use their plot as and when they wish. The allotments host a community afternoon open to the public and community to visit on Thursdays.

**Vineyards Park** space used by general public. Play area and outdoor gym equipment.

**Children's Park** opposite shops on Queens Road Park; space used by general public.

**Noah's Ark Children's Centre** hosts targeted parenting support groups, children's health education groups for parents. Venue for children's services meetings with families on child in need or child protection cases.

**Tewkesbury Rugby Club** run groups through training and social events. Have strong social media presence.

**Tewkesbury Bowls Club** have mixed teams, men and women teams, and indoor short mat teams. The club hosts coffee mornings once a month during winter months on a Saturday.

**Costcutter supermarket** and **Balham's pharmacy** on Queens Road.

**Tewkesbury Nature Reserve** is a community run wetland nature reserve.

**Heart of Priors Park (HOPP)** Is a charity/ community interest company founded in 2016 with the goal of creating a new play area.

**Bromford Housing Association** (formerly Severn Vale Housing Association) social housing provider supporting tenants to sustain tenancy via neighbourhood coaches (formerly known as housing officers).

**Skate ramp area near Link Road** space for public to participate in skateboarding and using scooters. Pump 17 are a charity set up by local youths passionate about the skate park.

**Optimists Group** of elderly retired Priors Park or former Priors Park residents that meet for tea and coffee and a chat.

**Tewkesbury Leisure Centre** is a public leisure centre with activities and services designed to improve people's health and activity, e.g. a swimming pool, gym, fitness classes, a shop and café.

### 4.3 Early stage of the project

The first Community Engagement Worker (CEW1) was a local resident who had experience of volunteering in the area. Working out of Priors Park Neighbourhood Project an initial stage of the project was to gather information and ideas for activities using a community board display in the project foyer. CEW1 also contacted lead agencies, including the GP surgery, which identified the need to clarify the difference in role from those employed as 'Community Connectors'. Some of the first activities supported were a pop up café, a creative/arts group, and walking football: all initiatives that were consistent with previous work at PPNP.

Prior to this position, the worker had no formal training or experience in community development practice. However, he described his overall ethos as 'independent', 'flexible', and very much bottom up:

*"My approach has been to work in whatever way that people want, but if you put something on, they won't turn up. If you put something on that they ask for, they'll turn up."* [CEW1]<sup>8</sup>

After eight months in post, CEW1 resigned and GreenSquare recruited a replacement to the post. There were some problems in this transition in terms of the hand-over of project records and plans. This led to a delay of some weeks as the new CEW picked up the main threads of the project. A main point of continuity was the close working relationship with PPNP. CEW2 had, and maintained, a role as a Housing Inclusion Officer with GreenSquare, which meant that he brought a good understanding of the agency's wider community development work to the SLC project.

### 4.4 Partnership work with Priors Park Neighbourhood Project and other agencies

The SLC project has been working closely with PPNP, a well-established initiative that has been running since 2004. Around the time of the new SLC CEW's appointment, PPNP was reinvigorated with the employment of a new manager. The combination of new staff has led to a refreshed range of activities taking place at the centre. GreenSquare's wider community engagement work, especially the New Friends Network, has also supplemented the SLC project. The Network has a contract to provide housing support to those with rental payment problems. Home visits often lead to the GreenSquare officer offering to buddy up with the client to go to social network activities, which in Prior Park currently takes place at the chapel.

As appears commonplace with small community centres, PPNP has fluctuated in terms of the number of weekly activities and attendance. CEW2's work with parent and children groups has substantially boosted attendance, although recent completion of an IT project and the departure of a volunteer chef has produced a dip in activity. The PPNP manager believes that CEW2 has used creativity and diplomacy to solve issues and stimulate new ideas: "[The CEW] quietly gets on with it - unassuming – and sees ways to make a difference."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mar18 Interview

<sup>9</sup> Aug19 Interview LP1

Whilst most local agencies have worked openly with the SLC CEW, there have been some difficulties building a productive relationship with Heart of Priors Park, partly it appears, due to perceptions of roles and personality differences<sup>10</sup>. This has led to extended - but inconclusive - dialogue about developing youth provision in the area<sup>11</sup>. PPNP is also aware of the potential for confused boundaries: “While we were already doing a lot of activities already, we have had to be careful not to compete. Local residents aren’t ‘my clients’. They don’t ‘belong’ to anyone!”<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.5 Parent and child group activities

Since taking on the role, CEW2 has placed an emphasis on supporting parent and child activities in Priors Park. This has included Children’s Holiday Clubs, seasonal events such as a Pumpkin Party, Christmas Family Fun, and an Easter Picnic, mainly working through PPNP and Priors Park Chapel. These events have been well attended and PPNP received a lot of positive feedback. Events have also involved the library, who are interested in starting a pop-up library at PPNP to support families to improve literacy. A consequence of the one-off events has been to bring in subsequent visits to the PPNP.

The CEW has worked with two mothers to establish their own parent and toddler group at Priors Park Chapel. While the numbers attending are low, the activity is largely parent-led. The CEW has supported the group to apply for funding through Barnwood Trust.<sup>13</sup>

Issues with this family-based work have been, firstly, the lack of appropriate facilities – such as basic cooking facilities or play space. Secondly, there have been (relatively minor) tensions with other local groups that have run parent-child activities in the past. The CEW has had to be careful not to ‘tread on toes’ with others who feel that they have the prerogative on such activities.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.6 Work with the primary school

Contacts with the local primary school was an early area of focus for the second CEW. This built on personal connections and the work with parents at PPNP. The initial engagement in late 2018 involved consulting the children on the school council, followed by a school wide survey, about what they enjoyed at Priors Park and what activities they would like to see more of. The consultation was followed by a School Parliament meeting. The consultation led to insights about the lack of safe meeting places and tensions with older young people.

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<sup>10</sup> ALS7

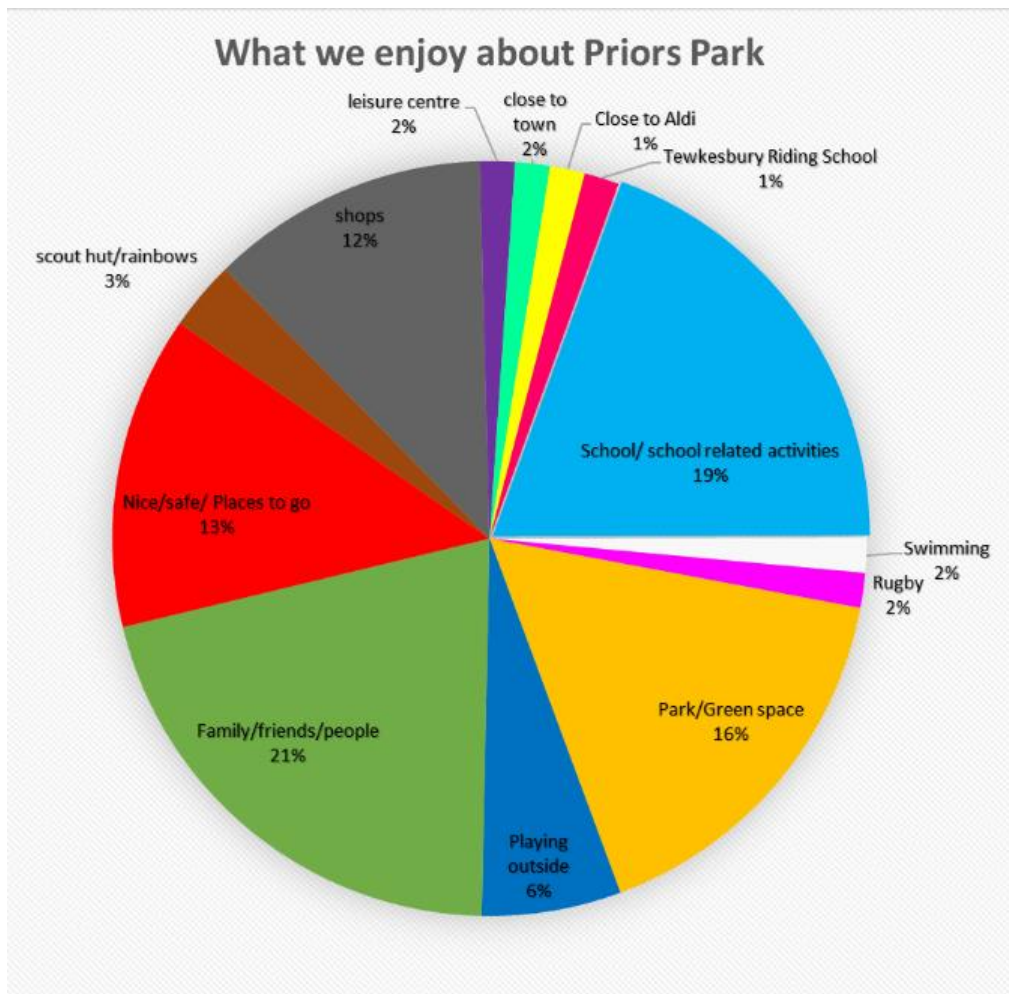
<sup>11</sup> ALS8

<sup>12</sup> Aug19 Interview LP1

<sup>13</sup> ALS8

<sup>14</sup> ALS8

**Figure 3: Consultation exercise with primary school children**



#### 4.7 Gentle exercise group with older people in residential homes

In early 2019, the CEW consulted with residents at Lanes Court and Clee House to ask if they would like to be supported to start any activities. One suggestion was an exercise group, an area that a PPNP worker and volunteer had experience in running in other settings. She had also had specific training in providing strength and balance training run by Active Gloucestershire. The CEW quickly established a weekly class, with an emphasis on providing regularity and accessibility, in the community room at Clee House. Six people from Lanes Court and Clee House have been regularly attending the group. The CEW has been promoting the group more widely through the GP practice and locality reference group, and has organised an outreach taster session at a Priors Park Chapel meeting.

The older people taking part in the group report feeling an improvement to their health, particularly physical health such as strength, flexibility and mobility. The weekly activity has also provided an enjoyable and sociable point in the week. One original member said that normally there is very little to do: "We're just sitting here... Waiting. Like just waiting to die!" R2

For one of the home managers, the exercise class has shifted the social emphasis at the home, where many activities had started to centre on a culture of alcohol drinking, with the effect of excluding those who felt uncomfortable with this. The CEW also feels an effect of the process of setting up the group has been to stimulate further action:

*"I think it's given the home a bit of a 'kick up the bum' - to think about doing more activities like doing a weekly bingo night." [CEW2]*

The activity leader believes that the keys to the success of setting up this kind of activity are to make sure the sessions are regular and reliable, and to persist over time with the expectation that attendance will fluctuate due to illness or other commitments.

In addition, the CEW has been working with the residential homes to run IT/tech drop-in sessions and an intergenerational project with the local school.

#### 4.8 Carpentry Shed Project

PPNP started the Carpentry Shed project in late 2018, following successful application for funding a shed and equipment. The CEW has been active from the outset to help develop the project.

Larry<sup>15</sup> has become unemployed after a career in product control, working for a local engineering company. He had become depressed, isolated and missed the chance to get out and do things with other people. Larry was introduced to PPNP through GEM (Go the Extra Mile) after the lead worker had become very concerned about Larry's mental health and thought he might benefit from volunteering. Larry's practical experience and knowledge of product management processes meant that he brought essential skills to the Carpentry Shed project. Since he started volunteering, he has dedicated most weekdays to set up systems to source free materials (mainly pallet timber) and to develop marketable products such as planters and bird feeders. With the help of the CEW and PPNP, Larry is introducing and encouraging others to take part in the project. The group have brokered agreements with donors of materials, developed a health and safety protocol, and started to explore the potential to become a social enterprise drawing upon insights from a visit to a similar initiative. An example of how the group is becoming more formal has been the role of the CEW setting up First Aid training, not only for shed volunteers, but participants in other local community groups.

Support workers at GEM and PPNP feel that Larry's mental and social wellbeing has strongly benefited from the project. He says "getting to make things gives me a good feeling. It feels like I am in it for the long term. In the future I'd like to be raising money for the neighbourhood project."<sup>16</sup> Larry's engagement has had wider benefits for PPNP in terms of bringing greater energy and activity to the centre, which in turn has led to wider neighbourhood interest. The shed volunteers have raised £400 towards the charity PPNP through sales and sold an additional £80 worth of birdboxes. The shed volunteers are currently making a commissioned set of 5 planters for a community in Cheltenham linked to the Oakley centre.

#### 4.9 'Art from the Park' Project: medieval arts and crafts making

'Art from the park' project was developed as an opportunity to engage with the community to display artwork from Priors Park, but it has been open to others from outside the area. The idea was based on plans for Tewkesbury to celebrate its history and to commemorate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Abbey and 500 years since the battle of Tewkesbury (Priors Park is part of the site of the battlefield). The CEW collaborated with a local arts group, the local primary school and a social group at the chapel to run art workshops. These led to the production of banners and flags for the Medieval Festival Parade in July 2019. During the sessions completing the artwork, the attendees reported being very happy, interacting positively and enjoying the session. They commented on how therapeutic it was. They said it allowed them to switch off from other things. The families that attended the parade march all fed back on how much they enjoyed the experience. They have expressed the desire to do it again

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<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>16</sup> Aug19 Interview

next year. The banners have been displayed in an exhibition at the Abbey. The CEW believes a wider benefit of the project has been to bring a sense of historical pride to the neighbourhood. An additional aspect of the work has been to consolidate a range of support activities with Priors Park Community Chapel.

#### 4.10 Work with GP practice

There have been some difficulties initiating dialogue with the GP surgery<sup>17</sup>. While both CEWs have had meetings with the surgery, these had not led to much tangible action. Another project, Caring for Communities and People (CCP) has some similarities to the SLC project in Priors Park, so the CEW has been advised to take an alternative focus such as engaging young people.<sup>18</sup> The surgery has agreed to devise a flow chart highlighting which service would be most appropriate for them to signpost/refer patients to, as there is a CCP (social prescribing) service that covers Tewkesbury and Healthy Lifestyles and the CEW, all of which have a health and wellbeing focus. More recently, the CEW has been invited to attend the bimonthly local reference group meetings led by GP practice. These contacts have led to a diabetes support group and the GPs have secured £3000 of funding to develop the group. Guest speakers such as nutritionists, healthy lifestyles and NHS diabetes professionals have been identified and agreed to attend future sessions. Leisure centre have attended and given out free day passes to members that attended and additional ones for the CEW to distribute. A key learning point is that it has taken many months to build links with the GP services, and that these have emerged towards the end of the two year funding period.

### 5. Community engagement with the project: summary

The CEW has been able to make use of the SLC evaluation questionnaires with over 20 participants, with a further ten anticipated. Given the small numbers, an analysis of this data is not reported here. Table 3 draws upon a number of project records to indicate the reach and range of community engagement initiatives. The pattern is mixed, with several large community events and some more intensive work with small numbers of residents.

**Table 3: Summary of key projects and indications of community engagement**

Activities led or supported by the project	Indication of community reach or engagement	Source/Note
Parent and children group activities	2dn Pumpkin Party attended by 28 parents and 55 children Family Festive Fun event was attended by 23 adults and 49 children	Project records
Primary school consultation	Estimated 60 children completed the consultation questionnaire	Project records
Carpentry Shed project	5 volunteers, plus range of supporting groups and businesses	March 20
Art from the Park project and Medieval arts and crafts, and festival parade	Approximately six participants at the chapel	April19
Gentle Exercise group	Six participants from older people's residential homes	April19
Intergenerational residential home project	Estimated under 30 primary school children and under 10 older residents	Status report

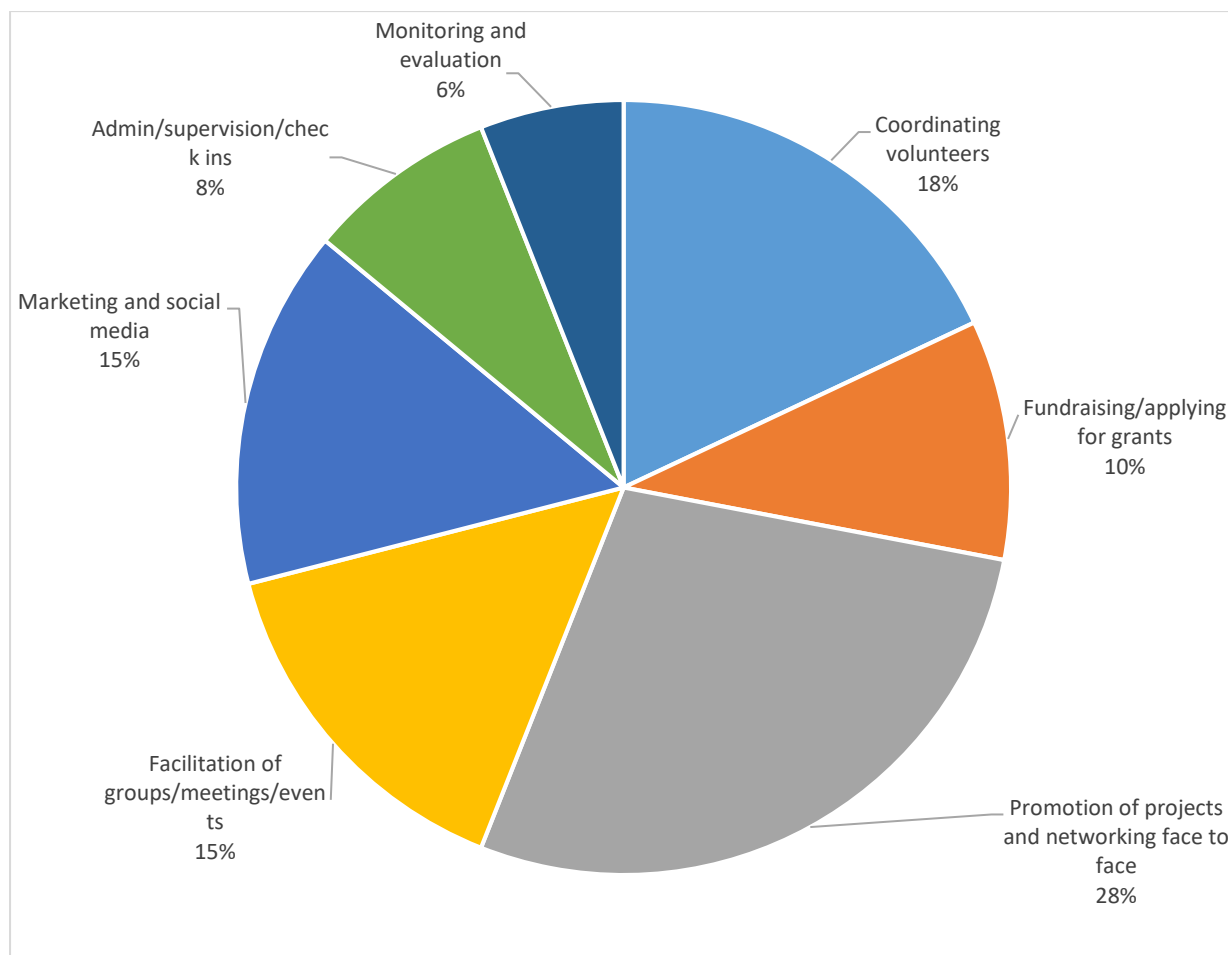
<sup>17</sup> Aug19 Interview

<sup>18</sup> ALS7

## 6. Financial, resource, and social value aspects of the project

As with most SLC projects, staffing was the primary cost for the Priors Park project. The funding was used to support one office rate of 25 hours per week for 18 months. Figure 4 provides an estimate of the breakdown of the role by activities.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of the CEW role by main project activities**

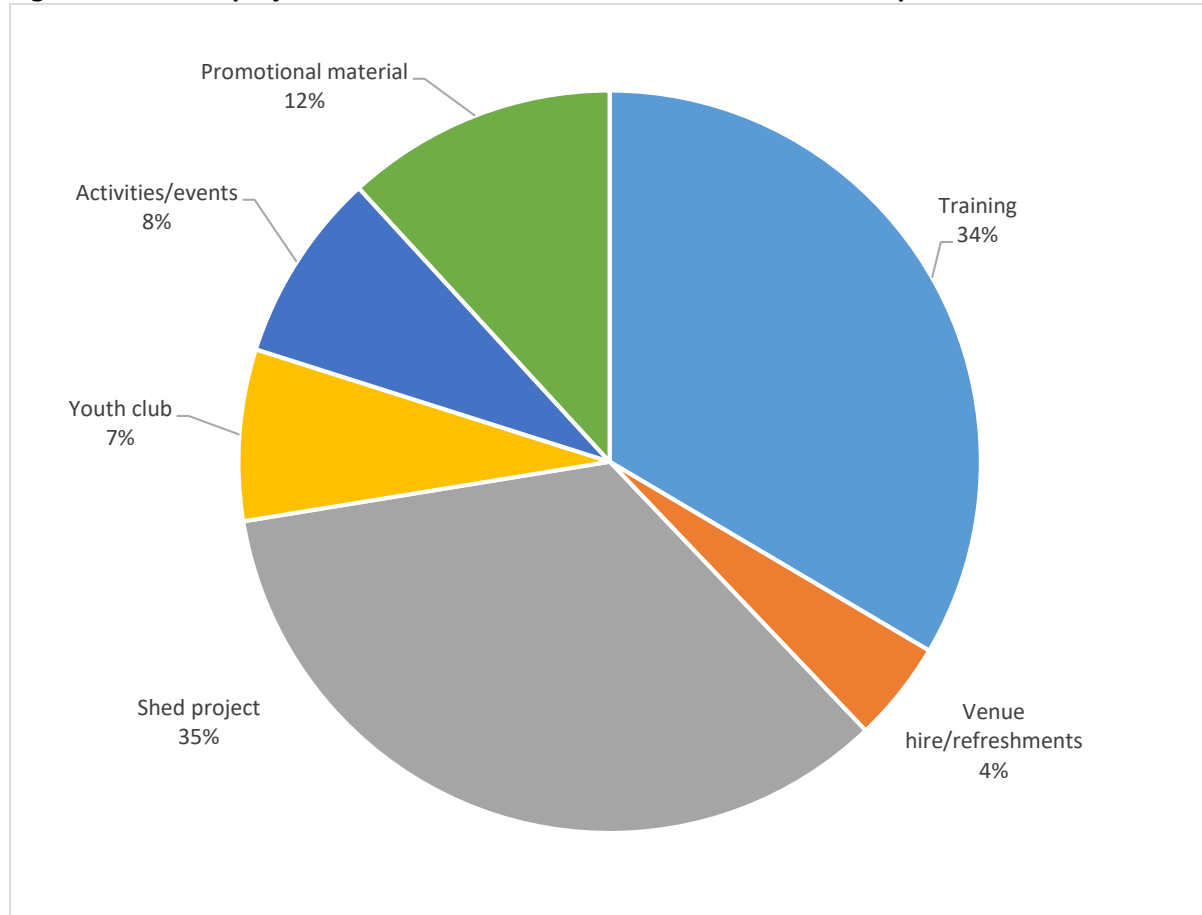


Management and office support was provided through GreenSquare. The Tewkesbury lead council officer met with the project team on a regular basis, but was not directly involved with the delivery of the project. It is notable that PPNP secured further grant funding for the Carpentry Shed project. The main areas of social value are likely to lie in personal development support for community members taking part in project activities.

A less tangible form of value, but an important one reported by interviewees, has been the role of the project in bringing agencies and groups closer together, such as the links between PPNP, residential homes, the chapel, and the primary school. PPNP has clearly reported that the SLC project has led to greater engagement in activities at the centre.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> LP1 Aug19

**Figure 5: How the project work can be articulated in terms of financial expenditure**



## 7. Engagement with the SLC programme Action Learning Sets

Both CEWs have been actively involved in the ALS meetings, and have attended all events except ALS8 (Gloucester)<sup>20</sup>. Each worker was quite new to the field of professional community development practice and both reported getting a lot of advice and support from the other practitioners on the programme. The process of presenting burning issues helped them firm up and reflect on complex issues. CEW2 hosted one of the ALS's and, in addition to setting out a burning issue, gave a project progress presentation to additional practitioners from outside the SLC programme.

## 8. Sustainability and future development of project activities

All the activities developed over the course of the project have the potential to continue after the funding period. However, the PPNP manager is very concerned that opportunities for outreach and new creative projects will be curtailed. Some volunteers, such as the lead for the Carpentry Shed project, have needed ongoing and close support. This has led to immediate dividends for the Carpentry Shed project itself and the wider neighbourhood project, but is vulnerable without the CEW as a point of contact. There is a similar issue with the gentle exercise, arts/crafts, and parent-child groups. Nevertheless, the (relatively) new management of PPNP has brought fresh impetus to the neighbourhood project overall. Links between community projects and NHS primary care services appear to be quite fragile or embryonic. The combination of the 'emergent' remit of the project, its short duration, and staff changes have made it difficult to cement these relationships.

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<sup>20</sup> ALS8 check record.



## 9. Discussion of strengths and main areas of project success

There are a number of strengths to the project model in Tewkesbury:

1. The project was able to draw upon GreenSquare's wider programme of community engagement work. This enabled the CEW to make connections with the existing New Friends Network and associated support services.
2. More generally, the CEW was able to tap into a model of community development work developed by the agency. This drew upon insights on the central role of housing and accommodation in health and wellbeing. GreenSquare's experience helped direct efforts towards engaging isolated or withdrawn community members.
3. The project has enabled GreenSquare to develop its skills and capacity in community engagement work, the learning from which was subsequently taken to other work by the organisation in the local authority.
4. GreenSquare was able to provide programme infrastructure support for the CEW post. Notably, this helped respond quickly to a change of staff at an important point in the project.
5. The project was embedded within a well-established local neighbourhood project. This helped the CEW make connections with existing work led by PPNP, and publicise the work through the agency.
6. The project adopted a highly flexible approach that allowed the CEW to engage with a broad range of social groups, rather than focus on one demographic group.
7. The project included a clear focus on building relationships with groups underserved by existing local opportunities.
8. The CEW adopted a problem solving approach that included being pragmatic and responsive to small barriers and opportunities that arose for activities. Prompt actions helped grow small initiatives and stopped them from stalling.
9. The CEW drew upon learning from the Action Learning Sets, for example, with regard to methods for neighbourhood door knocking.
10. The project helped stimulate other local initiatives, in some cases through simply raising ideas with partner agencies [e.g. picnic] and local community members [e.g. bingo].
11. As the project developed, new opportunities developed to bring participants from different groups (New Friends Network, gentle exercise, Carpentry Shed project) together. This helped build the web of community connections, generate new ideas for social activities and develop new opportunities for formal volunteering.

## 10. Discussion of challenges arising for the project

Some challenges that the project has encountered have been:

1. The distinctive remit of the project was not always clear in the context of other work by local agencies. Of particular note is the work of PPNP that had a pre-existing health and wellbeing role to "engage people in positive activities to encourage awareness of healthy living".<sup>21</sup>
2. This meant that it was not clear from the outset what the additional value of the SLC project would be to existing local provision.
3. The resignation of the first CEW caused some disruption to the delivery of the project, particularly because the short notice left GreenSquare without an opportunity to organise a handover process.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://priorsparkneighbourhoodproject.co.uk/about-us/>

4. The project encountered some instances of 'territorial resistance' from local agencies. Predictably, this slowed the pace of progress for the project. However, an unanticipated consequence was that some partner agencies were spurred on to enact latent activities simply through the presence of the project.
5. Engagement in some project activities was lower than anticipated or sporadic. This was unsurprising and corresponds with the test and learn approach adopted by the project. There may be a number of reasons for this observation including barriers to participation, the availability of alternatives, or low interest.
6. The small geographical area of focus for the project may have created a challenge in terms of the limited potential pool of participants.
7. The room facilities available at PPNP restricted opportunities to run multiple parallel activities and informal drop-ins. This reduced both the 'productivity' of the space and the chance to bring different groups together through opportunistic contacts.
8. GP surgery staff appear to have had limited capacity to engage with the project. This might be a consequence of the open-ended and emergent character of the project: staff may not have been able to prioritise work with the project given more immediate caseload pressures. However, towards the end of the project relationships have started to develop rapidly in particular through collaboration on a diabetes support group.
9. The high levels of personal needs of some community members restricted their opportunities to take up project services or contribute towards activities. Examples of issues included chronic ill health, alcohol problems, major adverse life events, and conflicts with other community members.
10. The time limited nature of the project meant that the project staff lead (CEW) had to exercise considerable care in assessing how to support local initiatives. This placed limits on the progress that the project could make within the time available.

## 11. Conclusions

This project draws upon GreenSquare's track-record in housing-support community development work. While there is no formalised model, its 'Community Engagement' approach follows many principles and techniques found in the community development practice field, such as building trust, adopting an open-mind, gaining strong local insight, and taking a highly flexible approach to supporting activities. This has meant that the project has been pragmatic in engaging with a range of groups and interests, and also working with the personal skills of lead staff. While the project-linked activities clearly map on to a range of health and wellbeing benefits, the direct links to health service priorities was less immediately visible until the latter stages of the project.

## 12. Sources of data

The evaluation draws upon a variety of sources of data collected from the inception of the project. These include:

- Fourteen interviews with ten practitioners including the project workers and partner agency staff.
- Interviews with nine project participants/volunteers, and observations of four project activities.
- Notes from programme Action Learning Sets (7/8 attended) and Steering Group meetings.
- Analysis of project records including project plans, CEW job description, project monitoring records, status reports, email and phone correspondence.