



Essex LDP Evaluation Workstream Greening Basildon – improving green spaces in the Felmores, Five Links and Lee Chapel areas of Basildon.

October 2023



Project status:

In progress



LDP funding:

Not known



Objectives:

Working with local residents to improve the street scene and biodiversity of Basildon's most deprived estates. By doing so, improving community cohesion, reducing loneliness, and improving both the mental and physical health of participants.



Consulted:

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Gareth Evans, Operations Manager, Trust Links
Site visit to Basildon

The project

The objective of the project is for Trust Links to work with local residents to improve the street scene and biodiversity of Basildon's most deprived estates. By doing so, it aims to improve community cohesion, reducing loneliness, and improve both the mental and physical health of participants.

However, faced with a range of delays, Trust Links has changed the original scope of the project in order to commence engagement with the local community. This has involved working with the Parks division of Basildon Council to develop a project where the local community restores the neglected Mediterranean Garden in Northlands Park next to the Felmores Estate. Trust Links has also run a series of free events in local libraries covering activities such as making bird feeders; again, this initiative is not part of the original Greening Basildon proposal.



This has been a very challenging project. It has taken a lot of time get all the players on board and get it underway.

Matthew King



Key findings

- 1 Since it launched in October 2022, the project has faced the major challenge of agreeing suitable locations on the three estates for the greening work to take place. By July 2023 only one site had been identified and a project launched in the Felmores Estate. This delay is mainly down to uncertainty over the land ownership of possible greening sites and means that sites owned by Essex County Council cannot be used. Basildon Council has also raised concerns about the ongoing maintenance costs of any new green areas.
- 2 Overall, Trust Links has found handling the delay very challenging, and although formal agreements with Basildon Council have now been established, believe that these should have been in place before the launch, and note this has delayed the project by around six months. Trust Links also believes that despite reporting these challenges to funders, they have not been well supported in dealing with them.
- 3 Despite these challenges, Trust Links has made progress in building community engagement. For example, they have around forty registered volunteers in Basildon and the Northlands Park project attracts between four and ten participants every week. They have also had a good response from the local community on ideas on how this space should be developed.

The site visit

The NSMC visited Greening Basildon's project to renovate the Mediterranean Gardens in Northlands Park in July 2023. We received a warm welcome from the Trust Links team and local residents who attended.

- 1 The work party was attended by three members of the Trust Links project, along with two Trust Link volunteers. The local ward councillor also attended along with a local resident who came for some of the session but left early. Later, three local young boys joined the group who had attended before and enjoyed participating. Staff told us that several regular local residents who normally attend were unavailable on the day.
- 2 Our overall impression (from this single visit) is that local residents' engagement with the project is still limited, and Trust Link and its own volunteers continue to carry the project. However, it was encouraging to see several residents who were using the park during the work party, stop to ask questions and express their support for the work being carried out.
- 3 Local engagement will have to increase quickly if Trust Links' aim of withdrawing from the project and encouraging the local community to take over the management and upkeep of the Mediterranean Garden is to be realised.
- 4 At the end of the work party, we visited the previous initiative completed by Trust Links as part of the Greening Basildon project. This project involved working with the community to install and maintain planters in the Felmores Estate. This project was completed at the end of 2022. In our view, the state of these planters – given that it was the height of summer – were disappointing.

NSMC comments

- 1 This is a clearly a project facing challenges and we are impressed by Trust Links' efforts to overcome these, while at the same time commencing engagement activities with their target communities. We note that the time taken to overcome these challenges has cost Trust Links a considerable amount of unbudgeted time.
- 2 Trust Links is frustrated about the lack of progress on this project and are conscious that funding ends in October 2024. This frustration is increased as they have already successfully worked on a similar project in Southend which did not face the same land ownership challenges.
- 3 Clearly, this project has suffered from insufficient stakeholder engagement with the key players (especially certain sectors within Basildon Council), prior to its approval. The land ownership issues along with the higher costs that Basildon Council may face in maintaining the green spaces make this a more complex project than originally envisaged and it is surprising that these issues were not identified during project inception and flagged as a risk.
- 4 Faced with these challenges, Trust Links has done an excellent job in getting this project off the ground but, in their view, would have clearly appreciated a more hands-on approach from the funder(s) when they faced difficulties.
- 5 This type of community project is often the most difficult to implement, especially in areas where community involvement is not usual or expected. Therefore, ample time needs to be a time designated at the start of each project where the team can spend time with the community building trust and enthusiasm.

Felmores Estate planters

