

**Big Local Programme**

**Final Report and Impact Assessment**

***November 2012 to March 2020***



**Section One: Background**

**What is Big Local? *(and some key terminology introduced)***

Big Local is a Lottery funded initiative which has awarded £1m to 150 deprived areas in England to spend over a period of up to 10 years. There have been two principal conditions as to how the money can be spent:

* it must be in ways that meet priorities expressed by local residents

*and*

* it must be implemented under the governance of a **Community Partnership** on which local residents are in a majority.

The national programme is co-ordinated on behalf of the Lottery Community Fund by **Local Trust**, an organisation set up specifically for this purpose.

Unless the money was awarded to a community organisation which was already legally incorporated, the money has been awarded through a **Locally Trusted Organisation (or LTO)** which is legally accountable for expenditure and also enters into any contractual arrangements on behalf of the Community Partnership that are necessary for the implementation of the programme. An LTO must be approved by the Community Partnership.

The Northampton LTO was known as **Blackthorn Good Neighbours** until March 2019, when it changed its name to **Growing Together Northampton** for reasons to be explained later in this report.

Each local programme has been free to choose its own name, and the name chosen for the programme in Northampton was **Growing Together**. The name was chosen from a number of names suggested in a competition by a resident vote undertaken during the initial consultation exercise. The programme’s original logo was chosen in the same way.

**A brief history of the Growing Together Big Local programme**

*The early development of the programme*

The original approach to set up a Big Local programme in Northampton was made by the Big Lottery Fund (predecessor to the Lottery Community Fund) to Northampton Borough Council during 2011. The Council then brought together a working group to decide which area of Northampton should be awarded the programme and which local voluntary/community sector group(s) should lead the development of the programme. The decision made was to invite Blackthorn Good Neighbours (BGN) to develop a programme proposal covering Blackthorn, Goldings and Overstone Lodge. A strong case was then made by the Brookside Residents’ Council (BRC) for the inclusion of Lings and Lumbertubs estates. The eventual programme area was decided to be the former Lumbertubs electoral ward.

A multi-agency steering group was then convened by BGN and BRC with consultation exercises beginning during 2012. A number of events were arranged to coincide with the passage of the Olympic torch through Northampton, the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and other occasions. The pace of development was accelerated in November of that year with the appointment until 30 June 2013 of a dedicated worker charged with establishing a sound consultation base, recruiting and inducting the Community Partnership members, and preparing the first Big Local Plan (a spend plan to unlock the first tranche of the money) for the Partnership’s approval.

The principal outputs from this stage of the programme’s development were:

1. a consultation base of almost 600 interviews, mainly achieved through door knocking but also including shopping centre interviews during the week before Christmas, the events described above and further half-term events at Brookside Hall and Blackthorn Children’s Centre
2. a vote by residents attending the two half-term events to choose Growing Together as the local name of the programme
3. the recruitment of a 15 member Community Partnership and the subsequent agreement of the Steering Group to an all-resident Partnership
4. a three event induction programme for Partnership members, culminating in their first decision-taking meeting on 20 June 2013
5. agreement to spread the benefits as widely as we could across all five estates by setting the following very broad programme objectives:

* making the place feel safer, especially by tackling anti-social behaviour and criminal damage to cars, houses and the environment
* providing more opportunities and things for children and teenagers, so that they can make the best of themselves
* improving the local environment and encouraging local people to look after it
* adding to the quality of life for older and disabled members of our communities
* bringing the community together and celebrating its diversity

1. the adoption of a Big Local Plan at that meeting covering the period from August 2013 till March 2015, with a supporting “quick wins” programme over the summer of 2013.

The 20 June meeting also elected Andrea McAuliffe as the Partnership Chair and Dianne Finnie as Deputy Chair and took the decision to ask the development work, Peter Strachan, to stay in post as Programme Co-ordinator. It confirmed that it wished BGN to remain as the Locally Trusted Organisation for the programme.

These three people, along with Kathryn White as Chief Executive of BGN, have remained in post for the whole duration of the programme, lending a stability that has been an important factor behind the smooth implementation of the programme.

*The first Big Local Plan (2013-6)*

Over the period of the first (extended) Big Local Plan, the programme spent £517,585 in support of the programme objectives. The following were the major areas of expenditure (other than programme overheads):

* three new play areas on Lings, Lumbertubs and Overstone Lodge estates
* two youth shelters for Blackthorn and Swanhaven Park, each with its own exercise equipment
* a “trim trail” of outdoor exercise equipment in Swanhaven Park
* wildlife information boards in Swanhaven Park
* a seat around the big tree at Billing Brook Road shops
* funding for youth clubs run by Free 2 Talk at Blackthorn Community Centre, Brookside Hall and Goldcrest Community Centre, adventurous outdoor activity youth programmes run by Change of Scene, Reelscape’s film based youth programmes and Impact Now’s education support youth work on three estates
* a £10,000 contribution to the start-up costs for a new Community Nursery in Blackthorn
* commissioning Age UK to establish clubs for older residents on all estates and an inter-club Kurling league and programme of trips
* new Environmental and Performance Zones at Lings School, to be available for community as well as the School’s use
* employing a community development worker to organise an ongoing programme of community events around the five estates and support residents who wanted to undertake community volunteering
* through our Small Grants Fund, making 48 grants, mainly below a thousand pounds each, to 24 different organisations for projects in the community. These included schools, the Police and a range of local charities and community groups

*The second Big Local Plan (2016-8)*

The completion of this first (extended) Big Local Plan marked an obvious watershed in the programme, with approximately half of the money having been spent. Before developing the second Big Local Plan, we therefore undertook a further major round of consultation, again based mainly on door knocking across the five estates. Interviewees were asked if they felt the priorities we’d set had been the right ones, whether they would like to suggest any new ones, and what specific projects or activities they’d like to see funded.

164 people were interviewed and all but 2 felt we’d chosen the right priorities. For the record, of the two who disagreed, one would have given the whole sum to the Council to provide a more effective litter picking service and the other would have spent the full amount on a programme of community events and activities to restore a sense of community spirit.

A few specific new activities were suggested. These included “doing something” with the derelict Silver Horse pub building (this has since been sold by the Council and the site developed by its new owner), and restoring the lakes along Billing Brook as a public amenity of which the community could be proud. There was widespread support for the idea of creating a Community Hub at the Billing Brook shops and for continuing to invest in Blackthorn Good Neighbours as the principal community resource for the estates to the east of Lings Way.

Working from this endorsement, the Partnership agreed the following strategy for the next Big Local Plan:

* to phase out major revenue grants over a two year period
* to complete the enhancement of play space provision with a play area for Goldings estate
* to address the environmental decline of the Billing Brook lakes
* to establish a Community Hub for Lings and Lumbertubs estates in Brookside Hall at the Billing Brook Road shops.

This resulted in the second Big Local Plan, which allocated funding for the following work:

* a covered outdoor play area and associated toilet facilities at the BGN nursery outdoor play
* dog agility equipment at Swanhaven Park dog area
* a visit to the WW1 battlefields by the local Scouts
* ongoing community gardening by three clubs at Brookside, Lings and Blackthorn
* a continuation (with phased reduction of grant) of the Free 2 Talk drop-in programme
* a continuation (with phased reduction of grant) of the Age UK supported Get Set Go clubs for older residents
* a continuation (with phased reduction of grant) of Impact Now’s educational support work
* the establishment of a new Community Hub serving Lings and Lumbertubs estates at Brookside Hall
* support for the organisational development of BGN
* continuation of the NBC run Junior Wardens scheme in local primary schools
* a new play area for Goldings estate, the only one of our five estates not to have had such provision earlier in the programme
* support for the regeneration of the three Billing Brook lakes
* continuation of the Community Grants Fund (CGF) – formerly the Small Grants Fund, with some variations in its operation

*Growing Together Neighbourhood Plan*

A project that had been running from an early stage of the programme also came to fruition during this period. With funding from NBC and Locality, we had been leading the development of a Neighbourhood Plan, within the legal framework established by the Localities Act of 2010. With a firm foundation in community engagement and consultation, this clearly set out the views of the local residents as to what should and should not be given planning approval in the area by Northampton Borough Council. Endorsement in a full local referendum was needed to pass the Plan into the legal planning framework. This was held on 23 February 2017 and produced a 91.47% Yes vote from a 16% turn-out.

*The exit strategy for the programme*

Another major piece of work that ran through the period of the second Plan was the development of an exit strategy for the programme. After considering of a number of options, the Partnership chose the option of a full merger with BGN and this was later endorsed by the Board of BGN. The process began with a joint workshop at Grendon Hall on 9 June 2016 and culminated in the formal merger on 1 April 2018. The merged charity is known as Growing Together Northampton, although the BGN name has been retained for the nursery on Blackthorn as it is so well known by residents.

After that, the focus shifted from the organisational basis of the legacy to practical arrangements for sustainability. Agreements were reached with NBC for the ongoing maintenance of our capital projects and new grants were secured for Brookside Hub (Tudor Trust), Silhouette Youth (Reaching Communities, Tudor Trust) and the development of Blackthorn Community Centre (Power to Change’s Community Business Fund, Clothmakers Company and Sylvia Adams Trust) in order to boost our income generating capacity from the building on a sustainable basis.

*The final two years (and beyond)*

Big Local Plans 3 and 4 took the programme through to its operational close-out on 31 March 2020, and made provision for:

* continuation of Brookside Community Hub, the three gardening clubs and the Junior Wardens programme, the core development of the Growing Together charity and the Community Grants Fund
* a year-long initiative to develop new volunteers and young leaders for Free 2 Talk’s youth work
* mental health work at Brookside Hub and the Blackthorn nursery, run by Feel Good Studio
* a contribution to the costs of the development proposals generated for the Billing Brook Lakes, unlocking much larger funding from other funders

The programme ended in its initial guise on 31 March 2020 and a final Big Local Plan 5 provided a mechanism for spend before March 2026 of the outstanding balance of £33,043 on

* retaining the Programme Co-ordinator on reduced hours to address any loose ends and provide ongoing fundraising support
* a contingencies reserve for any unforeseen expenditure on our capital installations (e.g. play area vandalism)
* the balance to be available for new initiatives approved by the resident members of the merged charity’s Board.

A new allocation of £50,000, initially to support local initiatives related to the emerging coronavirus emergency, was also included in this fifth Big Local Plan.

**Section Two: Impact Assessment**

**Objectives for the Assessment**

An assessment of the impact of work carried out under this first Big Local Plan, subsequently extended to March 2016, was conducted during 2016. The terms of reference set by the Community Partnership for the earlier assessment.

* what cumulative outputs (a measure of activity) have been achieved?
* what impact upon people’s lives have we made so far?
* what “bigger picture” impact upon life in general on the estates have we achieved?

This assessment incorporates the findings from that first assessment and extends it to the close of the programme on 31 March 2020. The following objectives were added to those above:

* what has been our impact against the national programme objectives?
* what do the community know of us and what we’ve done?
* what impact operational partners felt from the programme
* what evidence of outcomes can we capture for future funding use? (to include case studies from people attending groups and activities we’ve funded)

**Outputs achieved**

Measured purely by its total outputs, the achievements of the Growing Together programme have been enormous. The outputs generated by the activities described in the previous section are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Output** | **Total** |
| Residents involved | 8,980 |
| Hours of community activity | 6,184 |
| Physical and community enhancements | 46 |
| Organisations and community groups supported | 40 |

* *Users of more than one project counted separately for each project; no*

*figure included for environmental enhancements.*

As far as possible these figures are based on actual returns from projects. However, an element of estimation has been unavoidable. Also inevitable, the crude figures are misleading. For instance, a single “enhancement” covers both the regeneration of the three Billing Brook Lakes and the purchase of several laptops for a pre-school. An hour of community activity can be a one to one counselling session with a youth worker or a summer event attended by 100 people.

The Community Partnership also set itself an early target of doubling the £1m by raising or enabling other new money to come into the community. A total of £1,755,000 had been secured or facilitated by 31 March 2020 (see also Financial Legacy section on pp.42-43). The value of support in kind has not been calculated.

These figures are all impressive in their size. However, they also beg the question, “so what?” What real difference to the communities of the five estates, and individuals in those communities, did all this activity actually make? The rest of this report is an attempt to answer that question.

**Outcomes**

The summary of projects and outputs in the previous sections paints a picture of considerable activity linked to the agreed priorities. But what impact has it actually made on people’s lives in the area?

Sometimes it is possible to measure outcomes in a precise and quantifiable way. An employment training programme might measure the numbers of people who complete course that then go on to secure a job for which the training now qualifies them. A crime prevention programme might measure the fall in crimes of a specific category, or the fall in re-offending levels.

Very few of Growing Together’s activities lend themselves to this sort of quantitative outcome measurement. End results will often only be seen in many years’ time. Even when outcomes can be measured there are often a host of other factors in play. Can a fall in anti-social behaviour rates, for instance, be attributable to the activities of a youth programme when work by schools, Policing methods and alternative activities elsewhere might all have an influence? This report, therefore, makes considerable use of qualitative assessment methods such as case studies, the opinions of “key informants” such as professional people working in the area, and impacts reported subjectively by residents to build up a picture of the impact achieved.

***Objective One: Making the place feel safer, especially by tackling anti-social behaviour and criminal damage to cars, houses and the environment***

Discussion of a very early funding proposal helped the Partnership to define how they saw their role in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. An application from the **Police** for ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) cameras on the main routes into the area had argued that this would be the single most effective input to reducing crime levels in the area. However, the application was turned down by the Partnership as they decided their role was not to fund the core work of statutory agencies, but to support activities that would prove complementary to this work.

Furthermore, it was felt that ANPR cameras would not tackle the kind of criminal and anti-social behaviour that was of greatest concern to residents. It was clear from the initial consultation with residents that it was low level crime, anti-social and nuisance behaviour that principally concerned residents, rather than more serious forms of acquisitive or violent crime such as burglary and assault. There was a very frequent link made between the actions of young people (attributed to boredom) and fears about crime and anti-social behaviour.

The majority of the complementary work that the Partnership agreed to fund has fallen under the objective of providing new opportunities for young people. Although youth work has much wider objectives (considered in the next section), one purpose it serves is to create “diversionary” activities that will turn young people away from involvement in nuisance and criminal behaviour. The value of this was recognised by one of the more experienced Police officers working in the area.

*“If we hadn’t had the money, then the situation now would be very different. The play areas and youth shelters wouldn’t be there and the Junior Wardens programme might not be running. There would have been no Free 2 Talk activity on Blackthorn - though it may have had a negative side too.\* We wouldn’t be where we are now and I think the challenges would be greater. I’ve got nothing but good to say of how the money’s been used. It’s been dripped into the right places. Its impact has been small but important”.*

**PCSO Steve Hoadley**

* *The negative side to the work of* ***Free 2 Talk*** *referred to here was an early Police concern that the youth clubs on Blackthorn may prove to be a recruiting channel for the Section 3 “gang”, sometimes linked to much of the local anti-social behaviour. As time went by, however, all Police officers who expressed this concern came to feel that the positive benefits of the work greatly outweighed any harm done and that the clubs gave them a non-confrontational point of contact with the young people and had a genuine positive impact on the very large majority of attendees.*

A small number of projects have sought to have a direct impact on crime and anti-social behaviour. After a false start when a key officer was transferred away from the area, a grant was made to the **Police** to enable a year-long programme of community engagement activities. This included film and food evenings, pamper days, summer events and skills classes to enhance confidence in the Police and increase the flow of information from the community in a priority area for tackling crime. The project was not a great success, largely due to the competing demands on the Police personnel on the project, meaning that that they were often unable to attend events that had been arranged specifically for the community to meet them. There was, however, a significant spin-off value in enhancing community trust in the BGN/Growing Together personnel who stepped into their place

Growing Together also took out a block purchase contract with the **Probation Service** for 30 days of Unpaid Work time, to which they added a further two days of work at their own expense to complete a specific job suggested by one of their supervisors. The impact of the actual work is considered under Objective Three: improving the local environment. However, the work was also intended to have a positive impact on the offenders involved, giving them a fresh perspective and an appreciation of the value (and satisfaction) of making a positive contribution to the community. Anecdotal evidence from placement supervisors suggested that the work did indeed have this impact on a number of offenders. Indeed one volunteered to come back in his own time to complete a project that he had helped to start under an Unpaid Work Order.

Finally, Growing Together made a one-off grant of £2,000 in 2015 from the Community Grants Fund to enable an innovative Police project called **Cycl-opps** to get started. Cycl-opps works with offenders to give them training as bike mechanics, re-conditioning recovered stolen bicycles whose rightful owner cannot be traced. Some of these are then sold, with the money either supporting good causes or being ploughed back into the project; others are provided free to people who need them to get to work as a result of involvement in another Police project providing intensive rehabilitation support to ex-offenders. The majority of the participants have been from the east Northampton estates, and in recent months the project has started to take on pupils from Weston Favell School and the Academy about whom there are concerns of vulnerability to engagement in crime. Growing Together funding covered set-up costs and a first pilot course. More important, its funding helped to attract other financial support by demonstrating the value the community placed on the project.

The pilot project that we funded was widely considered a success. Of the five original participants, three went on to positive destinations (jobs, further education etc), one was known to be job seeking and one re-offended while on the course. This level of rehabilitation vs re-offending was considered by the Police to be very favourable. Probation officers were fulsome in their praise of the project.

**Feedback from Probation officers about the Cycl-opps project**

*“I’ve definitely found that of all the things he attends, Cycl-opps appears to be the one he most looks forward to.”*

*“very effective at building confidence and self-esteem”*

*“he was not engaging in any type of education, so I was keen to tell him about Cycl-opps. The project motivated him to go back week after week.”*

*“Cycl-opps assisted him to believe in himself and take pride in his abilities”*

The project is still going strong and its success has since led to replication in Kettering and Corby. As of February 2020, the project had worked with over 100 children and adults, mentoring, teaching bike skills, being positive role models and breaking down barriers. Schools sessions with children with behavioural and educational needs have serviced 30 Police bikes, saving the Force over £1,800. Sales of reconditioned bikes have raised over £10,000 and the project is now fully

self-financing, with enough spare to have donated bikes to a number of good causes and pay for two community defibrillators. Growing Together can take pride in having been critical to enabling the initial move from bright idea to successful project.

**Some Cycl-opps success stories**

*Bikes provided helped in the arrest of a male who had been evading Police for some time. Bikes were deployed and officers were able to keep him in sight and arrest him. He had no idea they were Police until they identified themselves.*

*A 64 year old homeless male living in a tent at the back of Corby swimming pool had his mountain bike stolen from outside his tent. He only put a value of £10 on it and would not take money to replace it when it was offered to him by officers. However, he was happy to accept a Cycl-opps replacement bike and accessories.*

*We had a volunteer working on the programme for a time who had suffered brain damage following a severe motorbike accident. He wanted some purposeful activity to do to assist him in his rehabilitation and getting back into work. We trained him out of the project funds raised to become another trainer and he continued until leaving to take a paid job. The project had played a critical role in his rehabilitation.*

**Objective Two: providing more things for children and teenagers to do, so that they can make the best of themselves**

Whether by accident or design, creating new opportunities for young people has become the principal focus of the Growing Together programme. In part this is due to a widespread belief among Partnership members and in the wider community that improving the life-chances of the youngest members of the community is probably the most effective way to bring about lasting improvements to the estates. There is also an awareness, alluded to in the previous section, that the other side of investing in young people is reducing anti-social and nuisance behaviour.

What is certain, too, is that there are more potential partner organisations (and therefore potential grant applicants) working in this field than any other.

* of the 75 Community Grants made, 47 were to organisations working with children or teenagers
* of the twenty-one organisations to which grants of more than £2,000 were made, fifteen were funded for projects working for young people (Northampton Borough Council for Junior Wardens, Free 2 Talk, Change of Scene, Impact Now, Lings School, Woodvale School, Reelscape, Silhouette, the Scouts, the Guides/Brownies, the BGN Nursery, Emmanuel Church, Saints Study Centre, the Martial Arts Academy and Solve-It)
* in addition, Growing Together also directly purchased six play areas and two youth shelters, each with its own gym equipment. More play facilities had been, by far, the single most common request during the initial consultation exercise.

In total there were an extraordinary 6,417 reported user take-ups of Growing Together funded children’s and youth activities, although this number certainly reflects the fact that an unknown number of young people will have benefitted several times. However we cannot say, for instance, how many went on a school trip, attended Scouts and took part in Reelscape activities. Furthermore, the total figure doesn’t include use of the new play areas and teen shelters, which have not been quantified.

However, even if we assume maximum overlap we can say with confidence that no fewer than 950 individual children and teenagers have benefitted. In practice, maximum overlap is unlikely and the total number will be much higher. Based on census and school enrolment data, there are approximately 2,500 children and teenagers living in the area. This means it is likely that a majority – and possibly a large majority - of them have gained at least some direct benefit from Growing Together funded work. Growing Together has undoubtedly enabled hundreds of young people to see the sea, climb a mountain, kayak on the River Nene, take part in a play or go camping who would not otherwise have been able to do so. The outcome value of these activities is impossible to measure, but most people would agree that it is very significant in terms of personal development.

Leigh Wolmarans, former Headteacher at Lings School and now Artistic Director at Silhouette, also points out the value to parents in taking part on a school trip. The school involves them as fully as it can so that they learn about planning, preparation, management of a day out, risk assessment and then understand what a day out has given their children as well as a lot of fun.

The following paragraphs consider the impact of specific projects, moving progressively up the target age range.

***Support to BGN Community Nursery***

The Community Nursery on Blackthorn was established by BGN in a former public house building. The name is so well known that it has continued to be known as the BGN Nursery even after the merger of BGN and Growing Together Big Local.

The majority of the children attending are in free places funded by the Government child care voucher scheme, though there are also some paying customers. The principal funder has been Northamptonshire County Council, but Growing Together also contributed £20,000 to the initial set-up budget, closing the final funding gap and enabling it to open on time in February 2015. From the start, there has been an aspiration to ensure that the Nursery forms the focal point for a much wider agenda of community engagement and development, rather than merely acting as stand-alone service provider.

The funding was not linked to any specific item or activity in the set-up budget and therefore the impact from Growing Together’s contribution is that of the Nursery as a whole.

*“We make the biggest impact on the children with chaotic home lives. Often this means improving their lives by teaching things they’re supposed to have learned at home. Giving children communication skills helps them to form friendships, develop confidence and happiness and opens doors to other kinds of learning. We’ve struggled with some difficult behaviours. Often parents were aware of these but didn’t know what to do about it. So we get support for these parents and run drop-in sessions for them as well as self-support and buddying groups. We’re even picking up a few parents of school-age children through these groups.*

*Only three of our children didn’t make good or outstanding progress on the Early Years Foundation Curriculum – that means going three or four steps up. This includes a number of Looked After children and other target groups. Overall, Blackthorn is well below the national average, but this progress means children are starting school where they should be in terms of national averages. Only one out of our twenty-six starters last year didn’t achieve the national average. This included statemented children and nine who attracted High Needs funding.*

*We make sure that the Nursery is an integral part of their lives. It’s not just something they do for a few hours a day. Our staff really get deprivation!”*

**Hayley Walker, Manager, BGN Nursery**

A further Growing Together grant to the Nursery during 2017 enabled the construction of a covered outdoor play area with associated toilet facilities. This was in response to a recommendation in an OFSTED report that also awarded the Nursery a coveted Outstanding in All Areas rating. The outdoor area enhanced the experience offered to the children, enabling them to play outside in wet weather and hot sunshine and so be more attuned to the natural environment. These benefits were especially valuable for children living in flats and those whose parents are most risk adverse.

*A less happy experience was provided by one joint initiative with Blackthorn Children’s Centre, run at the time by BGN. In July 2014, the Partnership decided to part fund a consultancy from a Bengali origin consultant to encourage women from the Bangladeshi and Somali communities to make better use of the Centre, especially, and also other support available to them through the public and voluntary sectors. In addition to her paid job as a social worker, the consultant also ran an Asian women’s organisation based elsewhere in the town and so was well qualified for the project.*

*Work started well and a weekly discussion group became established. Three women who spoke good English came forward and started a mentoring programme with the consultant with a view to taking over from her at the end of the programme. A successful community event to celebrate Eid with the whole community took place and a Christmas event was being planned.*

*Unfortunately, at about this point the consultant withdrew abruptly from the project before it had attained sustainability due to another opportunity that had arisen. A White British female community worker kept it running for a short while but lacked the language skills or cultural background to build the same level of confidence with the women. the project was still at a stage of high dependency on the consultant and little lasting benefit was achieved. Indeed, the disappointment of having support withdrawn in this manner may even have had a negative impact on some of the women.*

*It is well recognised that most community projects go through such a phase of high dependence on one or more key individuals and that loss of those individuals at this stage can prove terminal. Although the matter was out of our control, the experience did confirm the importance of staff stability through key times.*

***Play areas***

The very large majority of the play facilities originally installed on the estates were removed or taken out of use long ago. Only those by Rillwood Court (for toddlers), Longmead Court and South Paddock Court remained. Restoration of public play equipment was therefore the single most frequently mentioned suggested use of the £1m during the initial consultations. The Community Partnership created a new play facility on each of our five estates. In addition, new pieces of play equipment were provided at play areas outside Brookside Community Hub and on the Maidencastle “satellite” estate to Blackthorn.

All have remained well-used. Observation was carried out over periods of about two hours at two of the areas during summer holiday weekdays in August 2016, on cool and overcast, though dry, days. Both areas were in light though almost constant use though-out these periods: 14 users at Rillwood Court and 18 at Bird’s Hill Road. Most users were very local, though some at Rillwood Court had come from Thorplands.

*“We wanted a park over here for a long time - the others are too far away to go to very often. We come here three or four times a week, usually when we’re playing football. It’s much easier.”*

**Group of 14 year olds, Rillwood Court**

*“We come here a lot – there wasn’t anywhere at all to go before.”*

**Two brothers, 12 and 14 years old, Rillwood Court**

*“It gives us somewhere to play. We didn’t have anywhere before because there are too many cars to play in the streets.”*

**12 year old, Bird’s Hill Road**

*“It’s something lasting – it’ll give generation after generation of benefit.”*

**Local resident – Bird’s Hill Road**

These comments from users were echoed by professionals:

*“The play areas are absolutely great. They’re the right things in the right places. They’re well used and the locals seem very happy with them. Rillwood Court’s given something to the older kids that they didn’t have before and the Bird’s Hill Road one is especially well used from 2 to 4 in the afternoons, after school. No one’s complained to me or said they’re a waste of money.”*

**Lesley Ingram, NBC Neighbourhood Warden**

*“Parents talk about the play areas and how much they like them.”*

**Leigh Wolmarans, then Headteacher, Lings Primary School**

*“They’re very well used. There’s almost always someone on them”.*

**PCSO Steve Hoadley**

During consultation on the second phase of the Growing Together programme over the summer of 2015, a resident of Tonmead Road living very close to the Rillwood Court play area gave some very interesting opinions. He said he had initially been concerned about having yet another facility to attract young people into the area on summer evenings. However, he felt that the play area had actually had a positive impact on noisy gatherings by drawing young people away from the houses and giving them something positive and active to do instead of engaging in nuisance behaviour. His initial scepticism had been replaced by genuine enthusiasm.

A telling illustration of the importance of the areas to local communities was provided following a vandalism incident at the Goldings Road play area in the summer of 2017. A group of three children (estimated by a witness to be about 10-12 years old) dragged a mattress under a climbing multi-unit and set fire to it. Extensive damage was caused, which necessitated taking a major section of the unit – including a slide, two climbing nets, and a central platform/turret - out of use. A group of local residents then decided that they were not prepared to let the vandals win and set about raising funds to replace the damaged equipment. Growing Together agreed to match whatever they raised. Following several community events enough had been secured to pay for the new equipment. The resident who organised this action reports that “*our much loved play area remains well used, especially during the summer months. Thankfully, there have been no further incidents there*.” It is tempting to think that this display of community solidarity and ownership has contributed to this outcome.

*The Maidencastle community play* area saw a rather different origin and approach. Whereas all the other play area developments were initiated by Growing Together in response to expressed resident priorities, this play area was initiated by local residents. Led by a Lithuanian couple whose house overlooked a badly overgrown and neglected area by a public footpath, local residents worked together to clear the area and build or install play equipment either from scratch or that they obtained as donations from other residents whose children had outgrown it. Rather disappointingly, the Council’s response to this community initiate was to write a formal letter saying that the development did not have permission and should be dismantled immediately. It was at this point that the Lithuanian couple approach Growing Together. In the course of ensuring that this request had no resident objections, it became apparent that the play area enjoyed an extraordinary (and unanimous) level of very enthusiastic local support and commitment. A strategy was agreed of approaching the Council through the correct channels for permission to add an additional piece of equipment chosen by local residents and children, as had been done for all the other play areas. We also said that the company doing the pre-handover safety check would be asked to look at the resident-installed equipment too. Granting approval, of course, would entail the Council agreeing tacit permission (or at least a blind eye policy) for the rest of the play area. Following the helpful intervention of a local Councillor who was also a member of the Council’s Cabinet, officers approved it and became actively supportive.

*I think it’s wonderful what Andrej and Agne have done. I’ll sign anything, talk to anyone or join any protest to make sure that it stays.*

*It’s great. It’s brought all the children together and given them somewhere safe to play, overlooked by neighbours who we trust. There was nothing here for them before.*

*I’ve made friends with several of my neighbours over the past few months. I’ve lived here for 28 years and didn’t even know their names before! It’s got us all talking to each other.*

**Resident comments made during consultation before deciding**

**to support the Maidencastle community play area**

During 2019, Growing Together’s track record in providing community play space and in fundraising led to an approach from Northampton Partnership Homes (the management organisation for the former Council housing stock) to support the development of a community play area on neighbouring Thorplands estate. This was part of a much wider programme of regeneration for that estate bring led by NPH. A grant of £45,000 was secured from the Governmental Pocket Parks Plus fund and the play area successfully installed. Growing Together’s work on this project brought it closer to community groups on the estate and has paved the way for a possible expansion of other activities to that estate.

***Youth work activities***

Growing Together has funded youth work delivered by nine separate organisations: Free 2 Talk, Change of Scene, Reelscape, Silhouette, Impact Now, the Scouts, the Guides/Brownies, Solve-It and Emmanuel Church. The organisations all have different approaches and separate, if overlapping, target groups. This report focuses on the first five. These are the biggest in terms of both level of funding and numbers of users.

*Change of Scene*

Change of Scene was founded in 2010, originally funded by the Lottery’s Access to Nature fund. Prior to this, Change of Scene worked by using non-competitive natural environment activities such as camping, rock climbing, hill-walking and kayaking to enhance the confidence of young people so that they could rise to and meet challenges. Having seen that they *were* capable of climbing a mountain in Wales or paddling a kayak through white water, it then supported them in meeting the challenges of raising their life aspirations and gave them the confidence that they could achieve these aspirations. Many “graduates” from the Change of Scene programme went on to complete the training to act as leaders for new intake groups and to secure jobs that would previously have been beyond their wildest dreams.

The organisation started on the estates of east Northampton, and Growing Together funding enabled these activities to continue after the loss of the Access to Nature funding. The funding focused on paddlesports training and residential activities, leadership training, swimming related activities including lifeguard training (from which a number of participants secured paid employment) and an annual family event, with overnight camping for the young people.

The following quotes all come from a film shot at the 2015 summer camp for Growing Together as a part of the Our Bigger Story evaluation programme in which Growing Together is a participant.

*“Before I first started I just used to hang around, doing the things that kids do, not really doing anything very much. Now I’ve done First Aid, I’m a kayaking coach and I‘ve got a JNC in youth work. I’ve got a full-time job and I’ve got qualifications”.*

**Jamie, one of the first intake, now working in the outdoor education sector**

*“When we first met them they were 13 or 14, naughty kids some of them, on the verge of ASBOs. Now they’re just inspirational”.*

**Vikkie Maloney, volunteer activity leader**

*“When I started I was really shy, but not any more. It’s like a family really”.*

**Female participant, aged 14**

*“This is the second year we’ve had Big Local funding. One of the challenges each year is to give them activities that will get them qualifications to give them access to work. There are lots of them now holding down full-time jobs”.*

**Anna King, Programme Director**

Change of Scene’s activities in our area of town were so successful that the Charity was invited to replicate its work on the King’s Heath estate, a very similar area to ours on the north-west edge of the town. Regrettably, however, due to wider funding difficulties, the loss of the Programme Director, and the health of key a Trustee, the Charity was wound up in 2018.

*Free 2 Talk*

Free 2 Talk established two Growing Together funded youth clubs in the area very early on in the programme, with associated detached activity. The two clubs, run on a drop-in basis, have been at Blackthorn Community Centre for 8 to 11 year olds and at Brookside Hall for 12+ year olds from Lings and Lumbertubs estates. Free 2 Talk have also run a number of other projects, supported by the Community Grants Fund, and played a key role in the development and design of the two youth shelters, ensuring that local young people were involved in the creation of a facility that would be their own space on the estates.

Although Free 2 Talk’s work is mainly conducted on a drop-in basis, the sessions are structured and there is a programme of what themes will be covered on a week-by week basis, developed with the young people. A programme for the 8-11 group will typically include work based around the festivals of our diverse communities (e.g. Easter, Chinese New Year, Ramadan and Eid, Mother’s Day, etc.), sports and crafts based sessions and fundraising for specific events or local good causes. The older group at Brookside Hall have also had sessions on a wide range of topics including alcohol awareness and “legal highs”, on-line safety and sexual behaviour.

As Growing Together moved to phasing out the annual grants to Free 2 Talk and other organisations, a final grant was made to support a year-long programme of development for new community youth workers and young leaders. The aim was to give the programme deeper community roots and sustainability once the funding ended.

Numerous case studies have shown the impact that engagement with Free 2 Talk can have and the confidence that the young people invest in their youth workers.

*“The young people join the [Blackthorn] club in friendship groups and there are barriers between the groups and to expressing individuality within them. The club gives them confidence to break these down and to be themselves.*

*We get parents coming into the club now and the young people are proud of the work they’ve done and want to show it off. It’s good to see some self-policing develop too – there’s a spirit of healthy competition in many activities and the older ones won’t let people get away with winning by cheating. It’s their own space and gives them freedom to develop new ideas and have contact with adults from outside the family and understand how boundaries work. We’re building a solid social education foundation and they feed into the older group well, more resistant to anti-social group conformity.*

*Lack of self-esteem is the main issue at the Brookside Club. They’re adolescents and relationship issues become a big thing. We give them space and support to work these through. Often it’s a matter of resolving arguments before they develop into fights. They need to learn to understand how adult boundaries work. We end up with a lot wanting to do the Young Leader training at the end of it. They become aware of and engaged in issues in the wider community and say they want to make a difference to it.*

**James P and Matt Harvey, Free 2 Talk youth workers**

Following the work developed and the trust established by the Growing Together funded work, Free 2 Talk were successful in securing funding of £800,000 over a four year period from the Home Office’s Trusted Relationships fund. Only eleven youth work organisations nationally were given awards form this £13m fund. This work not only secures the organisation’s future for this period; it also gives it in a strategically important position as governmental recognition grows of the importance of youth work to preventing high profile concerns such as gang culture, knife crime, sexual exploitation and county lines drugs operations, following the carnage inflicted on the sector during the years of austerity.

This award in turn led to discussion with Growing Together Northampton to create a youth managed “safe space” within Blackthorn Community Centre. The idea was then developed into a wider vision for the future of the Community Centre, which in turn has attracted £250,000 from Power to Change’s Community Business Fund, with a further £78,382 of match funding from Northampton Borough Council (s.106), the Clothmakers’ Company, Northamptonshire Community Foundation and Growing Together Big Local. The project is set to transform the futures of both organisations (see further details in the section on Organisational Legacy on p.42).

Jodie Low, one of Free 2 Talk’s Directors, attended the Community Partnership’s meeting of April 2019 meeting to celebrate the impact that Growing Together had had on the organisation’s development. The following is an extract from the minutes of that meeting

*Jodie provided a review of the financial support received from Growing Together Big Local since 2013 and the many activities and outcomes that it has funded.*

*Our grants have been the longest term funding relationship that Free 2 Talk has had, and it has enabled the winning of confidence from the young people and the establishment of a reputation with partners for effectiveness and ability to work successfully with some of the town’s most disaffected young people.*

*Free 2 Talk have built on the foundation we enabled to a position in which they can work with young people in Blackthorn, Lings, Lumbertubs, Standens Barn, Bellinge, Spring Boroughs, around the Racecourse and King’s Heath.*

*Most recently they have become one of only eleven youth work providers to win Home Office Trusted Relationships funding, having been allocated £400,000 over two years (renewable for a further two years subject to performance). Not only does this provide stability and growth over this period, but it also means that the organisation is being listened to at the highest strategic levels. This gives Free 2 Talk a highly influential voice at a time when policy thinking is showing signs of shifting towards a belief that re-investing in youth work is essential if we are to combat high profile challenges like knife crime, radicalisation and gang culture.*

In addition to the Trusted Relationships funding, she also credited Growing Together with having generated a further £21,474 in match funding from various sources and to invitations from the Borough Council to expand their work into King’s Heath, Bellinge and Semilong as well as providing an outreach presence at the Midsummer Meadow skateboard park.

*Reelscape*

Reelscape is now known as Screen Northants and has moved to a town centre location. Until the move, Growing Together funding tended to be for its core expenditure such as business rates, IT investment and fundraising as we realise these can be difficult areas for which to secure funds.

Screen Northants still retains close links with its east Northampton roots, working with Project Redemption and at Weston Favell School. It provides opportunities for young people to get involved in the making of short commercial films, working alongside industry professionals and learning transferable skills that complement the formal school curriculum. Its two directors describe the target outcomes as being raised confidence, pride in their neighbourhood and their town, pride in themselves, understanding the demands of a working environment and appreciating of how accepting rigid structures and boundaries leads to them being treated as adults.

The organisation works on the soft skills that make young people employment-ready: communications, discipline, literacy, pride in your own work, enthusiasm for books. Director Becky Carrier says that involvement in Screen Northants keeps participants in education, makes them realise that education is a whole-life experience and not just confined to the classroom and provides them with contacts, work experience and a great CV.

*“We have our biggest impact on the most challenging kids. They’re challenging for a reason: they feel abandoned and lost, they’ve got no structure in their lives. Kids aren’t complicated: they just want love, stimulus, structure and security. This is what we give them.*

*“R had been described to the Police as the worst kid in his school. He got involved in Reelscape and his commitment to the work meant we decided to trust him with taking some expensive equipment off-site. We explained the trust we were placing in him and this gave him a sense of pride in himself. He was fine and has gone on to become a leading volunteer on a film we’re making about the Holocaust.”*

**Paul, Director**

Comments from the young people using the project reflect this balance of highly enjoyable (and so motivating) activity and learning educational and life skills that will stand them in good stead as they move into adulthood.

*“I’ve managed to communicate with the people we were interviewing and read off of a script when I normally struggle reading out loud”.*

*“I developed skills working within a professional environment. We also worked within a very strict time limit”.*

*“I definitely improved in my confidence by talking more and getting more involved which is something I’d never normally do”.*

*“It’s insanely fun and one of the best experiences of my life!”*

*Impact Now*

Impact Now was founded in 2015 with a grant from Growing Together by Nike Pedro, herself a local resident member of the Community Partnership for the full duration of the Big Local programme. Nike is also a graduate educational social worker. The grant was repeated in financial year 2015/6 and then, like other annual revenue grants, phased out between 2016/7 and 2017/8.

Impact Now was set up to provide formal and informal educational support to young people, mainly though not exclusively from the minority ethnic communities locally. Nike is supported by a volunteer team of teachers and trainers who deliver supplementary teaching up to GCSE level in English and Maths and informal education in cooking and baking, and saleable arts and crafts. The food preparation classes are also open to parents and there have been special introductory sessions for Asian women. Approximately 100 young people and family members benefit from the programme each year and visits by Growing Together staff and Partnership members how well and enthusiastically attended the sessions are.

Impact Now is still operating at full strength, two years after the last payment from Growing Together. A few grants have been secured (e.g. Councillors Empowerment and Aviva Community Fund) but the project (now a registered CIO) remains heavily dependent upon personal financial support from Nike. The failure of a number of grant applications is likely to be linked to lack of any systematic outcome capture measures and the organisation may benefit from some close support for its funding work over the remainder of 2020. Furthermore, the Charity makes no user charges, despite their awareness that many reasonably well off parents are using it for free private tuition for their children. At present, reliance on the founder’s personal generosity to cover the majority of the annual overheads of around £7,000 (rent, transport to sessions, insurance, books and materials, and storage) makes the Charity worryingly unsustainable.

*Youth shelters*

In addition to play areas for younger children, Growing Together also provided two youth shelters, at Blackthorn Recreation Ground and on Billing Brook Road, to give teenagers a space to meet friends as an alternative to hanging out on the streets. The two youth shelters were both developed in close consultation with local young people, through Free 2 Talk, and the young people had a decisive input to the location and design of their shelter. The Blackthorn youth shelter had actually been suggested by young people during a Week of Action consultation exercise, organised by Free 2 Talk. It was these young people who also requested the adjacent play equipment, a suggestion enthusiastically supported by the Police and so offered to the Brookside teenagers too.

The Billing Brook Road shelter has been well used since its construction and has attracted no complaints about anti-social behaviour. Indeed, residents spoken to along the footpath or on the doorstep at nearby houses have commented on how pleasantly surprised they’ve been at the good behaviour, courtesy and general cleanliness (from a littering point of view) of the shelter’s users.

Householders living close to the Blackthorn shelter report that the shelter is well-used, though does attract occasional rowdy gatherings late in the evening. These were thought to be adults who had been drinking rather than teenagers. Its orientation, selected by the Police to allow a clear inside from passing patrol cars, means that it gets no ambient light. Solar lighting panels have been vandalised, as have the panels that would have enabled young people to connect their phones and play music while they are using the shelter. The graffiti art is popular with both the young people using the shelter and with local residents, though has been vandalised by other young people. Residents report that the exercise equipment is very well used by people of all ages.

Visits to local householders to update/validate these findings are on hold due to the coronavirus emergency

A local PCSO has reported that the Blackthorn shelter is mainly used by groups of better behaved young people (often associated with the Free 2 Talk youth clubs) and so has made little impact on the youth behaviour problems being experienced by residents in some parts of the estate. There is also a fairly wide level of daytime use by people watching friends and family members playing games on the field or working out on the exercise equipment.

*Silhouette Youth Theatre (formerly Lings Performing Arts Academy)*

Silhouette is a community-based youth work CIO, based in the Weston Favell Centre and using the performing arts as a medium for enhancing confidence, aspiration, social skills and educational motivation. The project grew out of drama-based work at Lings School, which then expanded to working with pupils from thirteen east Northampton schools as the Lings Performing Arts Academy. In the spring of 2018 its founder, Leigh Wolmarans, left Lings School where he had been Headteacher to move the work into the community and set up Silhouette. LPAA had had considerable success in its 24 months of operation. Securing a Next Generation partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company (a very rare accolade for schools in such a deprived area) resulted in some energetic and highly acclaimed performances and a massive confidence boost for the young people involved. This partnership continues with Silhouette. The organisation now works with 150 young people each term and there is a waiting list for places. The activities engage the young people in productions that they choose and lead. These include work they have written themselves, modern plays reflecting the circumstances in which they are growing up, and interpretations of Shakespeare plays that bring out the resonance with contemporary concerns – e.g. knife crime in *Romeo and Juliet* and environmental issues in *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*.

Silhouette have comprehensive impact capture mechanisms in place. During the 2019/20 annual parental survey, 88% of 50 respondents described their work as excellent and 10% described it as Very Good (2% said Average) and 98% said that Silhouette had had a positive impact on their child’s life. The main reasons given included greater confidence (84%), new friends (72%), more opportunities (70%), raised aspirations (63%).rising to a challenge to improve (60%), happier (47%), and finding positive adult role models who they can trust (44%).

A large proportion of users are from our area and Growing Together has supported the project from its earliest days in Lings School. Grants have been made for core funding, specific items of equipment and to cover cash flow problems as the CIO established itself. More recently, Growing Together has provided intensive support with pulling together a development strategy, writing an associated five year funding strategy, and providing intensive support with fundraising efforts.

The outcome from that support has been to secure the future of Silhouette until at least 2023 through new grant income of £140,000 from Reaching Communities, and £58,000 from the Tudor Trust. This will also buy Silhouette the time and resources to develop a fully sustainable long-term funding base, built on earned income and non-grant charitable fundraising.

As this report was being completed, all of Silhouette’s activities had been closed dwon due to the Coronavirus emergency. Online activities were being developed.

**Impact of the support we’ve had from Growing Together**

*I can honestly say that Silhouette Youth would not be able to do the work that it does without the support, challenge and dedication of Growing Together. The organisation has provided our young people with so many things that it is hard to know where to start. Financially it has supported us to get off the ground and to build our sustainability, which has been crucial if we are going to continue to support our community. They have provided support and challenge in equal measure and have helped us realise the potential that we can have to transform the lives of young people. They have allowed to work with their exceptional staff to build up the skills and abilities we need if we are going to continue to have the impact that we want. They have been with us every step of the way and they have been faithful and true to the community that we serve.*

*What has been the icing on the cake is that Growing Together share our ethos of changing a community that needs as much help and support that it can get. And not just paying lip service to this change but actually getting involved to make sure it happens. This means that we have had access to professionals that can make our wishes a reality and can steer us in a direction that will allow us to have maximum impact. They have also signposted us to other people in the community that we can build partnerships with and have given us links to organisations that can support us to make a change.*

**Leigh Wolmarans, Artistic Director**

**Objective Three: improving the local environment and encouraging local people to look after it**

Despondency and sometimes anger at the state of the local living environment was almost as big an issue in the initial consultations as was crime and providing stimulation for young people. Most local residents hate living among the litter, fly-tipping and neglect, but felt enormously frustrated by their inability to affect it. The Community Partnership has therefore provided enhancements to the local environment that would not otherwise have been possible, and also to provide channels through which local residents could make a practical difference to their living conditions. This has included:

* the new play areas and youth shelters described above and, more recently, a “trim trail” of outdoor exercise equipment along the eastern bank of Cygnet Lake, by Billing brook Road.
* a major regeneration of the three lakes along Billing Brook and their surrounds (these include Kingfisher Lake in neighbouring Thorplands estate)
* block purchase contracts with Probation to improve specified local spaces
* the Junior Wardens programme in Lings and Lumbertubs schools
* an attempt to establish a Community Champions programme
* the subsequent establishment of a Community Hub at the Billing Brook Road shops, serving Lings and Lumbertubs estates.
* support for community gardening initiatives

*New public facilities*

The new play areas and youth shelters have been considered in the previous section. They are generally well used and valued by the community. It seems reasonable to conclude that they have been an effective use of Growing Together funds to meet a very widely expressed need.

The outdoor gym equipment is just as well used.

*It obviously meets a need: there’s almost always someone using it.*

**PCSO Steve Hoadley**

*It’s very well used. You see everything from people doing full work-outs to dog walkers doing a few minutes of exercise to help them stay fit. It’s something to do and it’s used by young and old just as much.*

**Lesley Ingram, Neighbourhood Warden**

No attempt has been made to assess patterns of use or the specific health benefits that are accruing to users. My own conversations with users suggest that many are regular users and that few could afford or would consider taking out a commercial gym subscription. Regular users seem willing to come some distance to use the equipment, contributing to making Swanhaven Park a “destination park”.

Its popularity led to the inclusion of similar equipment in the proposals for regenerating the green area on the corner of Billing Brook Road and Crestwood Road in Thorplands when this was undertaken by Northampton Partnership Homes in 2019.

*The regeneration of Billing Brook Lakes*

Billing Brook was originally a small stream that drained the agricultural land above the land where our estates now stand into the River Nene. It flows through adjacent Thorplands estate and then between Lings and Lumbertubs estates. When the estates were developed in the 1970s, three amenity lakes we created along its course by constructing large concrete weirs to hold back the water. The lakes also had an important role in the drainage of the estates. Once regarded as the environmental centrepiece of the estates, they have fallen into considerable neglect and dilapidation over the intervening decades and had come to be widely regarded as an eyesore. The brook and lakes were slowing down and silting up, while water quality was clearly plummeting and biodiversity was under threat. During the mid-programme consultation of summer 2016, restoring their amenity value for the community was the highest priority expressed by residents on Lings and Lumbertubs estates.

At about the same time, a major pollution incident took place that affected all three lakes and resulted in enormous environmental damage and the loss of much of the bird and insect life from the lakes. Responding to the resident priorities, Growing Together brought together a partnership of concerned organisation including both Councils, the Environment Agency, the Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water and Brookside and the residents’ associations for the three estates. This partnership’s early work raised more questions than answers and so an environmental consultancy was commissioned from JBA Consulting of Bradford, charged with establishing what had gone wrong, what we could do about it and how much it might cost. The consultancy was co-funded by Growing Together and the Environment Agency.

In response to JBA’s findings, technical and community consultation work began towards developing designs to restore some sustainability to the lakes. At the same time, an ambitious six figure funding target needed to be tackled. By late 2018 a funding package of £270,000 had been assembled, with input from the Environment Agency (£40,000), the Borough Council’s capital programme and Growing Together (£25,000 each), the Mick George Landfill Community Fund (£35,000) and the Council’s Section 106 funds (£140,000). The commission to do the work was won by Ebsford Environmental and the actual engineering work was undertaken in September and October 2019, with preparatory tree and vegetation work having been done in March. Following this, a further £70,000 was made available by the Borough Council for further work to be undertaken in 2020. This will mainly be planting of the new features and tree and vegetation work on the surrounds to ensure that the work does not immediately become obscured by new growth.

Resident feedback has been almost universally positive and the new design has withstood a very demanding first winter and done exactly what it was supposed to do in channelling high water flows. An early pollution incident soon after the work was completed was flushed through the system far more effectively than it would have been a year before. The real test will come during the summer when the water flow drops and silt could build up if the water is not kept flowing through the lakes as the design is intended to ensure. From an amenity point of view, residents will not see the full benefits until all the planting has been completed and grown through.

Furthermore, objective data on water quality improvement and the return of biodiversity will not be available for some time to come. However, it can already been seen that bird life is returning to the lakes and insect populations seem to be improved from last year.

**Comments on the Billing Brook Lakes project**

*This project simply wouldn’t have happened but for Growing Together. They identified the need by engaging the community, created the project partnership that brought in essential players like the Environment Agency, raised most of the money, ensured that we had support from the Police and others, and secured planning permission. They then led the implementation hitting all the agreed objectives within budget.*

**Stuart Docker, Northampton Borough Council Asset Management**

*When you’re doing a high profile project like this in an urban area, you need the community buy-in so people say “we did this”. Growing Together ran the community consultation, got local residents on side with the project and headed off any objections. It was their involvement that made it a community project.*

**Andy Sadler, Environment Agency**

*These lakes used to be a lovely place to visit and people came from all across Northampton. Over the years I’ve lived here I’ve seen them becoming more and more of an eyesore. It’s really exciting that we’ve finally been able to get the work done to make them better again.*

**Dianne Finnie, Chair, Brookside Residents Council**

The project has also been extremely good value for the Big Local programme. Counting the preliminary consultancy work and the follow-on work to be done in 2020, the total cost has been £437,000, while Growing Together’s cash contribution was £65,000. This means that every pound of Big Local money has been matched by £6.72p from other sources.

*Probation contracts*

The impact on criminal behaviour of the work commissioned during 2015/6 from the Probation Service has been considered above. The visual impact on the main sites worked up such as Foxcovert Wood, the surrounds of Cygnet and Dragonfly Lakes and along Overstone Lane between Greatmeadow Road and the Blackthorn Road underpass was initially dramatic and greatly appreciated by users. Inevitably, however, this has been lost as vegetation has grown back and new litter and fly-tipping has accumulated. Only the improvements to the footpath through Foxcovert Wood have been lasting.

This is nothing more than was expected. However, there were two further hopes of this work. One was that it would raise the profile of Growing Together in the early days of the programme. This would not seem to have been realised. Immediate recognition of the Growing Together name and logo was only 15% during the summer 2015 consultation exercise, rising to 35% when people were prompted by being reminded of specific Growing Together projects. However, no respondents mentioned the work done for us by Probation as something they’d noticed. Received wisdom in the advertising industry is that a name sticks when people have seen it seven times; it is possible that early exposure to the name as a result of these projects contributed to eventual recognition when the play areas went up or school projects were advertised. More likely, people just assumed it was the Council that had done it.

The second hope was that our own use of the Probation Service would lead to more widespread demand for their use by the Borough Council. Former Neighbourhood Warden, Lesley Ingram, said that the project helped cement an ongoing operational dialogue with the Probation Service and that this dialogue has led to further regular use of Probation teams in the area.

During the summer of 2015 there was an unexpected development of very localised but extremely important impact. During door-to-door consultation at the bottom end of Tyes Court in Lings, we learned of an ongoing series of indecent exposure incidents committed by at least one person hiding in the bushes along Bird’s Hill Walk. This was aimed at children on their way to the Lings Field play area, making dens or playing games among the bushes or retrieving footballs from them. At least five incidents had taken place over a period of no more than two weeks. In consultation with the Police and the Community Safety Partnership, we agreed to divert a Probation team immediately from Foxcovert Wood and have all bushes and undergrowth cut down for about ten metres back from the play area. There were no further incidents after this had been done.

*Junior Wardens scheme*

The Junior Wardens programme was developed as a joint Police/NBC initiative by former Insp. Daemon Johnson and Noella Crump of NBC’s Anti-Social Behaviour team during 2011. Year Five children are put through a programme of activities that involve learning about their environment and their responsibility in looking after it. They visit the CCTV Centre at St. John’s and Hazard Alley in Milton Keynes, take part in a litter pick, design posters to discourage littering and come up with a personal action plan for playing their part. The initial pilot programme took place at Lumbertubs School and Lings was included in the first roll-out wave.

As Growing Together was putting its first programme together, there was a possibility that the programme would be moved on the other parts of the town. The Partnership therefore offered to pay for it to be continued on an ongoing basis to all schools in our operational area. (Regrettably, Wood Vale School declined the offer and Blackthorn only took it up from school year 2016/7). Growing Together funding therefore enabled the project’s retention in this area for an extended period, while not depriving other schools in other parts of the town from experiencing it too.

*“The programme helps with recycling levels, littering behaviour. I meet former participants who’ve gone on to the Academy and tell me they’re still getting onto their parents to pick up litter and take their fag ends home. I’ve had young people who know me from it come up to me and tell me and point out graffiti to me. It makes a real input because it’s so enjoyable to do.”*

**Lesley Ingram, NBC Neighbourhood Warden (2016)**

*“We have to develop a sense of community in the children to develop the whole child. This programme makes them ask how they can be better. It makes them aware of the impact everything they do has everyone around them. They get parents involved in doing things in the community too and this has led to a loss of fear of the area they live in”.*

**Leigh Wolmarans, then Headteacher, Lings School**

*“Junior Wardens has had a real impact. It’ll make a lasting difference – the kids who’ve done it remember it for years afterwards”.*

**PCSO Steve Hoadley**

*“You can tell the kids who’ve done Junior Wardens. Their attitude is so different when they come into the school”.*

**Teacher at the Academy (Secondary School)**

*The Junior Wardens scheme has been a huge success, and the children actively engage throughout every session. We cover a vast selection of topics which raises awareness and encourages the children to take note of what is happening around them. From carrying out the litter picks around the local areas, the children are able to demonstrate what they have learnt from the classroom sessions and can identify the difference between what is classed as litter and what is fly tipping. They love this activity and as Caroline* [another Neighbourhood Warden] *says, “it’s like watching a kill on the savannah” when they all hunt down the same coke can! Going to Hazard Alley brings the scheme together as it involves all of the topics that have been covered in the classroom sessions.*

*This scheme has had a huge influence on the children and the local community. I have had several parents come to me to thank me for what we have done and it has also raised their awareness. They are shocked when their child tells them off for not recycling properly or for dropping some litter and have informed me it has changed how they think about things. It is important that this scheme continues in the local areas as it really is influencing the mind set of people and how they dispose of their waste.*

**Nuala Duffy, NBC Senior Neighbourhood Warden (2020)**

Junior Wardens is an excellent example of a high impact, low cost initiative with real sustainable impact. The Partnership can be proud of having retained it for our area for a further seven years and have done so with a real appreciation of what it does. In participatory budgeting exercises for the second and third Big Local Plans, funding for Junior Wardens came out as the clear top priority expressed by our residents.

The original hope was that by enabling all children in the area to do the programme, we would create a cohort that had the experience as a shared reference point and that this in time would result in more caring and responsible adults and parent. It is, of course, far too early to assess this.

*Community Champions*

The Community Champions initiative was based on the very successful Street Champions model. The basis of this model is that local volunteers are recruited and supported to cover an area of no more than one street, usually their own. They liaise closely with the Council to report litter and fly-tipping and to engage their neighbours in keeping the area tidy. The model has been effectively implemented in deprived communities from Newcastle to Exeter. The main difference in seeking to replicate this model was that whereas Street Champions schemes tended to focus exclusively on local environmental issues (including litter and fly-tipping), the Community Champions programme would give greater freedom for volunteers to identify whatever local needs their immediate community had and gave them access to a funding pot to put these into action. They could be related to environmental issues, but they could equally well be related to child care, support for the elderly, crime or anything else.

A qualified community worker with previous relevant volunteering experience, Chloe Dennis-Green, was recruited in October 2013 for 18 hours/week to develop and run the programme. Initially, specific pilot areas identified in conjunction with the NBC Neighbourhood Wardens. The scheme was intensively promoted door-to-door and through “pop-up” initiatives on the targeted streets. Initial response was enthusiastic and at one time Chloe had a promising number of volunteers to set up three initial pilot schemes of several adjacent streets each. However, when the time came for these volunteers to commit to a training programme they all withdrew from the scheme with a variety of personal reasons given. This left Chloe back at square one.

Rather than re-start the whole scheme from scratch, the Partnership instead agreed to re-formulate the programme with an emphasis on supporting people into volunteering of any sort. Between October 2014 and Chloe’s departure in October 2015, she tried to promote local volunteer led initiatives. Ten events were held and three new groups set up through BGN, but Chloe increasingly came to feel that these were not making significant progress towards the development of sustainable community-led activities.

There is no obvious reason why the Community Champions initiative failed to take off when the less superficially attractive Street Champions scheme has worked successfully in neighbourhoods with the notoriety of Lozells and Small Heath in Birmingham and Meadow Well in Newcastle. One speculative possibility, and it’s no more than that, has to do with “critical mass”. Unlike the mainly local authority led Street Champions schemes, we didn’t put in a level of resources and publicity to make people feel they were going to be part of something really big. This may have left them feeling they were going out on a limb and possibly making themselves vulnerable in the community.

However, the majority of Street Champion schemes active across the country during the first decade of the century have now either closed down or, in a few cases, are operating at a very much reduced level. Furthermore, our Community Champions scheme was not alone in failing to gain traction. A not dissimilar Police led scheme called Street Watch was established in four areas of Northampton in 2015, but didn’t last more than a few months in any of them. A recent attempt to revive the scheme in Northampton has . . .

Before leaving the programme, Chloe recommended that the following changes should be made in the job design before a successor was recruited:

1. less focus on organising events, which came to dominate her time
2. a smaller patch and/or larger team of workers
3. less explicit targeting of volunteering and more on simply “getting involved”

All of these changes were adopted before transferring the funding into the Brookside Community Hub initiative and recruiting Chloe’s replacement to run it.

The project can perhaps best be considered as a learning experience. Although it was not a success in terms of meeting its stated objectives, it did pave the way for one of the programme’s biggest successes in the Community Hub. Furthermore, the contacts and experience gained through events and volunteering placements on Blackthorn later informed successful community development work undertaken with Children in Need funding on Blackthorn.

However, it failed to make much of an impact on the issues that it was intended to tackle. Many other community engagement projects in other parts of the country (including Big Local) have experienced similar frustrations in trying to get local people directly involved in tackling priority local issues. Possibly the main lesson to be learned is about what expectations are realistic about the genuine appetite for active community involvement.

However, its positive legacy is Brookside Community Hub.

*Brookside Community Hub*

Brookside Community Hub was established in July 2016 in rented premises at the Billing Brook Road shops to serve the estates of Lings and Lumbertubs. It consists of an office/meeting room in a privately owned community hall, with a small interview room for confidential meetings. The Hub was intended to build on the lessons learned from the unsuccessful Community Champions programme and to provide the estates of Lings and Lumbertubs with some of the benefits that Growing Together Northampton offers to Blackthorn and its satellite estates.

With a part-time paid worker and volunteer support, the Hub has provided a drop-in problem-solving service and regular “surgeries” run by Northampton CAB and public sector service providers. Local professionals like the Neighbourhood Wardens and PCSOs will drop by regularly so that residents can raise concerns informally. There is also a wide range of activity sessions including a mothers and tots group, a weekly social session after school drop-off, crafts and knitting groups, relaxation sessions, FISH (Food In School Holidays) events, and a regular litter pick and other environmental activities. There are also community events during school holidays and to celebrate festivals like Christmas and Hallowe’en.

From an inevitably slow start, the Hub has now established itself to the point where 139 people had used the Hub at least once during 2017/8, rising to 212 people in 2018/9. Between April 2019 and the end of the calendar year, 360 people had made 1,389 visits. A snapshot impact survey was undertaken during one week in November 2018. Of the 17 people responding, 12 said they had made new friends at the Hub (the other five were one-off drop-in users), 10 said they had learned new skills, 13 said they had a better understanding of how to solve problems, and 16 said they felt calmer or happier. Since then, a rolling outcome capture system to track the Hub’s ongoing impact has been introduced.

Thanks to a grant of £75,000 from the Tudor Trust, the future of the Hub has now been secured until March 2023.The grant has also enabled a second worker to be recruited and opening hours to be extended.

Regrettably, the Community Hub is also currently closed due to the coronavirus emergency.

**Comments from a focus group session, February 2020**

*The biggest difference has been knowing there’s somewhere safe to come. You can say whatever’s on your mind because you know that whatever’s said stay here.*

*I was getting really isolated before I discovered the Hub, but I felt at home here straight away. Coming here has given me new interests and a structure to my life.*

*I felt very alone after giving birth to my first child in 2016. Coming to the baby group overcame my sense of isolation. It’s been great since then seeing all the kids growing up.*

*I moved back to Northampton when my husband retired a few years ago. Very sadly, he died soon after. I didn’t really know anyone here and became very lonely. Discovering the Hub gave me something to get up for. I made new friends and volunteering here has given me the satisfaction of knowing I’m doing something useful for the community. It’s completely changed my life.*

*We have one lady who suffers badly from anxiety attacks after being assaulted twice. The only time she leaves the house now is to come here. She says it’s kept her together.*

*The Hub has become established as part of the community. We don’t have to advertise our events any more. Everyone knows that the summer event is on the last Wednesday of the school* *holiday – and they’ll all be there.*

Kathryn White, Chief Executive of Growing Together describes her future aspirations for the Hub as being:

*To continue to expand the numbers benefitting by:*

* *increasing the ‘range’ of people who attend – more men, more working people, more mental health support, etc*
* *increasing the opening hours, so that we get more use out of the space and offer a wider range of times, and*
* *increasing the activities on offer – including those with some income generating potential such as social prescribing for anxiety reduction.*

*We also want to build up the volunteer pool so that we have a couple of lead volunteers who can take leadership of groups and the Hub itself as well as supervising those who are offering to help out in a more informal way. This will also make the future less dependent upon the skills and personalities of the two paid workers.*

*Community Gardening*

Growing Together grants have supported three very different community gardening projects.

* Brookside Community Gardening Club have met most weeks throughout the period of Big Local funding. The Club has developed and maintained the garden areas around and within Brookside Hall on a regular basis and has organised regular public events to share gardening skills with the wider community and has thanked its regular volunteers with a summer trip each year to a major National Trust or similar garden. When a garden area dedicated to the memory of a former chair of the local residents’ association was vandalised in 2018, the community response was overwhelming and was described by a relative of the deceased lady as one of the most heartening things she’d ever experienced. There has been no repetition.
* Blackthorn Community Garden has been largely been developed by a single community volunteer to transform an unused and neglected area between the community centre and the school. There are now six raised beds and an orchard area. Four regular volunteers have supported her through the main growing season of April to October each year, with another five lending more occasional support. She has also had numerous conversations with passing residents, often sharing gardening ideas or seeking advice on a gardening problem they have faced. Many more have stopped to congratulate her and her volunteers on what they are doing. An early fear that the garden would be regularly vandalised has not materialised, though there have been scattered incidents. Out of concern that the future of the project is too dependent upon her, the Community Partnership have bought some extra time from a Children in Need funded Growing Together Northampton community worker to engage more members of the community and develop some regular lead volunteers. The objectives for this period of development support are:

1. to establish a club to take collective responsibility for the garden
2. to encourage Blackthorn Primary School to take on at least one raised bed to tend on an ongoing basis as a school project
3. to engage similarly with Free 2 Talk’s Blackthorn group and encourage them to take on a raised bed
4. to develop a two way link with the older people’s clubs meeting at nearby Arlbury Commuity centre (see next section), assisting them with their own garden and encouraging their involvement with the Community Garden
5. To enter Northamptonshire in Bloom each year, hoping at least to repeat the Silver Gilt award achieved in 2018. (The Garden did not enter the competition in 2019).

* Lings Gardening Club was set up to encourage local residents to use their gardens to grow food, so reducing household costs. Although there is little evidence that it made much progress towards this objective, the club instead developed in a different direction. Most of its regular members were from BME backgrounds (e.g. Asian, African and Polish) where there is a much stronger culture of home food production. However, many of the crops grown “back home”, especially by newer arrivals, could not easily be grown or even sourced in the UK. The club therefore became something of a clearing house for solutions to these problems, for instance by making a bulk purchase of kohl-rabi seeds (a Polish favourite) and advising on its UK cultivation. Sadly, the club’s activities came to an end when its founder moved away from the area. Its demonstration plot in a high profile location has since been taken over as a decorative feature by the Brookside club.

*Neighbourhood Plan*

Between 2014 and 2016, Growing Together led the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for the area. Deriving from the Localities Act 2011, this forms a legally binding part of the planning framework. Building on and adding to the consultation done for the Big Local programme, the Plan has a very solid base of community views on which to base its policies for what does and does not get planning approval in the area.

The main policies include:

* adherence to specified standards of design and community utility for any new development
* Local Green Spaces protection for eleven open public spaces in the area, preventing change of use or development other than to enhance their current use
* to require the integration of Secured by Design standards to ensure adherence to the highest community safety and designing out crime standards
* other than on three designated eyesore sites, to limit housing developments to no more than 10m units per site
* to encourage new community facilities and to require that any community facility removed by any development should be replaced with other facilities of at least as high a quality

The Plan was approved by a public referendum on 23 February 2017 and produced a 91.47% Yes vote from a 16% turn-out.

Since then it has enabled us to influence and challenge a number of proposed developments. The largest of these have been:

* successfully blocking and proposing an alternative site for a new free standing pharmacy building at Blackthorn shops that would have created alleyways, closed off lines of sight, replaced play space and removed a protected green space
* influencing major housing development at one of the eyesore sites to ensure that the Plan’s provisions and other resident concerns were taken into account in building it.

**Objective Four: adding to the quality of life for the older members of our communities**

Work towards this objective has come under two projects, since in effect merged:

* support for the Arlbury Road Community Centre
* the Get Set Go project, implemented for us by Age UK Northamptonshire

*Arlbury Road*

Support to Arlbury Road has consisted principally of enabling them to extend their garden and create a fully accessible sitting out and gardening area within their new boundaries. We raised additional funding from Northampton Community Foundation to enable this to happen. We have also funded a new kitchen range at the Centre. Informal feedback from Northampton Partnership Homes’s Community Worker and from Committee Members at the Centre indicate that these changes are well used and that the consequent extension of activities on offer is greatly appreciated.

*Get Set Go*

Get Set Go is a national programme developed by Age Concern (prior to their merger with Help the Aged to create Age UK) to tackle the isolation of older people. Older people’s clubs are established with strong support from Age UK, which gradually decreases as groups become more self-supporting. The groups themselves chose their own programme and focus.

In 2013 and 2014, Growing Together funded Age UK Northamptonshire to set up and support a weekly older people’s Get Set Go club on each of our five estates, and to guide it towards a self-organised basis. A number of the clubs have since amalgamated and now meet at the Arlbury Road Centre. Others continue to meet at the Goldcrest Road Centre in Goldings. From 2014 to 2016 we continued to fund the programme, supporting expansions, inter-club social activity programmes and, co-funded by Public Health England, an effort to include more Asian older people in the programme. In April 2016, 46 people were regular members of the programme.

A participative evaluation of the programme by Age UK at that time listed the numerous activities that the programme had offered and identified nine possible benefits:

1. the activities have brought many people, some of them very vulnerable, together socially; many new friendships have been maintained outside of the meetings.
2. people who originally attended one club now frequently visit clubs across the area, extending their friendship network
3. provision of meals has encouraged more people to attend, particularly more men
4. those now running the clubs have learned new skills such as funding and leadership from Age UK
5. inter-generational activities have been greatly valued and have increased understanding and broken down barriers
6. many volunteers have come forward to run activities and cook meals
7. many activities and presentations have enabled participants to increase their own skills
8. exercise activities have enabled participants to improve their mental and physical health
9. handicraft activities have enabled participants to learn (and teach) new skills

All regular members were invited to complete a self-assessment questionnaire and 31 did so.

28 of these thought the programme had improved their overall well-being and 25 said they had made lasting new friendships through the programme

The major concerns were too few people doing the work and the consequent sustainability of the programme into the future.

The following comments arose in a discussion session with nine of the programme’s more active members:

*The group helped me to find out what was going on in the area and to start to use it.*

*Before the programme started I was a bored and miserable old man sitting at home on my own. I’ve got no family in the area. Now I’ve got lots of friends and I’m out every day. I’ve got local people who I can give to the hospital as my emergency contacts rather than my kids, who are miles away now.*

*There was a lady of 90 who attended regularly. She lived on her own so one day when she didn’t come so we went to look her up. She’d fallen in her bungalow so we were able to get her the help she needed. It’s all about being neighbours and looking after each other.*

*I was a 24/7 carer so I could never get out. Now there are people who will provide cover for me so I can have a break. Or I can tell Lifeline where I’ll be so if my husband presses his alarm they know where I am and how to get me.*

*The inter-generational work we did with the Princes Trust was very fulfilling. I ran a cookery course which gave them confidence and made me feel useful.*

*There are people who come along and just sit on the side. Sometimes they’re not very fit and sometimes there are language problems. But they keep coming back because they enjoy the company.*

Between 2016 and 2018 Growing Together’s revenue grants to the programme were phased out, although some one-off grants were subsequently made for summer excursions. However, Age UK Northamptonshire continued to support the clubs that emerged from the directly funded period. This support has included the development of fundraising skills. At the time of writing, each club is run by a committee of members and chooses its own activities programme. These are funded by user fees and a grant from Northamptonshire Community Foundation. Age UK has continued to fund a support worker and made some funds available for the summer social programme.

Ongoing activities vary from club to club, but include quiz mornings, visiting speakers, bowling outings, exercise sessions and, for the Weston Favell club at Arlbury road, a regular Wednesday lunch at £3/head. Both clubs regularly have 25 to 30 attendees per session. Between 2017 and 2019 the summer programmes were subsidised by Growing Together and Age UK. Ten trips a year were offered, with attendees making a contribution to each one they joined. 750 places were taken up on these thirty trips.

Ken Nokes has worked for Age UK for over 15 years and on this project from its earliest days. Reflecting on its journey from the initial recruitment drive to sustainable self-management, he says *“this has been one of the most successful projects I’ve ever been involved with – a total eye opener”.*

**Small Grants/Community Grants Fund**

*2013-2016*

In addition to the work funded or directly managed in support of the four priorities, the Partnership also set up a Small Grants Fund in support of these priorities and for events and activities that would bring the community together. This Fund made £20,000 per year available to make grants of up to (approximately) £1,000 per project. Grant applications were considered by an *ad hoc* Panel, meeting approximately once a month and then had to be signed off by the Chair. Larger grants could be made from the Fund but these had to be referred to a meeting of the full Community Partnership for decision.

* Up to April 2016, 43 separate grants were made to 24 different organisations.
* 29 of these grants were to support activities for children, teenagers or families.
* 7 of the supported organisations were to the public sector, 14 were registered charities, and only 3 (Brookside Residents Council/Gardening Club, The Trippers and Impact Now) were community sector.
* Organisations receiving multiple grants were as follows:

2 Police, Lumbertubs School, BGN, Reelscape, Change of Scene, Leisure Trust

3 – Little Fishes pre-school, Lings School, Brookside Gardening Club

4 – Scouts

5 – Brookside Residents Council

* The Small Grants Fund supported projects with 3207 users and funded 578 hours of community activities, in addition to providing 13 new community enhancements or facilities.

The output data suggest that the Fund was extremely successful in reaching large numbers of people. 70% of Growing Together’s user numbers over the first three years were accounted for by Small Grant funded activities. This reflects the fact that many grants were either for big single day activities like Community Fun days and school coach trips or for equipment that would get high usage, like that funded by the Scouts and Little Fishes grants.

Projects supported by the Fund were very successful in delivering small but highly effective enhancements to local quality of life that would not otherwise have been possible. Though not a stated objective of the Fund, it was disappointing that the availability of local and easily secured money did not stimulate a great deal of new community activity. Most grants were for additional or improved services by pre-existing organisations.

*2016 to 2020*

From April 2016, the Fund was renamed the Community Grants Fund and the £1,000 indicative limit was removed. From this point on, all applications came to the full Partnership for decision. The subsequent trend was towards smaller numbers of larger grants. Between April 2016 and the closure of the Fund to external applications in January 2020, 31 grants were made to 17 organisations, with the average grant being almost £2,033.

Only one public sector organisation (Wood Vale School) received funding, as did 9 charities and 7 community groups, three of these being the Get Set Go older people’s clubs.

Over these three years, the Grants Fund paid for 2,247 people to engage in 2,870 hours of activity. The trend was therefore towards smaller numbers of people per hour of activity. This is consistent with a move away from trips and outings where a three figure number of people would benefit from a single day, towards programmes of activity in which fewer people would attend for a greater number of hours.

**The programme’s legacy**

The legacy that the programme leaves behind can perhaps be considered under four headings: physical, personal, organisational and financial.

*Physical legacy*

The programme leaves behind:

* 7 new public play areas at Rillwood Court, Billing Brook Road shops, Birds Hill Road, Goldings Road, Foxcovert Wood, Blackthorn shops and Maidencastle
* a covered outdoor play area at the BGN Nursery in Northampton
* a canopy enabling all weather outdoor play at Wood Vale School
* an outdoor performance area and environmental area at Lings School
* 2 new youth shelters, each with its own suite of exercise equipment, at Billing Brook Road and Blackthorn Recreation Ground
* a dog agility facility close to Lodge Farm Community Centre
* a trim trail of exercise equipment along the footpath on the eastern side of Cygnet Lake
* a major regeneration of the three Billing Brook lakes to restore amenity value, sustainability and biodiversity
* Brookside Community Hub
* a new circular seat around the oak tree at Billing Brook Road shops
* 3 community gardening projects, 2 of which were started entirely through Growing Together funding and the other received a significant boost in capacity
* new facilities at Little Fishes pre-school, Arlbury Road Community Centre, Lings Wood (pond by Lingswood House) and the 43rd Northampton Scouts Group

*Personal legacy*

This is harder to quantify but covers the personal benefits, skills, experiences, friendships and memories gained from Growing Together funded activities at:

* the Year 5 Junior Wardens programme that has run at most of our primary schools for the last six years
* Free 2 Talk youth clubs
* Change of Scene’s outdoor activities programmes
* Lings Performing Arts Academy and Silhouette Youth Theatre
* Impact Now’s supplementary educational work
* the cinema related youth activities of Reelscape
* Scouting and Guiding trips and camps (including Cubs and Brownies)
* Emmanuel Church Youth Club
* trips and activities arranged by all four of the area’s primary schools
* summer programmes at Saints Study Centre
* the substance abuse educational work of Solve-It
* the three Get Set Go older people’s clubs and their predecessors
* the three community gardening clubs that we have funded
* the support, services and activities run by and at Brookside Community Hub
* community events and activities run by BGN/Growing Together Northampton, Brookside Residents Council, Brookside Community Hub, Northampton Leisure Trust and others
* above all, the skills and capacity developed individually and collectively by the members of the Big Local Community Partnership. Many of them are now applying these as Trustees of the merged Growing Together Northampton and through leading roles in other projects such as Impact Now, the Blackthorn Community Garden and Brookside Community Hub.

The list above is far from exhaustive.

The focus of the programme has gravitated towards activities with young people, as discussed above. We can be confident that at least half of the young people living on the five estates have had some benefit from our work, and possibly many more.

**Survey findings**

*All eleven serving members of the Community Partnership completed a final survey in March 2020. Six questions asked for a numerical response on a rising 1 – 5 scale. The average scores given were as follows:*

How much have you enjoyed being a member of the Partnership? 4.9

How much has it helped you to understand how things work in the area? 4.9

How much has the Partnership been able to influence decisions locally? 4.7

How likely are you now to continue working to improve the area? 4.8

Overall, how much has the programme improved local quality of life? 4.8

How much influence have we had on the policies and approach of service 4.4

delivery organisations?

*Many members reported how much the experience had enhanced their confidence and spoke of how the Partnership had grown as a team and become much more effective in the process.*

*When asked what they felt were the best things the programme had done, the responses were the Billing Brook Lakes project (9), play areas (6), youth work and children’s activities (5), Brookside Community Hub (5) and the Community Grants Fund (4). The Get Set Go clubs, Neighbourhood Plan, gardening clubs, influencing the Council and other service delivery organisations and the Partnership’s own development were also mentioned.*

*Asked about disappointments, five could think of nothing. The most comment response (6) was our failure to secure wider community involvement in and support for our work, with three specifically noting the lack of direct input from BME communities. Two people mentioned failure to reduce littering and other environmental nuisance and one said they’d have liked to see more tangible assets in our legacy.*

*Asked what they would do differently if they could start again now, one said they’d make better use of social media and another spoke of more Partnership training and earlier focus on sustainability. No others could think of anything.*

Programme Co-ordinator Peter Strachan, the author of this report, has stated that *“watching the development of the Community Partnership and its members from a group of enthusiastic but mostly inexperienced residents to a cohesive and innovative community development body has been one of the most exhilarating experiences of my forty year career in community-led development”.*

*Organisational legacy*

Growing Together Big Local’s investment in the communities of our estates has developed a significant legacy of new and strengthened organisations that will carry on elements of its work. These include:

* the three older people’s clubs that have developed out of the Get Set Go project commissioned from Age UK Northamptonshire
* Impact Now – started with Big Local funds by a member of the Community Partnership; now a self-supporting CIO
* Silhouette – Growing Together has been a major funder and supporter of Lings Performing Arts Academy and then the new CIO, providing developing and fundraising support as well as direct financial assistance. This resulted in £198,000 of new grant income from Reaching Communities and the Tudor Trust to keep Silhouette operating until 2023 and give it time to develop a sustainable funding base consisting of earned income and regular unrestricted fundraising income from sources other than grants.
* Free 2 Talk – Growing Together provided several years of secure funding that enabled the CIC to develop the practices and relationships that enabled them to secure a major four year contact from the Home Office and acted as match for other fundraising efforts
* Brookside Community Hub – expertise from members of the Partnership (especially the Chair, Andrea McAuliffe, who ran Bellinge Community House for 24 years) enabled the establishment of this new Growing Together Northampton facility serving Lings and Lumbertubs estates
* Growing Together Northampton – through its merger with the Big Local programme, the former BGN has regained the community focus that was its original reason for existing, has a Board of Trustees revitalised by an influx of skills and energy from the communities it serves, and the funding to develop a number of new projects of high priority to the community. It is Big Local’s impact on Growing Together Northampton that, more than anything else, enables us to state with confidence that spending up the Lottery funds does not mark the end of our programme, but only the end of its first phase. The box following this Legacy section gives the Chief Executive’s perspective on the partnership.

*Financial legacy*

An early aspiration was to double the £1m by bringing in or facilitating new funding or services to that value. The following funding has been secured, to the nearest £1,000:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Project | Funder | Amount | Outcome |
| Brookside Hub | Tudor Trust | £75,000 | Two years operation with extra worker while sustainable funding is built up |
| Silhouette | Reaching Communities | £140,000 | Three years funding to expand staff and services while putting whole organisation on a sustainable footing |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Silhouette | Tudor Trust | £58,000 | Co-funding with Reaching Communities of above outcome |
| Free 2 Talk | Home Office | £800,000 | Trusted Relationships project protecting young people from harmful influences |
| Blackthorn Community Centre extension | Community Business Fund (Power to Change) | £250,000 | Youth safe space, summer programme for working families, £30,000+ p.a. earned income boost for Growing Together |
| Clothmakers Company | £20,000 |
| BGN Nursery (run by Growing Together) | Sylvia Adams Trust | £52,000 | Enhanced support to 2 and 3 year old children and their families |
| Billing Brook Lakes | Northampton Borough Council | £235,000 | Regeneration of three lakes as amenity space, restored biodiversity, enhanced sustainability of design |
| Environment Agency | £90,000 |
| Mick George Community Fund | £35,000 |
| **TOTAL** | | **£1,755,000** | |

No attempt has been made to cost the value of staff time contributed to the programme by the Council, Police, Environment Agency, voluntary sector, community volunteers and others. The value would undoubtedly be in five if not six figures.

*It’s been a huge learning curve, both for the organisation and for me, personally.*

*I think the Big Local programme has increased the organisation’s profile overall and broadened our scope, so that we are less regarded as a children’s charity and more as the community organisation we strive to be. When we took this on, BGN was really a service delivery organisation which extended its services from the Children’s Centre to include the wider community. Working with new community organisations, such as the Get Set Go clubs and the new Westfield Residents’ Association, built up our reputation beyond young families. The Neighbourhood Plan also played a big part in this, as did Project Jigsaw and the outreach events and volunteer recruitment done for the Community Champions programme. Work with Free 2 Talk on their youth clubs and the proposed new youth “safe space” has also enormously enhanced the strength of that partnership and our standing with young people in the area.*

*The Trustee Board has moved from having one resident Trustee to being 70% local residents, with local residents in key positions such as Deputy Chair and active members of the finance sub group. This was enabled by the smooth transition from the old structure to the merged Board we now have. It was an iterative process that started several years before the full merger actually happened, and it ensured that people moved at their own pace so strong relationships were built over time. I think we learned a lot about community development processes through it. Working with Community Partnership members from Lings and Lumbertubs has also given us an understanding of the needs of the area and built up links with Brookside Residents Council in particular. This has led to the creation of Brookside Community Hub and subsequent community development work on the estates.*

*The impact on our finances has also been considerable. The 5% fee we were paid as LTO was an important cushion for us when we lost the Children’s Centre, ensuring for instance that we could retain our finance worker. The programme support budget has also covered some organisational costs such as rental for office space. In the longer term, the development funding and practical fundraising support we’ve received has enabled us to secure £270,000 from the Community Business Fund and a further £20,000 in match funding. This will enable us to build a youth “safe space” at our Community Centre, through which 30 – 50 young people per week can access specialist support. At the same time it will enable us to exploit the income generating space of our two buildings better, bringing in a potential £30,000 a year or more in long term unrestricted funds through increase rental income and a summer child care programme.*

*The ongoing and successful fundraising teamwork between myself and the Big Local Programme Co-ordinator has boosted organisational capacity significantly. As well as the funding work for the Community Centre, this has also brought in the money for the Billing Brook Lakes project, a £75,000 grant from the Tudor Trust for Brookside Community Hub and possibly other applications currently in the pipeline. In addition we have a direct mail campaign which has been planned and is ready to run when we have the capacity to do it. This could bring in up over £10,000 per year once it has become established. The real lasting impact, however, has been through the knowledge and skills shared with myself as CEO and now part of the fabric of the organisation. This will shortly be enhanced further when the development of a full fundraising strategy for the organisation is completed.*

**Kathryn White, Chief Executive, Growing Together Northampton**

**Conclusions**

1. The Community Partnership adopted a strategy of seeking to reach and deliver at least some benefit to high percentage of the population of the five target estates. In this it has been very successful through its choice of which projects to support.
2. This is especially the case where young people are concerned. The data suggest that an absolute minimum of 38% of young people in the area have had at least one Growing Together funded experience, and that very probably a majority have. These figures do not take account of the increased availability of public play facilities, the single largest felt need expressed during the initial consultation programme, or of the two youth shelters.
3. The Small/Community Grants Fund has made a huge contribution to this very high reach figure. Although many of the activities funded have been one-off events, some of those have a high chance of creating lifetime (and life enhancing) memories. Community Grants have, for instance, brought school seaside trips within the range of all families so that children who might otherwise miss out have been included and have enabled a group of severely disabled children to visit Harry Potter World and thirty Beaver Scouts to visit London, including going inside 10 Downing Street.
4. The Community Partnership can be proud of its role enabling a number of projects to get off the ground, ranging in size terms from Blackthorn Community Nursery to the Police Cycl-Opps project. These are projects that are having a profound impact on the life chances of many of their users.
5. Just as the Community Grants Fund has enabled many children to enjoy experiences that are likely to remain with them for the rest of their lives, so the major grant programmes with Free 2 Talk, Silhouette, Change of Scene and Reelscape are very likely to have changed hundreds of young lives for the better, in lasting ways, by giving them confidence and skills that they can take into their future adult lives and, in some cases, have already led directly to a foot on the employment ladder.
6. Lack of community play facilities was probably the top community priority of all and Growing Together has responded to this widely expressed need with the provision of high quality modern play areas on all estates. All the evidence suggests that these are well used and highly valued by the community. Gym equipment at all locations is also well used on the basis of observation, resident reports and anecdotal evidence. Both youth shelters are appreciated by local young people and making a significant contribution to what is on offer for local teenagers, though the Blackthorn one is having less of an impact on some of the problems it was hoped it would address than was anticipated.
7. At the other end of the age range, Age UK’s Get Set Go clubs are well attended and in some cases absolutely transforming the quality of life of some formerly very isolated older people.
8. The highest profile success of the environmental programme has been building the partnerships and finding the funding to make the community aspiration for a regeneration of the Billing Brook Lakes a reality.
9. The development of a Neighbourhood Plan with a very strong community input has given residents a legally binding saying in what they do and do not want to see given planning approval in their area. This has already delivered results. Given that it cost Growing Together do more than (a lot of) time, this has been one of the highest impact actions we have undertaken. It remains in force until 2029.
10. The programme has made limited inroads into the other environmental problems of the area. In the face of public sector cutbacks that have resulted in under-performing contract arrangements and widespread, if low level, environmental neglect by many residents, a transformational change would have been a big ask. However, although the the failure of the Community Champions initiative to mobilise local volunteers to address this widely expressed concern was a big disappointment at the time, it paved the way for the success of the Brooksaide Community Hub and much of the community work now run from the growing Together premises in Blackthorn.
11. PCSO Steve Hoadley’s assessment of Growing Together’s impact on the background noise of crime and anti-social behaviour as “small but important” is realistic and gratifying. It’s probably also a good summary of our impact on other big picture issues. The £1,112,500 from the Lottery amounts to £17.52p per person/year over the seven years. Given the size of the challenges and the relatively small scale of our investment, it’s probably as good as could realistically be expected.
12. The programme has achieved genuinely transformational benefits in enabling a large number of members of the community to see that through working together they really can rise above their own challenges and hugely improve their own lives and life chances. This applies to a range of initiatives from the young people attending Free 2 Talk and Silhouette, through to the Get Set Go older people’s clubs and, above all, to the members of the Big Local Community Partnership whose vision, cohesion and persistence have driven and shaped this work.
13. The question of additionality should be addressed. This relates to how much of what Growing Together has done would have happened anyway. It is impossible to know what lies down “the road not taken”; however, it is reasonable to assume that alternative funding would only have been secured where a person or organisation placed a sufficiently high priority on securing those funds and had the time, knowledge and skills to pursue funding through an increasingly difficult fundraising landscape. Very few of the grants made and directly managed projects meet both criteria. BGN nursery, Little Fishes and Free 2 Talk are obvious candidates but even they would have been seeking funds from very competitive national sources and could not take success for granted. It’s hard to avoid a conclusion that the level of additionality has been very high.
14. The programme leaves a wide range of legacy benefits that will ensure its impact will continue to be felt by the community for many years, or decades, to come.
15. The programme has been fortunate in experiencing no major problems either within itself or in its dealings with partners. A number of Partnership members have also spoken of the value of a stable core leadership group – Chair, Deputy, LTO Chief Executive and Programme Co-ordinator – consisting of very experienced people who have bonded well as a team and remained together from start to end.

***Peter Strachan***

***Programme Co-ordinator***

***March 2020***