



# OPENING GREEN DOORS

DOORSTEP GREENS AND COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE

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# INTRODUCTION



Close contact with a living landscape close to home is good for us. It can provide welcome breathing space in a hectic day, a chance to re-connect with nature or to chat with the neighbours. For the very young, the very old and for anyone else with limited mobility or time, good green space on the doorstep is especially important. We need to take it seriously and make sure it is well cared for. When local people have a direct hand in the design, the shaping and the aftercare of their own local open-space, it really seems to make a difference. Indeed there seems to be no better way of ensuring that it grows more beautiful and more popular as time goes by.

A daily dose of nature on the doorstep is a basic human right and Doorstep Greens are demonstrating just how beneficial that can be. Many more communities deserve the chance to share in their success.

**Chris Baines**

*Writer and broadcaster, environmental campaigner, president of the Urban Wildlife Partnership and Vice-President of The Wildlife Trusts.*

## ABOUT DOORSTEP GREENS

The Doorstep Greens initiative was launched by the Countryside Agency in April 2001. Its aim was to provide grants of between £10,000 to £150,000 to local communities, to help them to create and manage their own special local open space. Almost £13 million was provided by the Big Lottery Fund as part of the *Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities* programme with a further £15 million donated from other funders, and so far well over 100 Doorstep Greens have been successfully completed. New open spaces, play areas, nature reserves, village greens and flower gardens are helping to improve the quality of life for people in communities from the inner city through suburbia to the rural countryside, and by the end of 2006 the initiative is expected to achieve its target of 200 individual Doorstep Greens.

In 2005 The Parks Agency was commissioned to assess the scheme's progress and this document is based on their independent findings, as well as information gathered from local community groups and their project partners. The Doorstep Greens initiative has already proved to be a catalyst for far-reaching community regeneration. It is beginning to have a positive influence well beyond the physical boundaries of each project site, and its growing success seems set to provide an inspiring model for similar community green space schemes.

This document has been published as a way of marking the achievements of people all over England in creating their Doorstep Greens. There are many lessons to be learnt for green space managers and planners from an initiative of this scale. Drawing these together to tell the story in one document helps to maximise the legacy of Doorstep Greens.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACES



**"Sustainable communities must combine social inclusion, homes, jobs, services, infrastructure and respect for the environment to create places where people will want to live and work now and in the future."**

*Rt. Hon. John Prescott MP, Deputy Prime Minister, February 2005*

## STABLE COMMUNITIES

Green spaces - whether in the form of parks or play areas, village greens or recreation grounds - are a vital part of our environment. They affect how we feel about where we live; they provide 'breathing spaces' from the noise and congestion of modern life; they bring us into contact with the natural world, and they're good economic indicators, since attractive, well-maintained green spaces can influence property prices.

Although we have a tendency to take these places for granted, they are an integral piece of our social infrastructure as somewhere to meet friends, hold outdoor events, walk the dog, jog, play sports or just sit and reflect. Along with jobs, adequate housing and public services, they represent a significant part

of the key to thriving, economically and environmentally stable communities; or what we currently refer to as '*sustainability*.'

At a local level, green spaces have many positive benefits. These include:

## CIVIC PRIDE

Fostering a sense of local ownership and shared responsibility; which in turn can impact on anti-social behaviour.

## SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Providing a place to meet, either informally or at organised events, encouraging a sense of community.

## PLAY SPACE FOR CHILDREN

Necessary for many aspects of physical and emotional development, as well as maintaining health and fitness.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Providing a valuable source of hands-on learning for outdoor and ecological studies.

## HEALTH

An estimated 70% of users walk to their local park or green space\*, further enhancing their benefit to health and fitness.

*\*Source: 'Places for People,' Groundwork, 2004*

## ENVIRONMENT

Helping to conserve natural systems, including carbon, water and natural cycles; supporting ecosystems, and providing a wide range of habitats, in both landscaped and conservation areas, within urban settlements.

There is a need for a green infrastructure if sustainability is going to be given a chance to work in our towns and cities. Successful green spaces are a vital part of that infrastructure.

Hallcliffe DG, Bradford.



Image right: Treloggon DG, Cornwall, before work started.

*"The fragmentation of green space management and its low status constrains the capacity of some local authorities to establish a shared vision for green space. Establishing a shared vision of the importance of urban green space requires support from local politicians and senior officials within local authorities and the bodies they work with".*

*Source: National Audit Office, Enhancing Urban Green Space, 2006*

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACES

### CONTINUED



*“There was a patch of green space used for dog walking, but it wasn’t safe for children, vulnerable people... well, anybody really. There was a job element who would push abandoned cars down the slopes onto the green and burn them. It got to the point where there was a car two or three times a week.”*

*Babs Miles, Oak Road DG, Tunbridge Wells, Kent*

*New Herrington DG, Sunderland, before work started.*



### GREENS IN DECLINE

The decline in our public open spaces has been well documented and attributed to a number of factors. The introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in the 1980s, for example, required local authorities to relinquish many long-held practices and attitudes in order to make short-term savings. While these cultural changes brought greater cost-efficiency, the impact on our parks has been reduced maintenance, a loss of skills and the virtual extinction of the role of the park-keeper.

*“At the ‘urban fringe’, the countryside in and around towns weaves in and out of the built-up area and is often characterised by new development, derelict and brownfield sites, retail and industrial parks, landfill sites and reservoirs.”*

*Source: The Countryside Agency and Groundwork. The Countryside in and Around Towns, 2005*



*Burnett Avenue DG, Bradford, before work started.*

Trellogon DG, Cornwall, before work started.



Carlin How DG, Cleveland, before work started.

## UNDESIRABLE PLACES

Many green spaces have seen a downturn in their fortunes. According to the Parks Agency's *Doorstep Greens Evaluation Report*, commissioned in 2005 by the Countryside Agency, 'the barriers to greater public use and enjoyment of green spaces are concerns over personal safety; dereliction and loss of facilities; poor access and the decline in standards of cleanliness and maintenance.'

Nowhere are these barriers felt more greatly than when drugs, and the associated problems of crime and violence, are added to the social mix. Indeed for some communities, the impact of a poorly-maintained green space is actually worse than if there had been no space at all.



Ocean Road Open Space DG, Leicester, before work started.

*"We have lost everything to the developers. Our recreation ground was sold off by the council for housing, and the village hall was converted into a private house, as was the post office. Within a generation everything has been stripped out."*

Mike Harris, Epping Upland DG, Essex

# DOORSTEP GREENS: A BLUEPRINT EMERGES



The model for Doorstep Greens was pieced together using knowledge gleaned from earlier initiatives, and from the people who used and ran them.



*Hoddlesden Millennium Green, near Darwen, Lancashire. Millennium Greens created long-term community assets which provided for a range of community and environmental benefits.*

## THE DOORSTEP GREENS HERITAGE

The idea of a community-led regeneration scheme is not new. There are many such programmes which have sought to create and restore green spaces, with varying success. In devising Doorstep Greens, the Countryside Agency aimed to harness the best aspects of these programmes, while addressing some of their inherent problems to create a blueprint - or 'greenprint' - for all others which followed.

Among the schemes which provided inspiration, the first - and arguably the most significant - was **Pocket Parks**.

This pioneering initiative was launched in 1984 by Northamptonshire County Council with support from the Countryside Commission, and was the first of its kind to encourage communities to acquire and

manage their own green spaces. It invoked genuine community involvement and a radical shift in thinking away from the dependency culture which expects 'them' to do it for 'us'. So successful was this new way of thinking that it prompted the three main political parties to publish policies for the improvement of parks and open spaces.

However, like many ground-breaking innovations there were lessons to be learnt, and for Pocket Parks these included:

- **Limited** money and staff time, meant insufficient Pocket Parks to meet the high demand
- **Insufficient support** for training and 'networking', enabling communities to share information
- **Too few volunteers**; the scheme relies on a small number of dedicated individuals and The Parks Agency's 2005 report found that sustainability 'is getting harder each year'.

Hardings Pit DG, King's Lynn.



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**Millennium Greens**, the initiative which most closely resembled Doorstep Greens, was launched in 1996 by the Countryside Agency with support from the Millennium Commission. Its aim was to create 250 new areas of open public space by the year 2000. Inspired by Pocket Parks, it demanded an even greater commitment from communities, requiring them to purchase or lease their land and take complete responsibility for its future management.

Although this initiative had evolved significantly from the Pocket Parks model, it had its own shortcomings, which included:

- **Over-strict rules**, such as the requirement for 999 year leases
- **Legal and land-ownership complexities**
- **Too few volunteers** - as with Pocket Parks - rather than involving the whole community
- **Long-term unsustainability** which may be a problem and lead to abandonment.

Moorclose DG, Cumbria.



Clifton Place DG, Bristol.

## DOORSTEP GREENS: A BLUEPRINT EMERGES CONTINUED



*Advice on hand in the East Midlands.*

### COMMENT:

KRISTINA GOULD

DG ADVISER

EAST MIDLANDS REGION

“It would have been tempting to make the application process a tick-box exercise, but we insisted that this wouldn’t work - so we designed a staff-heavy ‘on hand to help’ set-up. DG Advisers were trained and equipped to ‘nurture’ Doorstep Green applicants. Their job was to be there at the end of the phone, e-mail, or to call round in person whenever complex DGs hit sticking points. The cost of this is higher than that in other grant schemes, but it’s been worth it.”

### THE DOORSTEP GREENS PROPOSAL

When the Doorstep Greens initiative was launched in April 2001 it offered 200 communities in England the opportunity to create a new green space. Their chosen site could be a derelict piece of land or an existing green space, regenerated to include features such as a grassy area for community events, a nature garden, a small orchard, an area for ball games or just somewhere to sit and relax. The initiative’s defining characteristics were:

#### **Local ownership and sustainability.**

The community took the leading role in the green’s planning, design, creation and long-term care; however, unlike Millennium Greens, the minimum lease required was only 25 years and local authorities could still retain ownership of the site.

**Project Preparation Plans.** First-stage grants of up to £3,500 were offered initially to help communities compile a proper proposal, to include extensive local consultation; this ensured that all projects were viable and had the support of the local community.

**Creation grants.** If the Project Preparation Plan was accepted, a second stage Creation Grant was offered, up to £150,000.

**Disadvantaged communities.** Unlike the earlier Millennium Greens scheme, priority was given to applications from disadvantaged communities, whether rural or urban. This was achieved through regional targeting plans, using local knowledge from the Countryside Agency’s experienced regional teams.

**Partnership.** The initiative sought to encourage not only whole-community involvement but collaboration with related organisations such as housing associations, local authorities, Groundwork Trusts, youth workers, the police, local schools, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and wildlife trusts.

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## DOORSTEP GREENS: A BLUEPRINT EMERGES CONTINUED



*“We liked the advice and support received from our local adviser who guided the group towards other funding initiatives and attended the group meetings and events”.*

*Secretary, a friends group*

*Source: Doorstep Greens Evaluation Report, August 2005, The Parks Agency*

### GRASS ROOTS SUPPORT

A factor which differentiated Doorstep Greens from many other green space schemes was the extent of the support offered to local groups. A 25-strong team of Countryside Agency staff, organised in regional teams, were on hand to guide communities through every stage of their project. Many advisers had worked on the earlier Millennium Greens programme, from which they had gained much valuable experience of community-led schemes. In addition there were quarterly newsletters, regional workshops at which groups could network and exchange ideas, plus specialist information and resources made available online.

### THE RURAL/URBAN SPLIT

Understanding the challenges faced by rural and urban communities, the Countryside Agency was keen to promote applications from all areas. Surprisingly, the need for accessible green space is often as acute in rural areas as in urban areas. Intensive farming often restricts access to the countryside and in many villages open space is sold off for development.



*Aston Green DG, Shropshire.*

In the end, the percentage split between rural and urban Doorstep Greens was around 40/60.

### SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL AGENDA

If the structure of Doorstep Greens was derived from earlier schemes, its ethos was linked directly to national, and international strategies for the environment. Two government White Papers in particular formed a basis for the initiative: the Urban White Paper, *Our Towns and Cities: Delivering an Urban Renaissance* (ODPM 2000), and the Rural White Paper, *Our Countryside: the Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England* (Defra 2000).

In promoting sustainable development it supported *Securing the Future*, the Government's 2005 sustainable development strategy devised in response to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The scheme's principles were also echoed in the *Community Action 2020* programme, contained within this strategy.

And the Health White Paper, *Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier* (DoH 2004) actually makes reference to Doorstep Greens as an example of how local communities can influence the take-up of healthy lifestyles.

From its small beginnings it is hoped that the concept of Doorstep Greens will play its part in the creation and management of future community green spaces.

**A full version of the Doorstep Greens evaluation report by the Parks Agency, can be found on the CD enclosed within this document.**

Templars DG, Essex, before work started.



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*“The nature of communities in urban areas is, at its core, not that different to the nature of rural communities. However there are key differences between urban and rural communities and the distinct ways in which their composition affects their development. Issues such as identity, sense of place, stability, access, and the existence of support structures all combine to give a very different perspective.”*

Source: Community Development and Public Participation in Urban and Urban Fringe Areas, Church and Woodward, The Countryside Agency, September 2000.



Holywell Orchard DG, Gloucestershire.

## COMMENT:

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

PETE JOHNSTONE, DOORSTEP GREENS PROGRAMME MANAGER

*“Doorstep Greens was born in an exciting time for green spaces - before the rebirth of the Urban Parks Forum as GreenSpace, before the Urban Green Spaces Task Force’s report and the advent of CABE Space, a period that has been referred to as some sort of renaissance.*

“Perhaps the single most important thing about this initiative is that it gave people the power to improve a piece of land in their area. From that one action of sending in a reply card, groups were entered on our database; so then a regional adviser could talk to them about their proposal; which meant that the group had a single point of contact all the way through, and we had a way of personally connecting with each project.

“There’s no doubt that the emphasis we placed on community consultation was pivotal to the initiative’s achievements. But ‘community’ is a misnomer - each town or village is made up of different communities. You often hear of a group of people putting forward a plan, and another group next door totally opposing that plan. We wanted to achieve a good consensus for each project, which is why we devised the Project Preparation Plan approach. In some cases it didn’t work, and the community just couldn’t agree; but it was a way of seeing whether the community could consolidate their views... a sort of litmus test, to see whether a project was sustainable. It certainly proved the point that you can’t guarantee sustainability just by putting in money.”

# THE FINANCIAL PACKAGE



“The responsibility of money is hard - and it’s also hard for group members to trust each other with money, to spend it in the best way... they’ll say, oh, we can’t spend £800 on a bench... and I’ll say, oh yes you can, because it’s got to last at least 20 years.”

*Crispin Downs, Manager of Landscape Consultancy, Essex County Council and project manager at Jaywick DG, Essex*



*Eastfields/Westfields DG, County Durham.*



## THE BOTTOM LINE

- The average Doorstep Green grant awarded to groups was **£56,500**.
- Typically, this would leave a group with around **£17,500** to raise themselves in 'match funding', which could be a mixture of cash (a minimum 10% of the project value) and gifts in-kind.
- The total match funding raised by Doorstep Greens groups was over **£15 million**, achieved through a mix of public, private and charitable funds.

## A SCHEME OF TWO HALVES

One of the defining features of the Doorstep Greens initiative was the way its grant was split into two separate awards, marking two distinct phases of each project.

- An initial **Project Preparation Plan (PPP)** grant, of up to £3,500.
- A **Creation** grant, awarded if the PPP demonstrated a viable, sustainable project which would serve the whole community. Creation grants were available up to £150,000, but the largest offered was £119,000.

*“One of the best things about this scheme is that it’s meeting a real need - green space is incredibly important to a local community. But it also puts time and effort into the enabling process - the ‘hand-holding’, which is so important in the early stages. That’s a very positive thing for a funder to do.”*

*Sarah Betteridge, Director, Shell Better Britain Campaign and Doorstep Greens grants panel member (image right).*

Scotland Gate DG, Northumberland.



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### FAIR AND BALANCED AWARDS

The power to decide whether projects would receive a Creation grant lay with the Doorstep Greens grants panel - a group of ten environmental professionals who met quarterly to:

- Make decisions on Creation grants.
- Provide strategic advice to the National Project Team, such as geographical spread and targeting.

Among their criteria were issues such as the cost of the project; evidence of strong community support, and whether there was a sufficiently strong team to carry the project forward.

This was an important part of the scheme's process. Since Doorstep Greens were publicly funded, the Countryside Agency had a responsibility to ensure that all projects awarded grants were accessible, inclusive, economically viable and sustainable. In addition, it was felt that an extra level of scrutiny, separate from that of the regional advisers, would ensure that each project was treated objectively.



### WHAT THE MONEY WAS SPENT ON

There was no typical Doorstep Green since each project was defined by its own unique characteristics: size, location, site layout, existing trees, shrubs or buildings, and the different requirements driven by the social mix of the community. For example, a predominantly elderly community may give priority to all-weather footpaths and somewhere quiet to sit, while families may consider children's play space, or somewhere to hold local events, of particular importance.



New Herrington DG, Sunderland.

An average **Project Preparation** grant might be spent on:

|                                   |               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Community consultant/consultation | £1,825        |
| Landscape architect               | £1,268        |
| Organisational costs              | £407          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                      | <b>£3,500</b> |

The **Creation phase** budget for an average green might look as follows:

**HARD LANDSCAPING:** for example, rail boundary, paving, paths, metal fencing to children's play area, artwork, Doorstep Greens sign, benches, fencing and gates sculpture

**SOFT LANDSCAPING:** for example, bulb planting, trees, shrubs, wildflowers, turfing, seeding

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <b>TOTAL SITE WORK</b>   | <b>£42,650</b> |
| <b>REVENUE COSTS:</b> site survey, gardening tools, community events (e.g. site opening), training | <b>£10,350</b> |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>£53,000</b> |

## THE FINANCIAL PACKAGE CONTINUED



### COMMENT:

#### CRISPIN DOWNS

MANAGER OF LANDSCAPE CONSULTANCY, ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL  
AND PROJECT MANAGER AT JAYWICK DG

"We were lucky in that we raised the match-funding through another source. It's all very well saying that people should have to raise money in order to feel committed to the project, but I think that really applies to well-organised, reasonably affluent groups, professional people with lots of contacts who will each give £20-£100. Those groups are very confident about raising money.

"When you have a community of elderly people, single parent families, people on benefits with lots of problems, they don't have enough for themselves. Getting them to go off and organise something to raise £1000 was never really on.

*"I do think involving people is really important. It's not about the money, it's the fact that they're involved."*

The only restriction imposed by the Countryside Agency was play equipment, which was not included in the grant. 'Formal' play equipment, no matter how valuable, is costly, and funding this would have left many projects with little or no money for planting or landscaping. As an alternative, groups were encouraged to install 'features' made from natural materials suitable for climbing on or hiding in, such as stone boulders, tree stumps or living willow 'wigloos'; or find additional funding for more traditional play equipment.

### PART-FUNDING: ENCOURAGING SOCIAL COHESION

Creation grants were usually offered up to a maximum of 70% of the total project cost, requiring the community to fund the remaining 30% through;

- **fundraising**
- **other grants** (for example, Living Spaces, the Landfill Tax Credits, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund)
- or **gifts in-kind** (such as donations of services or materials from local suppliers).

Some opinion suggests that this approach, in tandem with thorough community involvement, is a key factor in encouraging local ownership of a project. Having worked, and in some cases really fought, to secure the funds needed to achieve their goal, the sense of community pride in the end result is all the greater.

### THE FUNDERS' VIEW

Many other organisations, aside from the Countryside Agency, made Doorstep Greens possible by providing the all-important match-funding which enabled some groups to proceed. But at what benefit to themselves?

**New Herrington's** DG in Sunderland was an ambitious project totalling £500,000, combining the renovation of an existing green and the creation of a Home Zone traffic-calming scheme. **English Partnerships** awarded the group £209,060 as part of their National Coalfields Programme: a regeneration scheme which helps former mining communities across England.

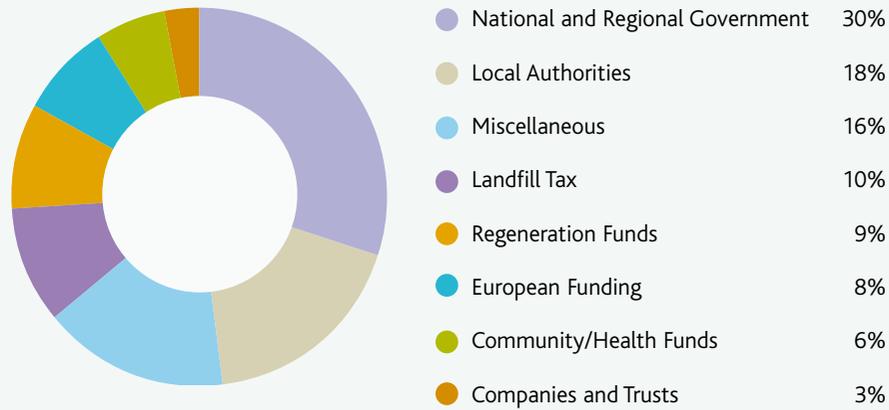


View from Hardings Pit DG, King's Lynn.

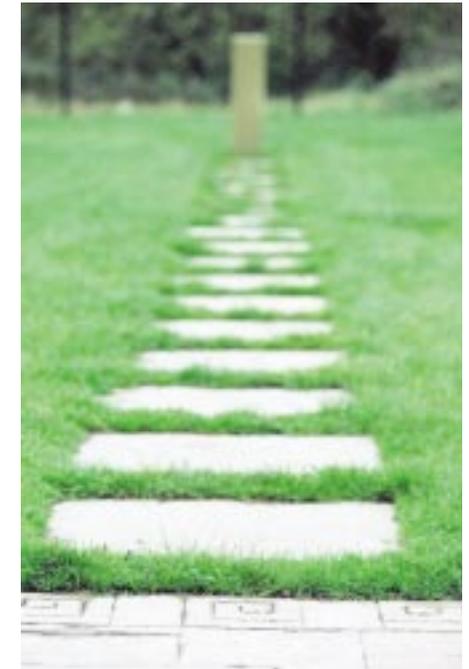
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DOORSTEP GREEN PARTNERSHIP FUNDING



Information courtesy of Bill Bruty (Fundraising Training Ltd) and Land Restoration Trust.



Gamesley DG, Derbyshire.

*"Maintenance is the perennial problem of grant aid and needs resolving."*  
Community Forest Development Officer

Source: Doorstep Greens Evaluation Report, August 2005, The Parks Agency

## THE FINANCIAL PACKAGE CONTINUED



***“Our Green needs financial support to continue to provide a community resource.”***

*Trustee, Millennium Green*

*Source: Doorstep Greens Evaluation Report, August 2005, The Parks Agency*

*Building design can influence the feel of adjoining green space. Oak Road DG, Kent.*



English Partnerships chose to support this project because they saw that it was closely aligned with their own programme of coalfields regeneration: “This project fits perfectly within our wider strategy of improving the environment for communities within the coalfields. It will provide an attractive open space for the whole community to enjoy.”

Meanwhile WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd), who award grants to local community and environmental projects under the Landfill Tax Credits scheme, have funded 20 Doorstep Greens projects to a total sum of nearly £400,000. Stephen Parr, Managing Director of WREN, commented: “WREN always seeks to fund the most deserving projects and maximise community benefit, and to work in areas of greatest need. The support to these Doorstep Greens projects filled these criteria well and will make a lasting impact on the lives of local people.”

### THE COST OF REAL, SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

The impact of the £32m spent during the course of the Doorstep Greens initiative is visible. Vibrant, welcoming spaces have been created on some of the most unremarkable of sites, breathing new life into the communities around them. Whole-community involvement has been embedded in the foundations of each project, in the hope that the same community spirit which created the greens will endure to sustain

them. But without long-term financial support, how many of these may slide into neglect within the next five, or ten years?

In the Parks Agency’s report, **100%** of respondents thought that there was a continuing demand for grants to improve green spaces. And of all the 19 grant options suggested, the highest support - **60%** - was for maintenance funding.

This was further supported by an analysis in the split of *revenue* costs - such as security, maintenance and planting - versus *capital* spending on items such as fencing, paths, lighting and seating. A resounding 65% of respondents, when asked to list priorities for funding, named items requiring predominantly revenue support.

This issue of sustainability, and how it is funded, is the question that will without doubt shape the next generation of community green space schemes.



Putting the fun into fundraising.

*"The future fundraising challenge will be very different from the establishment phase. Most Greens have been successful in securing funding from a narrow range of funders. I suspect that this pattern will be turned on its head for the long term maintenance income. Whilst a close relationship with the local authority will always be essential for each Doorstep Green, creativity will be required to attract and maintain a completely new set of funders who will support the Greens into the long term future."*

Bill Bruty, Fundraising Training Ltd.

### IMAGINATIVE FUNDRAISING

For many groups, raising the required match funding proved the biggest challenge of the whole scheme and a task with which some communities struggled. However, others demonstrated great tenacity, initiative and creativity in raising the money they needed.

"One group member came up with the idea of asking residents to 'buy a square' of the site for a donation. One drizzly September morning, a team of volunteers stood outside the local supermarket and managed to sell over £200 worth of 'squares', marked out on a large map of the site."

Hallcliffe Community Garden, Bradford.

"We persuaded people it would be a good project to invest their money in... we sold it on what the benefits would be to them. We had all the facts and figures about deprivation, and a good idea of what the outcomes would be."

Templars DG, Essex.

"The Ladies Night on 19 October was a huge success, helped in no small part by the wine reception and disco featuring 'Tom Jones'."

West Horndon DG, Essex.

"We do monthly breakfasts on the first Sunday of every month... We charge £3.50 for a full English; we attract between 70 and 90 people..."

Donyatt DG, Somerset.

Carlin How DG, Cleveland.



# PLANNING AND CONSULTATION



**“I work in three different areas across this region and I’ve never worked on something which has pulled people together like this project has.”**

*Clare Iley-Christie, Environmental Projects Officer, West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust, and Carter Park DG*

## A WHOLE-COMMUNITY APPROACH

From the start, Doorstep Greens were encouraged to be inclusive. Each green evolved through a process of extensive consultation with local residents at the preliminary Project Preparation Plan stage. Groups devised questionnaires, held ‘Planning for Real’-type events, instigated school projects and set up workshops with youth workers and local artists in order to garner the views of every sector of the community.

For many groups, this was new territory. Those who tackled it successfully made some useful discoveries along the way.

***“You’ve got to listen to what people want, and reflect their aspirations. If you say to people, ‘what do you want?’, someone is going to say ‘a ski slope’ - then they feel disillusioned when they can’t have one. You’ve lost their faith. But if you give them a menu of options you’ve got their involvement.”***

*Derek Hill, St Neot DG, Cornwall*

This strong emphasis on whole-community consultation helped to ensure that:

- Each project had the support of most, if not all local residents: a crucial advantage when enlisting volunteers, raising funds and organising events.
- The needs of specific groups such as young mothers, people with disabilities and the elderly were catered for.

It also meant that, in the final analysis, most communities felt they got the Doorstep Green they wanted.

*Eastfields/Westfields DG, County Durham.*



*Biglands DG, London Borough of Tower Hamlets.*



*"I just thought we needed to make it special - especially to young people, who are potentially tomorrow's graffiti artists. We decided to get kids involved in the history of the site using maps, census reports, plans and a professional archaeologist."*

*Roger Kitchen, The Secret Garden DG, Wolverton, Milton Keynes*

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*"66% of the Doorstep Greens surveyed said that the project resembles what the community originally had in mind 'very closely'; 33% said that it did 'mostly'."*

*Source: Doorstep Greens Evaluation Report, August 2005, The Parks Agency*



*Dene Valley DG, County Durham.*

### PREVENTING VANDALISM, DESIGNING OUT CRIME

In some communities, there were real concerns that their hard-earned new amenity would be vandalised by local youths before it even reached completion. Here, too, the whole-community approach offered solutions.

Youth workers and community artists were employed to great effect in helping local teenagers define what they wanted from the green. Often this meant the provision of a youth shelter: a simple, open-sided structure which gives teenagers their own weather-proof meeting space while remaining visible to the rest of the community (i.e. providing no hiding place for undesirable pursuits).

## PLANNING AND CONSULTATION CONTINUED



*“The walls, which are undulating and bevelled, will have perching spaces but don’t have anything wide enough to lie or sit on for any length of time.”*

*Justin Parry, Bristol City Council’s Crime Reduction Unit and Clifton Place DG (image below).*



### COMMENT:

DAVE HAYGARTH  
COMMUNICATIONS ADVISER  
NATIONAL PROJECT TEAM

“It’s a greening project with a community focus. Or is it a community-building project with a green focus? The stories we hear from greens around the country give more strength to the latter statement. Yes - the design of some greens can be stunning, but the true strength of the stories is in the people involved. It’s a cliché, but people are the most valuable asset to any project.”

In the vast majority of cases where teenagers were actively included in the consultation for, and subsequent creation of their green, there have been few problems with vandalism and anti-social behaviour - a result which has surprised many.

At **Scotland Gate** DG, near Bedlington, Northumberland, community police officer Clare Bradbury reports that incidences of vandalism and youth disorder dropped from 24 to four in the year that the DG was created. PC Bradbury says this turnaround was due in part to a new youth club, but the green has “definitely had a positive effect. A lot of people were very pessimistic and said it would get wrecked, but it hasn’t been.” Now, she adds, young people have “somewhere of their own to go... it’s going to steer them away from certain houses [looking for alcohol or drugs], and keep them visible and safe.”

Other groups, meanwhile, adopted a ‘belt and braces’ approach by ensuring that their finished green’s design would provide few opportunities for undesirable behaviour.



*Scotland Gate DG, Northumberland.*

### CHANGING COMMUNITIES: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

There was another, more unexpected benefit from the whole-community approach. Suddenly required to talk to one another, share their views, pool resources, plan events, generate ideas as well as hard cash and really listen to others with different needs to their own, people began to engage.



Ocean Road Open Space DG, Leicester.

OPENING GREEN DOORS  
DOORSTEP GREENS AND COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE



*“All the age groups, old and young, made Plasticine models of themselves. They had such a laugh! At first the kids were stand-offish, they didn’t want to work with the older people; and the elderly thought it wouldn’t be much fun, but at the end they said, ‘we’ve made so many new friends.’”*

*Clare Iley-Christie, Environmental Projects Officer,  
West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust*

As their project gathered momentum and excitement over its completion grew, many groups discovered a community spirit frequently thought lacking in modern life. Sometimes this ‘community bonding’ would occur naturally as the project evolved; for other groups, the involvement of an external person such as a community artist or youth worker provided the necessary spark.

Indeed for some, the impact of the scheme on the wider community was seismic.

*“The change has been so dramatic. The animosity we had here - you didn’t go and chat to your neighbours, you shut your door and kept yourself to yourself. Now, the neighbours are all talking to each other. The yob element no longer exists. The people are still there, but the same boys who burned out cars have totally drawn their horns in.”*

*Babs Miles, Oak Road DG, Kent*

*Templars DG, Essex: Involvement by young people in the design, construction and siting of youth shelters can all have positive community effects for young and old alike.*



# THE CREATION



**“It is to be commended that design has been considered from the outset and not as an optional extra.”**

*Deborah Fox, Head of Standards and Best Practice, CABE Space*



*Moorclose DG, Cumbria.*

Wherever they were created - on agricultural land or industrial wasteland, on the site of derelict housing, or in place of parks which had fallen into neglect - Doorstep Greens had a remit for change. By applying the outcomes from extensive community consultation to the design process, vibrant new public spaces began to emerge.

Through design, Doorstep Green groups were able to:

- increase accessibility for all
- address social problems such as crime and drug use
- enhance the local landscape



*Trellogon DG, Cornwall.*



*Hawkesbury DG, Coventry.*

- marry existing and new features
- create a welcoming space
- encourage wildlife
- reflect the community's natural and industrial heritage
- encourage community interaction
- foster community pride and a sense of ownership.

*Image right: Westminster Park DG, Cheshire.*



## THE CREATION CONTINUED



### CHANGING LANDSCAPES

Within the Doorstep Greens initiative there are many examples of design being used positively to tackle a specific community problem or to address an overwhelming need. On the pages following, we have shown just a few of them.

**'Before and after' case studies for these projects and eight others can be found on the CD enclosed within this document.**

### OCKMENT

Okehampton in Devon used green space to enhance the already successful Ockment Community Centre. By linking the two facilities together using a wisteria walk, they have boosted visitor numbers and strengthened the long-term position of both.



*Before work on the DG started.*



### FOUR GREENS

The Four Greens Project is based around four pieces of former wasteland in the heart of the Longley Estate, Sheffield. Creating a focal point for the community, each of the four adjoining areas provide for different needs for local people.



*"It does not always follow that a good plan or drawing results in a great outcome. And grand designs can leave a legacy more appropriate to a city centre than a residential neighbourhood."*

*Deborah Fox, Head of Standards and Best Practice, CABE Space*

OPENING GREEN DOORS  
DOORSTEP GREENS AND COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE



*"The prevailing attention to local character in the greens is to be commended."*

*Deborah Fox, Head of Standards and Best Practice, CABE Space*

### CARTER PARK

Residents of West Lane, an isolated community on the outskirts of Middlesbrough, worked together on a design which would include all age groups. The outcome has been to unite the community and radically reduce anti-social behaviour.



### ASTON GREEN

This simple, natural design on one hectare of farmland in Aston-on-Clun, South Shropshire, preserves the site's character and makes use of important local wildlife. Aston Green DG won the national Biffa Environmental Award for 2005.



*Before work on the DG started.*

## THE CREATION CONTINUED



### KIRKBY THORE

The Sanderson's Croft estate in Kirkby Thore, near Penrith, has many families but until recently had nowhere for children to play. This project secured a much-needed amenity for a deprived community and has helped to kick-start more widespread neighbourhood renewal.



*Before work on the DG started.*



### AMC COMMUNITY GARDENS

A disused former playing field in the Meadows area of Nottingham which borders on two schools has been converted into a productive community garden with a poly-tunnel and herb gardens, raised planters, wildlife areas and an educational area. Produce is grown by local people to reflect the area's diverse cultural background.





### SCOTLAND GATE

Residents from a former coalfield town in Northumberland campaigned to have 40 derelict properties demolished; now their re-designed space has helped to reduce crime and restore pride in a depressed area which was once thriving.

*Before work on the DG started.*



## THE CREATION CONTINUED



## MAPESBURY DELL

In the London Borough of Brent, residents wanted to transform this tiny 0.2 hectare site, hidden among terraced housing, into a safe and welcoming space. Although the original plan included CCTV, security has instead been achieved through improved sight lines and circulation, using a variety of scales and space.



*Before work on the DG started.*





Plans for the DG at Mapesbury Dell.

## WELL-DESIGNED?

In assessing the success of completed Doorstep Greens, it seems appropriate to reflect on whether they are 'well-designed'. But what constitutes good design?

### Catherina Malmberg-Snodgrass,

a landscape designer working with the Mapesbury Dell Doorstep Green group, says it is: "Innovation; practicality; joy - a bit of fun; and that you pay attention to quality control. If you don't have all the money straight away, it's better to do it in stages: for example, 'we'll do all the trees this year.' Don't cheapen the design."

However, not all groups will have had the luxury of such a prescriptive approach, their progress being driven by more fundamental concerns, as **Deborah Fox** at CABI Space points out: "Many groups in the programme delivered their projects using funding from a variety of sources... However, by nature groups respond to the individual criteria of these funding sources and are not encouraged to step back and think about the bigger picture."

Perhaps a more appropriate yardstick for Doorstep Greens is whether they meet the criteria for 'quality green space'. **Paul Todd**, Applications Manager of the Green Flag Award at the Civic Trust, provides a suitably vivid definition: "It's a site that is well-managed, clean and well-maintained. It delivers for its local community, and the community are involved in that delivery. It addresses issues of wildlife and conservation; and it has all of the underpinning infrastructure needed to support it, because nobody wants to go to a dirty place where the grass is covered in litter and broken bottles and dog dirt, and the lake is covered in scum with prams and oil floating in it... people want to feel at peace."

## DOORSTEP GREENS: THE FACTS

- The **smallest** Doorstep Green is Burnett Avenue in Bradford, measuring a modest 0.01 ha.
- The **largest** Doorstep Green is Sturry Road in Canterbury, measuring an expansive 18.5 ha.
- **56 ha** of former waste tip, industrial or derelict land have been reclaimed through the Doorstep Greens scheme.
- **340 ha** of land have been renovated or reclaimed by the scheme as a whole.
- **840,000** people now benefit from a new Doorstep Green in their neighbourhood.

# SUSTAINABILITY



“Our aim was to prevent the loss of this green space and to preserve it for the community from here onwards. But after that it will be: there it is. What it looks like, how it’s used, it’s up to us all.”

*Lorella Medici, Weaver’s Green DG, Coventry*



*Clifton Place DG, Bristol.*

## PROTECTED IN LAW

From the outset, a legal framework protected each community’s right to continue using its Doorstep Green for a minimum of 25 years. The Countryside Agency, “insisted on legal compliance and required legal documents being in place prior to advancing grant”. says Malford Harris of the legal firm Challinors, responsible for all legal documents required in the initiative.

Although this sometimes meant lengthy delays in negotiating the lease or purchase of land before work on-site could progress, it did ensure that each project, once a creation grant was issued, was secure.

In addition to the legal documents required to achieve this, the Agency imposed a number of grant conditions:

## DEED OF COVENANT

Applicable to all greens, they restrict the use of the land to Doorstep Green only. It also prevents the sale of the land for the period of the covenant, which is 80 years for freehold sites, the length of the lease for leasehold sites and 25 years for others.

## FORFEITURE CLAUSE

In event that a group defaulted on the terms of their lease (for example, abandoning the green), a *forfeiture clause* would ensure that the landowner was responsible for the upkeep of the green until the end of the lease.

## REPORT ON TITLE

Confirms certain facts which are essential for compliance with the grant terms and conditions. It also confirms ownership of the site, highlights the presence of rights of way

(if there are any) and whether there are any other covenants which may conflict with the sites use as a Doorstep Green. There is also an undertaking to execute the deed of covenant and register the covenant at the Land Registry.

## LEGAL CHARGE

If continuation of the Doorstep Green or group was at risk, the Countryside Agency could seek an *order of foreclosure*, enabling it to acquire the title and transfer the green to a new group, ensuring its continuation.

## FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Groups who lacked the necessary skills or confidence needed to carry their project could appoint their local authority to act on their behalf. Local authority grant recipients were legally obliged to ensure that the Doorstep Green groups were fully involved in the planning, creation, and in some cases on-going management of their green.

*Image right: Oak Road DG, Kent. Greenways can link people, places and nature.*

OPENING GREEN DOORS  
DOORSTEP GREENS AND COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE



## SUSTAINABILITY CONTINUED



*“It will certainly give structure to the village. And it’s owned by the parish council, so it will be permanent. We’ve had the shop and pub opening and closing, the buses change... but this will be a permanent thing for people to appreciate.”*

*Susan Hernandez, Oxborough DG, Norfolk (image below)*



## CARED FOR BY THE COMMUNITY

While the tenure of Doorstep Greens has been legally secured, their on-going maintenance is a little more uncertain. Committed, determined local groups, often motivated by one exceptional individual, have proved a powerful force for change during the creation of their green.

At **Cloughfold** DG in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, for example, a particularly business-like, multi-skilled group was chaired by the ever cheerful Richard Shuttleworth: “You’ve got to use every tactic, because some people will be really keen and others just turn up for the tea and biscuits. You need a bit of persuasion. It’s a team event - you could not do this by yourself. But you need one person in charge sweeping up the bits, and that’s me.”



*Chaucer DG, Cambridgeshire.*

Meanwhile at **Oak Road** DG in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Babs Miles courageously took on car-burning youths and persuaded a broken community that they had something to aim for: “We told them, ‘I am prepared to be a witness to your bad behaviour’. We showed them we could speak their language, shake their throat a little, but also give them something positive.”

*"It's an area which has always had a transitory population, so the ongoing maintenance is a huge issue for us."*

*Lorella Medici, Weaver's Green DG, Coventry*



*"Local action is everywhere but many communities lack the support, confidence and skills they need to make their work as effective as possible. Local action is often driven by an inspired individual but even he or she needs support".*

*Source: Community Development and Public Participation in Urban and Urban Fringe Areas, Church and Woodward, The Countryside Agency. September 2000*

*The Spinney DG, Cornwall.*



**MANAGING AND MAINTAINING**

Nonetheless, all groups have produced a management plan since this was one of the conditions of the creation grant. **Dene Valley Community Park**, for example, in Bishop Auckland, County Durham, have set out their management plan for the next 20 years (see chart right).

Their short term aims include:

- installing perimeter fencing
- improved access
- create a youth area

Their longer-term objectives are:

- recreation and relaxation for all the community
- creating a wetland habitat and providing for wildlife

**The Spinney** DG in Camborne, Cornwall, has designed their site with minimal maintenance in mind.

**Dene Valley's 20-year plan looks something like this:**

| Task                     | Responsibility   | Year 1-3  | Year 4-6   | Year 7-20   |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Litter: dispose off site | Dene Valley Community Partnership                      | Twice weekly as part of warden's duties   | Twice weekly as part of warden's duties  | Twice weekly as part of warden's duties             |
| Trees                    | Contractor years 1-3; thereafter the district council. | Water and feed 4 times a year. Inspection of tree and guying system. Maintain weed-free area 1m diameter around base. | Liquid feed 4 times a year. Inspection of tree and guying system. Maintain weed-free area 1m diameter around base. | Inspect annually. Routine maintenance as necessary. |

*"It's been planned as low-maintenance so there isn't a lot to do.' Much of this work simply entails giving nature a helping hand; for example, blowing [leaves] back under the trees so they mulch into the soil, much as they would do if the site had been left untouched."*

*Source: Doorstep Greens Case Studies 2004, The Countryside Agency: The Spinney DG in Camborne, Cornwall*



*Weavers Green DG, Coventry.*

## SUSTAINABILITY CONTINUED



Meanwhile **Aston Green** DG in Shropshire agreed that the parish council, with volunteer support, will maintain it *in perpetuity* from February 2005, and have even been able to hand over some surplus cash from local fundraising to contribute towards costs.

However, for other groups - perhaps in areas with a frequently changing or predominantly elderly population - sustaining their initial achievement may ultimately prove a formidable challenge.

### SELF-SUSTAINING: A CHALLENGE TOO FAR?

This was one area of the Parks Agency's report where a question mark remains. Indeed one of its findings revealed that the Doorstep Green, for some communities, was just the latest in a series of 'makeovers' for their site, which suggests that maintaining a public open space requires a greater commitment than some communities can or want to give.

Churchward Community Green and Garden DG, Leicester.



Gamesley DG, Derbyshire.

- 65% of environmental groups surveyed cited issues such as security and maintenance as priorities for revenue (not capital) funding.
- Provision of staff - for example, wardens, rangers and park-keepers - accounted for 31% of the 'other' (i.e. un-named) priorities.

This supports the headline findings of the research, which indicate that maintenance remains an issue of high priority for those creating and managing green spaces.

*"I do think that green space should be statutory, because it links with people's health, learning and social problems. It's very inexpensive - compared with the amount of money spent on health or social services, it's miniscule. In fact I think you would end up saving money in those other areas. Perhaps because it's cheap, people think it can't be very important; perhaps it's a problem of perceived value."*

Crispin Downs, Manager of Landscape Consultancy, Essex County Council, and project manager at Jaywick DG

*Image right: West Grange DG, Leeds. The site's regeneration coincides with other developments nearby, and it is hoped that it will provide a boost to the area. The green not only provides a route to South Leeds stadium, but also to a new school which is currently being built.*



*Doorstep Greens groups have been actively encouraged to join the Greenspace Learning Network, an online network aimed at bringing together all people with an interest in running green spaces.*

<http://greenspace.net.countryside.gov.uk>



## COMMENT:

DR STEWART HARDING  
THE PARKS AGENCY

"The good thing about this scheme was in a way its weakness. Unlike its predecessor, Millennium Greens, it specifically targeted disadvantaged communities. But they're the communities who are least likely to sustain the project: they have less time for community involvement, less awareness of the opportunities for funding, and are less able to access that funding.

"I do think local authorities are the right people to look after public open spaces. The problem is that Compulsory Competitive Tendering made such a huge saving, but what they didn't realise is that the guy cutting the grass is also providing a presence, a form of surveillance... they didn't account for that in the balance sheet.

The engagement of local people in Doorstep Greens has been very meaningful. Projects have nearly all been led by the community which retained a dominant role in the planning, development and implementation of Doorstep Greens. In complex projects with a large range of partners the role of the community has been catalytic and remained dominant through to implementation and on to completion."

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR OUR GREEN SPACES?

"I think everyone would agree that resolving the issue of long-term sustainability is the key. One idea is a Greenspace Stewardship Scheme, similar to Environmental Stewardship: a scheme originally piloted by the Countryside Commission, whereby farmers receive payments to improve access to their land, to plant and manage hedges; to conserve the natural beauty of the land, and its wildlife. That scheme has grown and grown and is now a mainstream grant scheme. I'd like to see a similar pilot in urban fringe areas for green space.

"Another idea is a Management Endowment Fund. It works on the simple premise of a capital fund which can attract high interest. The interest generated can be siphoned off for maintaining projects, such as Doorstep Greens, and as long as the capital sum is maintained, you can sustain it.

"Of course the day may come when we really fully appreciate the value of outdoor recreation, to the extent that our parks and green spaces become a statutory provision. But until then it is encouraging that green space - even since we started Doorstep Greens - has risen rapidly up the political agenda. There's now a real awareness of people's quality of life, and a realisation that people thrive when they enjoy where they live. I think that carries more hope than anything."

*Pete Johnstone, Doorstep Greens Programme Manager*

***"Doorstep Greens have definitely built bridges between people, within the community and also between the community and the local authority."***

*A local authority parks manager, Doorstep Greens evaluation, 2005*



## NATURAL ENGLAND

English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Landscape, Access and Recreation Division of the Countryside Agency are working in partnership towards Natural England, for people, places and nature. The new organisation will launch in October 2006. Natural England will be a new and powerful environmental organisation with the responsibility to conserve and enhance the value and beauty of England's natural environment and promote access, recreation and public well-being for the benefit of today's and future generations.



Rural Development  
Service



## CD CONTENTS

- Opening Green Doors
- 11 DG Newsletter pdfs
- 31 DG Case Study pdfs
- DG Advice Notes
- DG Photographs
- Parks Agency Full DG Evaluation Report
- DG Project Summaries of sites
- Map of Sites
- DG Research Note pdf
- Millennium Green Research Note pdf
- "Making Spaces" Research Report pdf
- DG Customer Survey 2005 pdf



The Countryside Agency  
**Landscape  
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OPENING GREEN DOORS  
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