

Strengthening Local Communities Programme Evaluation: Forest Green Project

September 2020

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

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Further information

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Forest Green

1. Introduction

This document is the final evaluation report for the Forest Green project, delivered as Stroud's contribution to the Strengthening Local Communities programme. It details the development of the project model and the delivery of key project activities with attention to the context, rationale, perceived benefits, challenges and learning. The final section summarises the project and its outcomes.

2. The project

Forest Green is a small community situated within the district of Stroud, on the outskirts of the nearby town of Nailsworth. With a population of approximately 1,793 (mid 2015 population estimates, ONS), it is one of the smaller areas within the Strengthening Local Communities project.¹ The area sits at the top of a hill leading out of Nailsworth town centre, towards the Forest Green Rovers football stadium that sits on the other side of the village.

Forest Green was identified at the start of the SLC project by Stroud District Council as a priority area in which to deliver focused community development work in order to promote health and wellbeing.² Neighbourhoods were selected by District Council on the basis that there were existing health needs as well as some social capital with which to work, along with a potential openness amongst residents to get involved in community work.³

The overall aim of the project has been to 'develop a healthier community where there are healthier opportunities for socialising, eating, learning and taking care of ourselves and each other.'⁴ In order to do this the area adopted a community organising approach to community development, the details of which are explained further in the description of the model in section 2.

Anyone living in the local area could be a potential beneficiary of the project and activities have not been targeted at a specific group or focused on a pre-conceived set of issues. However, one of the broad objectives of the project has been to identify local leaders who might exhibit the potential to take on responsibility for key issues, campaigns or projects for which they display an interest or passion.⁵ A primary aim of the project has therefore been to successfully identify and empower a group of local people fitting this description to drive the work forward themselves by the end of the funded period and beyond.⁵ The hope was that this established group would then be sustainable and able to carry the work forward with little support from any paid worker.

Local priorities

Due to the model applied to this project, pre-conceived ideas about local priorities were on the whole avoided. Initial guesses about the direction the project would take included issues such as supporting young families, teenagers and isolated older people,⁴ however it was stressed from the outset that priorities would be dependent on local people and their individual ideas, concerns, strengths and passions. In this sense it could be broadly stated that the priority for the area has been to bring local people together in order for them to connect with one another and drive forward local causes that mattered to them.

¹ Stroud small area profile

² Strengthening Local Communities Summary Updated Objectives Sep 2018

³ Prevention Fund – District Council bid

⁴ Information gathering – Stroud, Forest Green document

⁵ Interview with the Community Organisers, 30th April 2019

The model

In order to facilitate the local priorities above, the area took a 'community organising' approach to asset-based community development, making it unique within the SLC project.

As a movement, community organising was borne out of the ideas of Saul Alinsky, a self-described 'radical pragmatist' who was critical of apathy and inaction within communities, advocating instead for what he described as 'creative disruption'⁶. This original form of community organising is now viewed as relatively extreme; Alinsky talked, for example, of agitating communities in order to bring about change, stating that community organisers must "rub raw the sores of discontent".⁷ Alinsky's ideas have therefore been adapted over time, although many of the underlying principles such as power - who has it and how the balance of power can be shifted within society⁶ – remain the same.

Modern community organising therefore tends to focus on empowering and encouraging people to get involved in their local community, with the aim of establishing a group of active citizens who are organised to work together towards a common set of goals. The guidance for organisers is quite specific, with a clear set of guiding principles. As figure one below shows, much of a community organiser's role focuses on reaching out and listening to local people's concerns, identifying local leaders and brokering connections, with the overarching aim of bringing about sustainable change.⁸

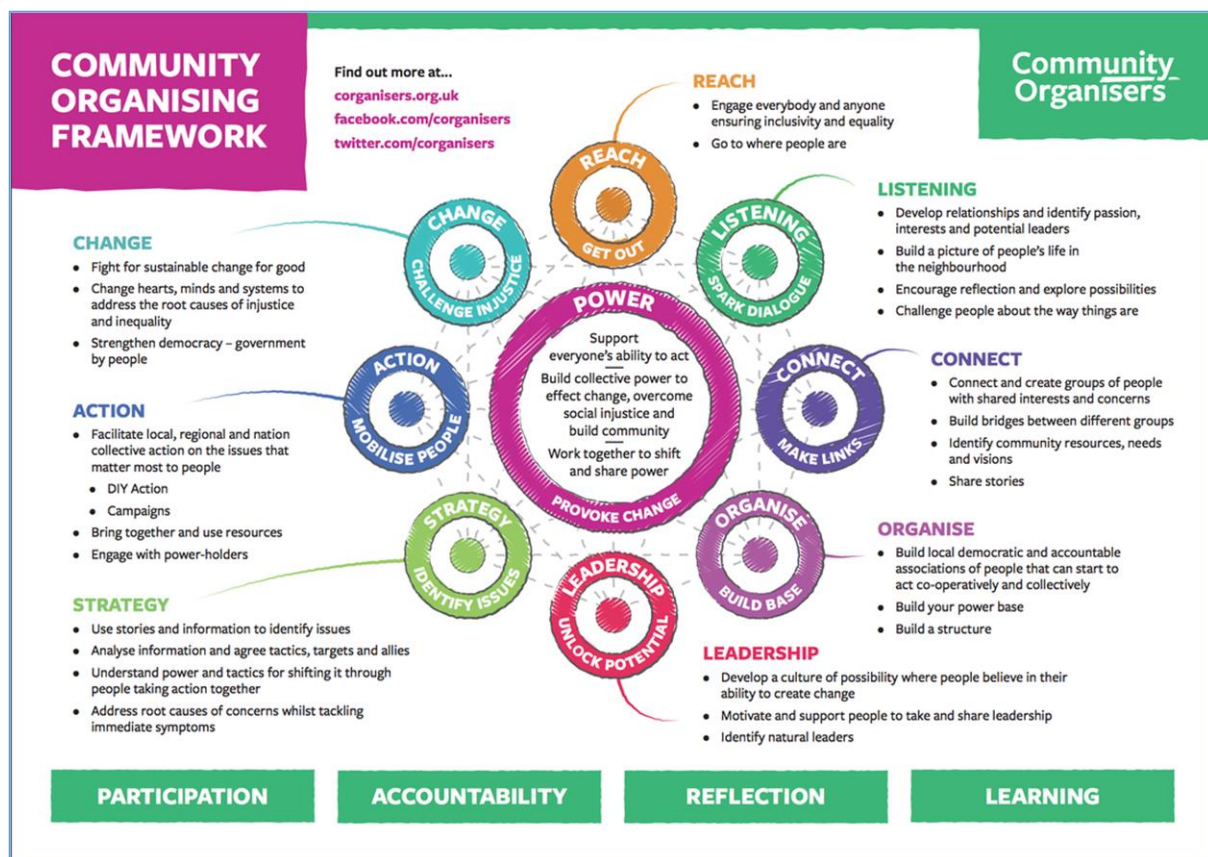


Figure 1: The Community Organising Model⁸

⁶ Taylor, M., 2011. Community organising and the Big Society: is Saul Alinsky turning in his grave? *Voluntary Sector Review*, 2(2), pp.257-264. (p.260)

⁷ Checkoway, B., 1995. Six strategies of community change. *Community Development Journal*, 30(1), pp.2-20.

⁸ <http://www.communitycolab.co.uk/award-in-community-organising-l2l3.html>

Community organising in Forest Green

Two community organisers were employed to work on the project in Forest Green, one with a proven track record and many years of experience of this way of working (referred to in this document as Community Organiser 1), and the other a local resident with little prior experience or knowledge of community work (Community Organiser 2). One of the aims of this project was to train a local resident in community development, and the second worker was therefore initially recruited primarily due to his connection to the area, his local knowledge and his emerging volunteering interests at a local youth club.

Community Organiser 1 had been working in community development for around eight years at the start of the project, having become disheartened by the private sector and inspired by travelling through small, closely-knit communities in other countries.⁵ The worker was recruited to one of the early community organising cohorts and was trained in working with residents to encourage social action.⁹

Forest Green employed a form of the model known as ‘neighbourhood community organising’, which focuses on specific geographical areas or communities of interest. The aim within this context was to achieve consensus amongst residents as opposed to agitating the community or overly politicising local issues. The more experienced worker therefore viewed community organising within this local context as a means for ‘creating the conditions for change’ and ‘holding the space’:

*“...So sometimes it’s about holding your nerve...it’s about saying you have faith in the people and in the process that they will eventually come up with the right outcome.” **Community Organiser 1**⁵*

Clarifying this approach further, the worker explained that the iron rule of community organising is ‘don’t do for others who can do for themselves’ – in other words, if you create a state of dependency whereby you are acting on the behalf of others then you run the risk of ‘suffocating the growth’ of those individuals and they will not be empowered to do anything for themselves as a result.⁵

The framework that the workers used in Forest Green was a relatively prescribed process based on the model in figure one, although adapted slightly and largely consisting of the following steps:



Figure 2 – the community organising process in Forest Green⁵

In Forest Green, this meant reaching out to residents by door knocking and ‘walking’ the local area on a regular basis, listening to resident’s thoughts and concerns in order to identify people with ideas, passions and interests. During these conversations a framework of questions was used which also created a record of what had been discussed. If the organisers sensed that there was a potential leader within the community then they would aim to perform a brokerage role and connect them with appropriate individuals and organisations that may be able to assist in developing their ideas. These could be organisations that already existed locally, or it might be a case of linking up like-minded individuals with shared interests within the Forest Green area. Lastly the organisers would support

⁹ ALS 3 meeting notes

members of the community to develop their project, skills and strategy in order to implement change through action. However, this did not mean doing things on their behalf, but rather encouraging them to take ownership of the process themselves.⁵

In the latter stages of the project the original, more experienced worker left the project and was replaced by another worker based within the same organisation (henceforth referred to as Community Organiser 3). This worker also had many years' experience of working in this way and was an equally strong advocate of community organising:

*"I've been working in neighbourhoods in excess of 30 years, and before I became a Community Organiser in 2013 I was the Chief Executive of a neighbourhood based charity in Gloucester City. I've written some huge national bids where we would look at stats and things and say 'we know what is needed here'. I would never go back to that again. Put in context like that, community organising is the right way to do it. It's a two way conversation – people who live in our communities that need support...they are the experts, they live here, they know what goes on...from that point of view I would say that Community Organising is the best way to do community work." **Community Organiser 3**¹⁰*

The overall aim of the project has therefore been to find enough community leaders to create an organisation under the banner of 'Friends of Forest Green' (an approach that the lead organisation has found to be successful in other areas they operate in locally, such as Gloucester Park). Friends of Forest Green has indeed recently been successfully established and is in the process of becoming a constituted group with a clear strategy based on what matters to local people gathered from the conversation data detailed above. More information on the establishment of this group and its achievements to date can be found in section 4.8 below.

3. Profile of the project area

The area

Forest Green is a distinct area, and it is important to differentiate it from the larger town of Stroud, and indeed from nearby Nailsworth. Whilst the latter has a central point consisting of numerous shops, restaurants and cafes, Forest Green has very little in the way of tangible community assets, despite being only a mile further up the hill in the direction of Nympsfield.

Originally the project was planned to focus specifically on the area of Lawnside, but this area was ultimately deemed too small and coverage expanded to include all of Forest Green (which incorporates Lawnside – see figure 3 below).

¹⁰ Second Interview with Community Organisers, 3rd February 2020

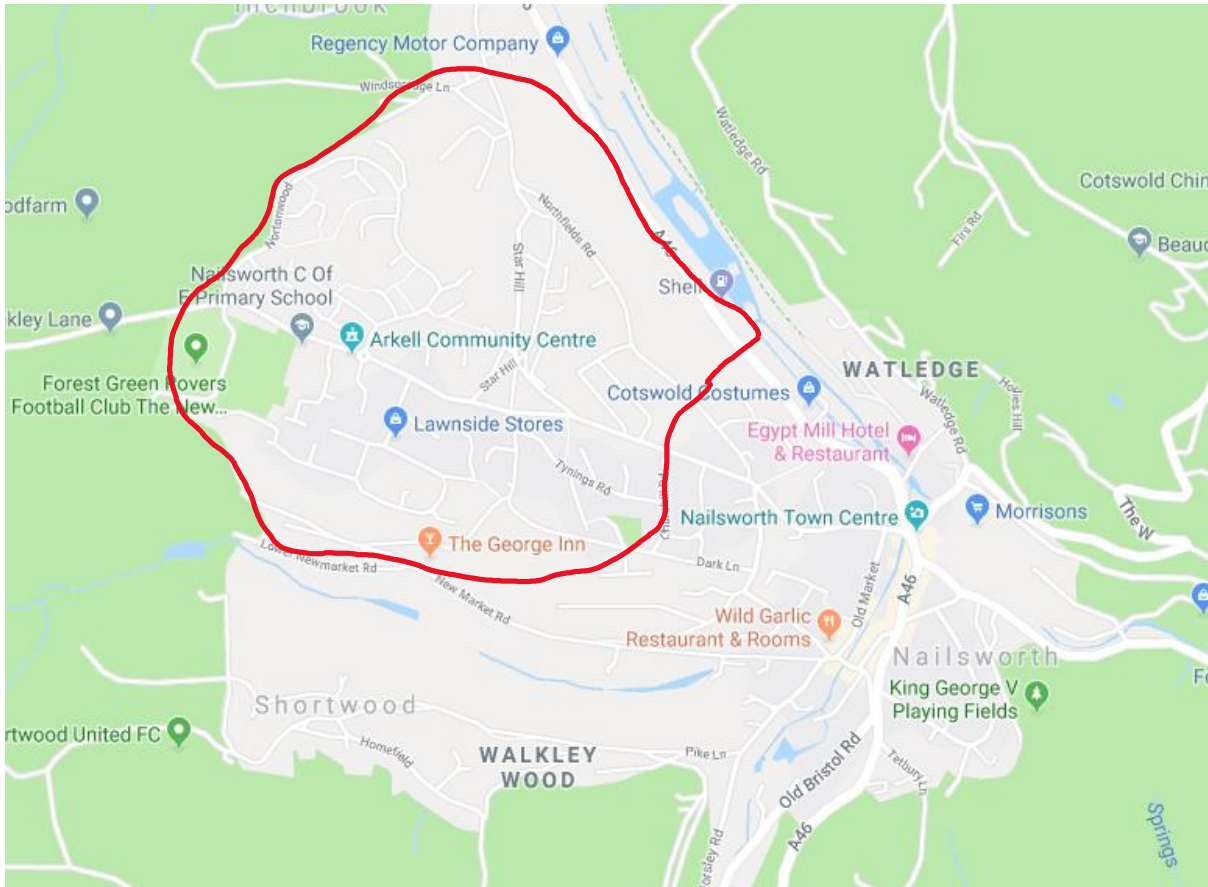


Figure 3 – approximate project area

Demographics

Data is difficult to find for Forest Green specifically as most previous information gathering has focused on a wider geographical area. However, at the start of the project the following information was known about the locality.

Ethnicity

The only available local Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) data is for Nailsworth, which states that this population is the 3rd highest within the Stroud locality at 2.7%. This is higher than the district average. ⁴

Economic status

The wider area is reasonably affluent, with all residents within the ward sitting within the second least deprived quintile of the national Index of Multiple Deprivation.¹ However, within Forest Green the picture appears to be quite different. It has, for example, one of the highest levels of people claiming Incapacity benefit in the County of Gloucestershire, ranking within the top 10 – 25% in the country overall. Furthermore, there are high levels of lone parents claiming benefits and roughly 15.8% of children are living in low income households. A high proportion of children are also claiming free school meals within the area, and Forest Green had the third highest level of food bank recipients within Stroud during 2014. ⁴

Age

Approximately 130 local people are aged under 5, and 34% of the population of Nailsworth are pensioners (figures for older people in Forest Green specifically are not known). ⁴

Health data

In the 2011 census for Nailsworth, 46 respondents stated that they were in very bad health, 263 others reported bad health and 1,117 had a long term health condition. Smoking, drinking and obesity for the town are average for England. Although again there is no data specifically for Forest Green, this information does give an indication of the local population's potential health needs.

4. Main activities and project developments

4.1 Overview

The project has varied slightly from other projects in the SLC suite in that it did not set out to implement a range of target interventions or initiatives. As a result progress has been steady and building towards tangible outcomes over the course of the project, and since our interim report many of these outcomes are now coming to fruition. This section re-caps some of the earlier preparatory work of the Community Organisers, but some new activities are now underway and showing much promise, and these are also detailed here.

4.2 Asset mapping

It was known at the start of this project that the Forest Green area had very little in the way of local community assets on which to draw. However, one of the first tasks undertaken by Community Organiser 2 was to conduct a community asset map of the local area. As the worker is a Forest Green resident he was able to draw on his local knowledge and contacts to do this, and his findings are summarised in the box below. These remain unchanged and no additional assets have been identified since our interim report.

Physical spaces

The primary physical space in the locality is the **Arkell Community Centre**, a community facility that was built as part of the area's regeneration strategy.¹¹ The centre offers facilities to the local community that includes space hire for events, parties, office space or exhibitions. Events that are currently running at the Centre include a knitting group, Citizen's Advice drop in, lunch clubs, Pilates and pop-up cafes during half term weeks. These are all organised by external groups and agencies.

There are some facilities for young people locally, including a **Multi Use Game Area (MUGA)** at Lawnside which is open to all ages but primarily used by young people. On the area boundary (and technically in neighbouring Nailsworth) is the Nailsworth Youth Club, offering youth sessions, football, meetings and space for parties.

The Forest Green area generally enjoys good access to green spaces and there are a number of **parks** locally, on Norton Wood, Lawnside and Tynnings. Next to Norton Wood park is the **wood** itself, offering country walks and a space in which to enjoy the local wildlife. There is an additional **play area at Beechwood Close**, and open space for dog walking and recreational activities at **Miles Marling Field**. This space has recently been refurbished.

There is an **allotment** on Hayes Road, which is largely used by older people and is currently not very well known in the community.

Schools

¹¹ www.arkellcommunitycentre.org.uk/history/regeneration

There is only one local school within the area of Forest Green, and that is **Nailsworth Primary**. The school currently has 198 pupil enrolled.

Local economy

There is only one shop in Forest Green, the **Lawnside Stores Premier**.

Associations

Forest Green Rovers football stadium is within the area boundary and sits at the top of the hill that runs through the village.¹²

Whilst many of these assets make a positive contribution to the area, there have been issues associated with some of them. For example, the Arkell Centre is well used by external agencies but continues to offer little in the way of community events that are run by local people or groups. There is an additional issue in that the centre's trustees are all councillors, some of whom have never actually been in the building and none of whom live locally. This has meant that there is no reduced fee to promote community hire, and the centre is largely run as a business rather than a community asset as a result. The trustees have told the workers that they are looking at changing their constitution, but so far this has not happened. The hope is that if the centre becomes more widely used by the community, then the asset will be energised and these ideas will be challenged, but again this is so far slow to emerge.⁵

There are also challenges with other community assets. The youth club for example offers good activities for younger children, but there is little for older children and teenagers to do at the club. As a result of a general lack of activities for this age group locally, there have also been problems with low-level antisocial behaviour, and the Miles Marling field in particular has a reputation for drug and alcohol use (although this has been recently refurbished which may reinvigorate the facility).⁵

Whilst having a football stadium on the doorstep is no doubt beneficial for the local economy, there are also issues that occur, particularly on match days and primarily associated with parking (or the lack thereof). Furthermore, the stadium previously boasted a gym that the local people were welcome to use, but this has since been turned into a bar, which has proved unpopular. There are also plans to move the stadium within the next few years and to replace it with an eco housing complex. Again, whilst the housing would be welcome there are questions around the potential impact on the local community, particularly when there is already an apparent lack of facilities.⁵

Community Organiser 2 took a number of photographs of the area which can be seen on the following page.

¹² SLC Project Tracker 13.09.2019



Figure 4 - The community allotments



Figure 5 - Forest Green Rovers football stadium



Figure 6 - Local children's play area

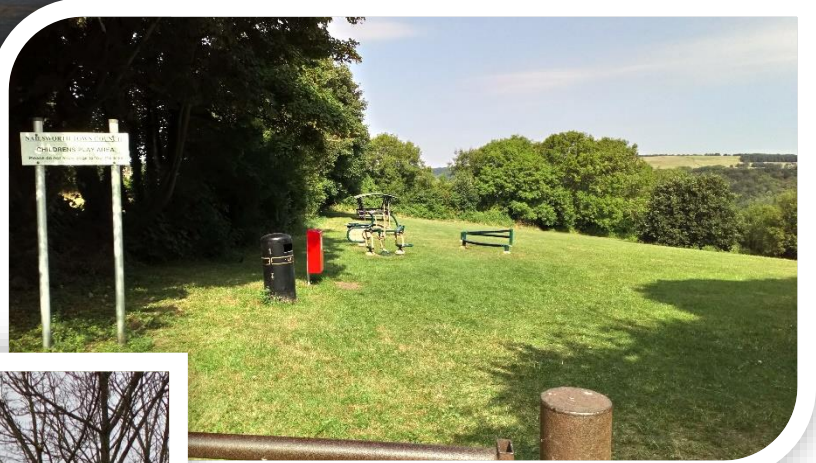


Figure 7 - Miles Marling Playing Field



Figure 8 - Nailsworth Primary School

4.3 Door knocking and 'listenings'

Door knocking began at the start of the project and constituted a large proportion of the day-to-day work of the community organisers in the warmer months. The Community Organisers tended to conduct this work in pairs, initially knocking on doors together as the less experienced worker was still being trained, but later splitting up to cover doors within a designated area as he gained confidence in working independently and talking with local people.

The workers have been using a door knocking question framework that consists of the following eight questions and additional prompts:

- 1) What do you love about living in the area? How long have you lived here? Is there anything you would miss?
- 2) Do you have any concerns about the area? Anything that makes you feel angry or sad?
- 3) What would you like the area to look like in 5 – 10 years? Do you have a vision or dream for the area?
- 4) Do you have any ideas that builds on your love or tackles your concerns?
- 5) Do you feel you have a say in how your community is run? If yes, why and if no then why?
- 6) Do you use or have you used the Arkell Centre? If yes then what for? If no, then why not?
- 7) Do you feel you have easy access to local services? GP, Pharmacy, Banking etc?
- 8) Do you know anyone else who feels passionate about the area? If yes, can you introduce us to them?

During these conversations, notes were taken and responses input into a database in order to help identify patterns and commonalities. Any common themes were noted and it was hoped that these would serve to further connect local people and unite them to campaign for common causes. 'Listenings' were also conducted with small groups of people in an informal setting in order to further discuss any issues raised and seek potential solutions.

Community Organiser 2 conducted an analysis of these conversations following the first wave of door knocking and listening activity and produced a number of pie charts to demonstrate the thoughts and feelings of the local community. A selection of these can be found in figure 9 below.

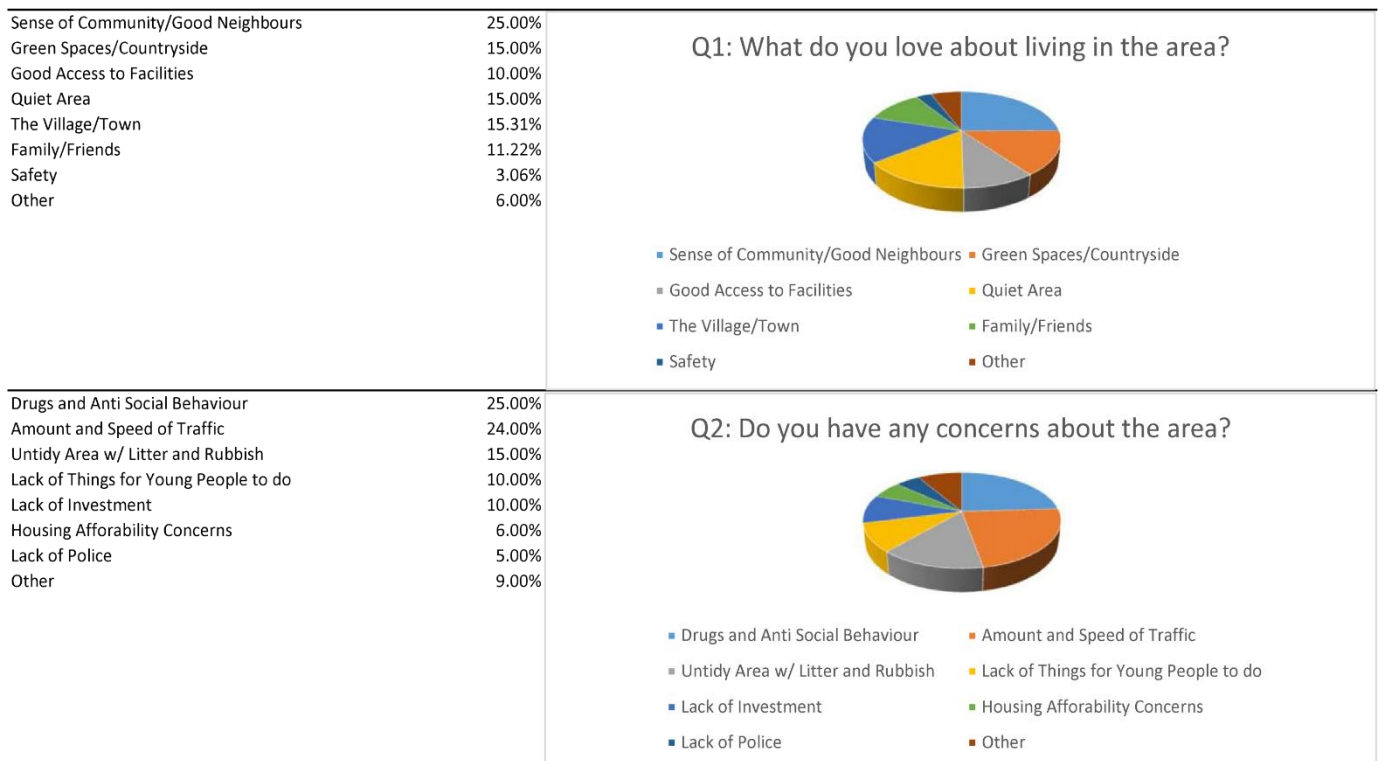


Figure 9: Example of the analysis undertaken by Community Organiser 2

In summary, people appreciated the fact that Forest Green is a quiet and peaceful area that has good access to the countryside. Neighbours and members of the community were thought to be friendly and tended to look out for one another, and the local amenities in Nailsworth at the bottom of the hill were thought to be good.

Concerns in the community centred on things such as perceived antisocial behaviour by young people, which included drug taking, bad language and the misuse of alcohol. Many were also worried about traffic - particularly in the Spring Hill area – as well as the amount of litter that could be seen in and around the local streets.

When pressed for ideas about what could be done to improve the area, many residents were unsure of any specific measures beyond simply tidying it up and not losing any more green spaces. There was however a keenness amongst some residents to increase the amount of facilities and community projects in the area, and a community café was a popular suggestion.

Another question that people were asked during these conversations was whether they felt they had ownership of the area and a say in how things were run. Many responded that they did not, and that they would not know how to contact their local councillor if they needed to.¹³

An unintended but welcome outcome of the door knocking exercises has been that contact has been made with some socially isolated residents living locally, and the Community Organisers have been able to connect some of these individuals up to relevant activities where appropriate.

In addition to gathering feedback and generating ideas, the door knocking and listening exercises were also successful in identifying some potential community leaders, some of whom are presented as case studies in section 4.4 below. Written by the junior project worker, these examples also serve as a good way of illustrating the model in Stroud, and perhaps better capture the impact of this project than questionnaire data might have done for this way of working, as discussed in section 4.4.

¹³ Results from conversations with residents PowerPoint presentation

4.4 Baseline questionnaire responses¹⁴

From early on in our evaluation it became clear that the initial plan to collect baseline and follow up questionnaire data for project participants would not be applicable uniformly across all districts. This was particularly true in Forest Green, where the model did not produce regular participants until well into the latter stages of the funded period, and even then the numbers were relatively small. The questionnaires were therefore adapted for Forest Green from the original design to make them fit with questions the Community Organisers wanted to ask residents, with the aim of reducing repetition or duplication of questions.

Two forms were completed and – despite the low numbers - the details are worthy of note given that they demonstrate the ideas and motivations of people who engaged with the project.

Participant One

This participant stated that they were involved in local youth groups, the local parent-teacher association, charity or voluntary groups and a resident's group/neighbourhood watch within the area, so they were already active within the community. They also reported that generally they engaged in social activities more than most people their age.

The participant was interested in organising a community litter pick, to include all ages of residents in Forest Green. The hope was that a litter pick would take place, with another during the summer. They also expressed an interest in establishing a photography club, and were very keen for there to be a community café.

Participant Two

This participant had historically not been as engaged in community activities and only reported past involvement with local social clubs. Unlike the other participant, they were much less involved in social activities generally, reporting that they socialise much less than other people of the same age. They were however hoping to volunteer in the future.

The participant was very keen to start a Sunday league football or 'kick-about' team in Forest Green/Nailsworth. They stated that the purpose of the group would be to help teenagers and others make friends and get outside 'rather than being stuck in their bedrooms'.

When asked how they could be supported, the participant noted that they would need some training (particularly in first aid), as well as support from the community organisers (by 'just being there' or 'checking in').

In addition to their desire to start the football team, they also hoped that the area could have more green spaces, be cleaner and that the roads would be made safer. Additionally they expressed concerns about the lack of affordable housing, and hoped that the community 'could feel like it used to be'.

Both participants offered solutions to some of the concerns that had been raised in the earlier door knocking activity, namely litter and the lack of activities available for young people. The activities suggested by these participants were also both successfully realised, and further details can be found in sections 4.6 and 4.9 below.

¹⁴ Strengthening Local Communities baseline questionnaire for participants

4.5 Case Studies¹⁵

Case Study – Jo*

“Jo came along to the May Day Bank Holiday community litter pick. Jo had seen a leaflet posted through her door and is passionate about keeping the local area tidy and clean. After a full warm listening with her a couple of weeks after the litter pick we found out she often picks up litter up and down Spring Hill, is passionate about growing her own food and would like to get involved with an allotment.

During the community litter pick, Jo met new people and started to discuss the idea of doing more regular litter picks.”

Case Study – Sarah*

“While door knocking, we knocked on Sarah’s door and she was very welcoming and invited us into her home. We had a good conversation with her and found that she had lots of passions and ideas, including dog walking, a travel club, a garden to encourage bees, cycling, driving, crafts and camping.

Sarah went to the Arkell Centre as we suggested to see what goes on there and joined in an art class.

Since then we’ve met up with Sarah twice - once at the pop-up café and another for a coffee in town to develop ideas. When Sarah is around, she is keen to get involved but she also does a lot of travelling, most recently driving around Europe. However, we stay in touch with her and she often sends us what she’s up to on her travels.”

Case Study – Harry*

“Harry came to the popup café in October 2018 where we had a stall with information about the project and were inviting people to have their say about the area. Harry expressed an interest in a community café, pub or similar in the area as there is nothing like that in Forest Green. Harry was also interested in bringing the community together in general.

We took Harry’s contact details and did a full warm listening with him where he echoed our conversation from the pop-up café. We kept up to date with Harry over the next few months.

In early 2019, our newsletter prompted Harry to get back in touch with us, keen to move things along. We met up with Harry again and he had an idea of doing an Easter community litter pick and expressed an interest in photography.

We missed Easter but worked with Harry to organise a community litter pick for the May Day Bank Holiday where we had 14 people show up, which was a success.

Sadly, Harry has had to take a small step back due to ill health but is happy to still get involved when he is up to it and is happy to organise the second community litter pick. He also intends to contact the school again to put it in their newsletter.”

¹⁵ Case studies provided by the junior community organiser

Case Study – Ed*

“At the beginning of 2019, we started to deliver on the things we were planning towards the end of 2018. Ed had read our newsletter and emailed us to say he was keen to share his ideas for the community with us. After going to visit him in his bookstore in Nailsworth, we understood more about his ideas for starting a book club (and how it would differ from other book clubs!), a community chicken run and community litter picking.

Ed left our first meeting with an action to go away and do some research. Ed agreed to speak to his friend who he knew had experience with chickens, and we were going to see if we could get a community rate for the book club so it could be held at the Arkell Centre. We also agreed to talk to the lady who runs the school allotment to see if there might be potential to have chickens there.

Research is ongoing, and we’re keeping in touch. We informed Ed that he could use the lobby at the Arkell centre if he wanted as this is only £10 to hire. Ed came along to the community litter pick held in May (2019).

From the litter pick we connected with another resident who has experience with chickens and are hoping to arrange a meeting with them both soon.”

Case study - Craddock Court

“In December 2018 we contacted Care21 to see who was in charge of the sheltered housing in Nortonwood, Forest Green and head office put us in touch with the newly appointed manager.

We arranged to meet with the manager to explain more about the project. While we were there, a local resident invited us to their next coffee morning, which takes place every Tuesday.

We went along to the coffee morning, introduced ourselves and conducted a group listening exercise with 7 of the residents. We found that they are passionate about the area and that their main concerns were the state of the pavements, litter in the area, no grit bin, lots of dog mess, no bus stop bay lined out and the lack of bins.

The actions from the meeting were to find out how to get hold of some litter picking equipment from the council and to organise a meeting with the local councillor Steve Robinson.

A couple of weeks later we facilitated a meeting where the Craddock Court residents expressed their concerns. From this meeting, Steve went away to try to see what he could do about the pavements and bus stop bay, and to see if he could get any litter picking equipment without all the paperwork.

During this time, we also encouraged the residents to go along to the pop-up café at the Arkell Centre which takes place every half term, and a few of them did. Steve was also able to get some litter picking equipment, so the group went out and did some litter picking.

A couple of months later, the bus stop bay was lined, much to the delight of the residents.

The residents have also expressed a desire to meet the warden, and we are in the process of arranging and facilitating that meeting.”

The project's listening activities clearly inspired people to get involved in their local community, and many contributed good ideas about how to take this forward. As was stated in the description of the model however, this work takes time and the ethos of allowing members of the community to take the lead can make the work slow, which can in turn be further halted when life events such as personal commitments or ill health are factored in.

However, these case studies effectively illustrate that the model has been successful in identifying a number of potential leaders within the community, and encouragingly some of these residents are now also active members of the Friends of Forest Green group.

4.6 Litter picking

As the case studies in section 4.5 testify, one of the most successful outcomes from the Forest Green project to date has been the community litter picks. This is perhaps due to there being a common consensus that keeping the area tidy is a priority for local people. It was a theme that came up often and the number of attendees at the two litter picking events so far have been impressive, with 13 in total at the first event and 17 at the second. One of the many positive things about the litter picking exercises is that they serve as an intergenerational activity, and at the second pick children outnumbered the adults, with 10 attending in total.¹²

Craddock Court residents now even have their own litter picking equipment and are therefore able to arrange these events on a regular basis.



Figure 10 - Above: members of the community head out of the Arkell Centre to a community litter pick

Figure 11 - Left: The senior community organiser with local residents, ready to go on a community litter pick

4.7 Communications

There are a number of ways in which the community organisers kept in touch with the local community and update them about events and project developments. Much of their daily communication throughout the project tended to be through verbal, face-to-face discussions with people they met on the street, but there are also a number of written and electronic channels through which information has been communicated, and these are outlined below.



Figure 12 – Example of the community newsletter

Newsletter¹⁶

In Winter 2018 the community organisers produced a 'Friends of Forest Green' newsletter (pictured above). The purpose of the newsletter was to introduce themselves to members of the community who were not yet familiar with their work, but also to update local people on the feedback that had been received so far. Highlights included a summary of the top five things that people had reported they loved about the area, as well as the top five things that concerned them most. As noted in the door knocking analysis, people most loved the surrounding environment and the friendly sense of community. People were also positive about the connection to Forest Green Rovers. However, the lack of activities for young people, drug and alcohol activity, litter, traffic and intimidation of young people were all listed as concerns.

The newsletter also offered a number of suggested solutions for action, including litter picks, a photography group, walking group and a new resident's group (this edition was published prior to those activities becoming established).

Unfortunately there do not appear to have been any further editions of the newsletter since the winter 2018 publication.

Community blog¹⁷

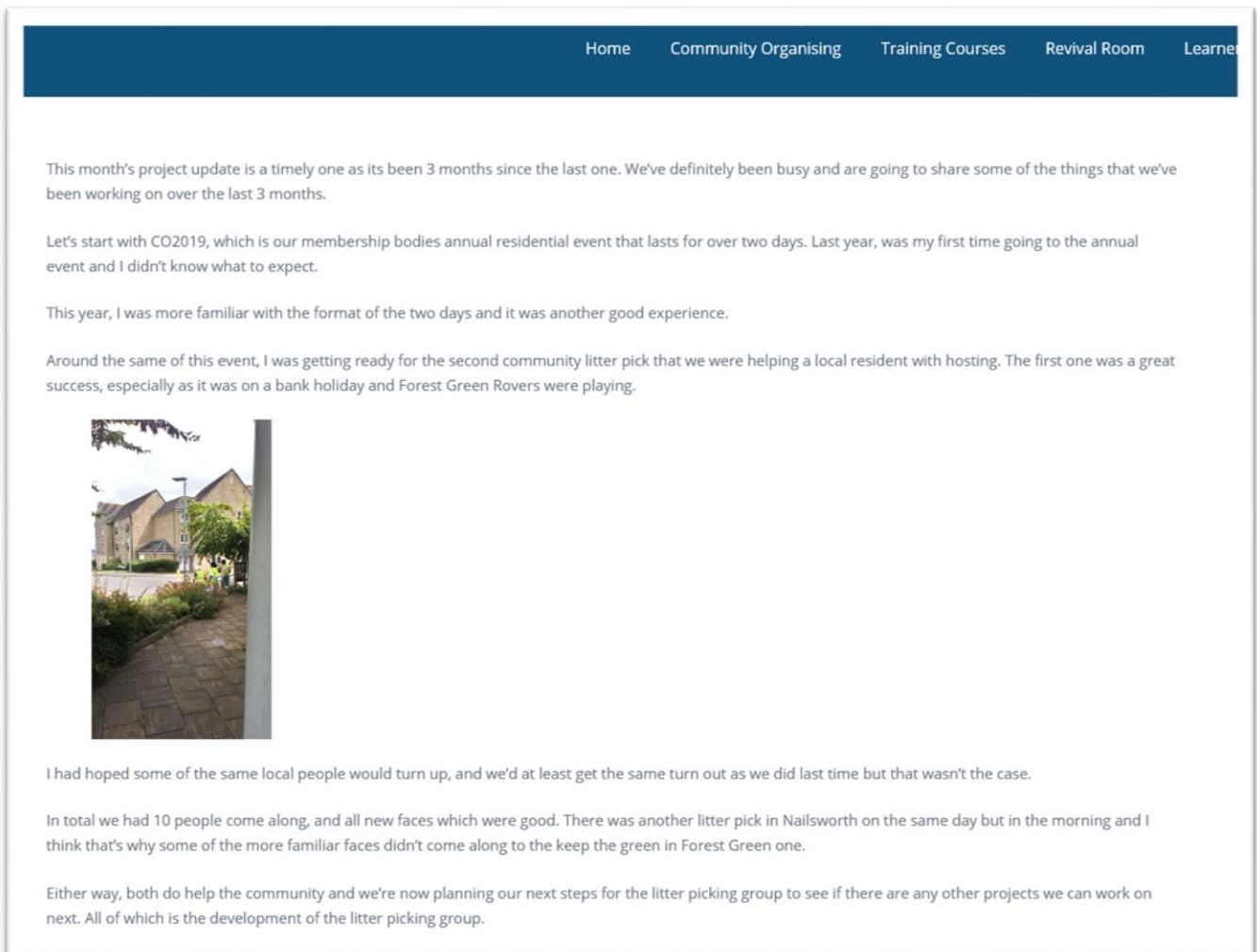
Community Organiser 2 produced a blog for the project in November 2018, with further posts in January, February, May and August of 2019. The purpose of the blog was again to notify the community of project developments and the progression of ideas.

The tone of the blog was personable and friendly, describing in detail the work of the community organisers as the months progressed. However, the gaps between blog posts increased as time went on which may have affected the readership (although it was not clear how many were reading it

¹⁶ Friends of Forest Green newsletter, Winter 2018

¹⁷ Friend of Forest Green community organisers blog

initially) and it may also have been the case that as support for activities increased there was less time to keep it updated. An example taken from the August blog can be seen below.



The screenshot shows a website with a dark blue navigation bar at the top containing the links: Home, Community Organising, Training Courses, Revival Room, and Learn. Below the navigation bar, the main content area has a white background. The text reads: "This month's project update is a timely one as its been 3 months since the last one. We've definitely been busy and are going to share some of the things that we've been working on over the last 3 months. Let's start with CO2019, which is our membership bodies annual residential event that lasts for over two days. Last year, was my first time going to the annual event and I didn't know what to expect. This year, I was more familiar with the format of the two days and it was another good experience. Around the same of this event, I was getting ready for the second community litter pick that we were helping a local resident with hosting. The first one was a great success, especially as it was on a bank holiday and Forest Green Rovers were playing." Below this text is a photograph of a residential street with a paved path, a white fence, and houses in the background. The text continues: "I had hoped some of the same local people would turn up, and we'd at least get the same turn out as we did last time but that wasn't the case. In total we had 10 people come along, and all new faces which were good. There was another litter pick in Nailsworth on the same day but in the morning and I think that's why some of the more familiar faces didn't come along to the keep the green in Forest Green one. Either way, both do help the community and we're now planning our next steps for the litter picking group to see if there are any other projects we can work on next. All of which is the development of the litter picking group."

Unfortunately this too appears to have not been updates in the latter stages of the project, and there have been no further posts to the blog since August 2019.

Figure 13 - Example page from the community blog

[Facebook](#)¹⁸

Community Organiser 2 is also responsible for running the Friends of Forest Green Facebook page, which currently has 70 'likes'. This page continues to be managed well and is updated regularly, and has recently started to feature updates on local activities (such as the football club and Nailsworth in Bloom) as well as short films made by the community organisers. The page currently features an in-depth video discussion between Community Organiser 2 and the project lead from Stroud District Council in which they talk about the aims of the project. There are also a number of photos on the page advertising activities or showing them in action.

¹⁸ Friends of Forest Green Facebook page



Figure 14: Still from the video interview between Community Organiser 2 and the District Council lead¹⁸

4.8 Friends of Forest Green

The primary objective of the project from the start has been to create a group of local residents who can operate under the name of 'Friends of Forest Green'. It was always hoped that through the door knocking and listening activities outlined above the project would be successful in identifying key members of the community with enough common ideas for change that they would be united in a residents group under this banner.



Figure 15: A pop up consultation event at the Arkell Centre

The first of these meetings was convened in November 2018 and three local residents attended, all of whom lived within walking distance of the Arkell Centre where the meeting was held. Many of the

residents at this meeting came with ideas for developing the local area or introducing new activities. For example:

Resident one: Was already in the process of starting up a football club at the school on Sundays at 10.30am, and was being supported to do so by Community Organiser 2. This resident was in the process of applying for a DBS check and would be ready to start very soon.

Resident two: Has an area of wasteland behind her house which was once used as a vegetable patch but has since grown over. She wondered if it might be possible to clear it and for the community to 'borrow' it – perhaps to use as a seated area for those who do not have a garden.

Resident three: Was interested in putting benches outside the Arkell Community Centre so that people without gardens have somewhere to sit and meet local people. He felt that this would also help to make the community centre a focal point again.¹⁹

The residents also used the meeting to discuss general points about the local community, and after much discussion decided that initially the group would focus on the two local priorities of:

- 1) Antisocial behaviour
- 2) Traffic and campaigning for traffic calming measures

Following this initial meeting the resident's group has met for a second time in January 2020, with another scheduled for March. At the second meeting the original attendees were encouraged to bring along a friend who would also be interested in joining the group, and the numbers are steadily growing as a result. The Community Organisers were also encouraged by the fact that those who had been unable to attend this meeting had given apologies in advance, which demonstrated a good level of commitment.

"The environment for change has been created. A group of residents have come together... community conversations have been had, we're ready to go. It takes time, you know? It's not a knee jerk thing, it's not someone parachuting in and saying 'this is what this community needs' – it's a process." **Community Organiser 3**

4.9 Community football group

As the result of the idea of one resident, a community kick-about group now takes place every week at the local school. At the time of writing the group has been running for four weeks, and attendance is steadily increasing from 4 attendees in the first two weeks, to 7 and 10 attendees in the third and fourth weeks.

Not only is this a positive outcome for the local community, but it is also enabling a local person to gain experience in running a group, as well as achieving a first aid qualification and accreditation with the Football Association (FA). There has also



Figure 16: Photo from the community kick-about¹⁸

¹⁹ Notes from observations at the first resident's meeting

been excellent support for this venture from nearby Forest Green Rovers, and their community engagement worker has kindly loaned equipment and donated some footballs to the group whilst they await FA funding.

4.9.1 Training a community organiser

A final output from the project that is worthy of mention is the training that the more junior community organiser has received throughout. He has now completed and passed his Community Organising qualification, and combined with his knowledge of the local area (he remains a resident) therefore represents a valuable asset to the community.

“[Community Organiser 2] is modest and his leadership skills have been developed over the two years. Although community organising is looking to identify local people as leaders, [he] is a local person himself so he will be seen as a leader in his community now that he has these skills. His facilitation skills are extremely good as well.” **Community Organiser 3**

4.9.2 Attendance at external events and meetings

The community organisers have attended a number of external events in order to promote their work and invite people to engage with the project, as well as visiting local stakeholders and nearby projects. These activities are outlined in table 1, which is adapted from a record kept by the community organisers.¹²

Whilst engaging with local stakeholders has not been the primary aim of the project, reaching out to other agencies and businesses in the area has meant that the community organisers have sometimes been able to find interested members of the community through events organised by others. It has also allowed connections to be made with these agencies that may facilitate taking resident’s ideas forward.

Table 1 – engagement with external agencies and businesses¹²

Description of the activity	Date	Agencies/ businesses Involved	Notes: Achievements, challenges etc.
Breakfast café at the Arkell Community Centre during half term.	22.10.18	Nailsworth Town Council, Arkell Centre Community Trust, Hobbs Bakery, Forest Green Residents Association (dissolved but had money left), Country Quality Meat	Low attendance. Event not organised by us but we went along to engage with local residents. We had our own table and banner displayed. Spoke to all residents and got feedback on their loves, concerns and ideas for the area.
Mental Health Event at FGR to raise awareness of mental health and the different services available	10.10.18	Different organisations and agencies around the county who would be in mental health.	Very good in attended from what I saw. Didn't see any young people as probably in school, college or at Uni. Overall a good and interesting event.

Halloween party at the Arkell Centre for local children	26.10.18	Arkell Centre Trust, Nailsworth Town Council, Forest Green Residents Association	Low attendance. Expected to be more as was a huge success last year with over 25+ kids. This year only 8. Our job was to talk to parents as they came in and start up conversations.
Indoor car boot sale giving the opportunity to people to sell their unwanted goods before Xmas	18.11.18	Arkell Centre Trust, Nailsworth Town Council	Good attendance, didn't stay for the whole event to see how many people actually turned up but from I did see was good.
Breakfast café at the Arkell Community Centre during half term.	25.02.19	Nailsworth Town Council, Arkell Centre Community Trust, Hobbs Bakery, Forest Green Residents Association (disolved but had money left), Country Quality Meat	Attendance growing as community members getting familiar with the pop up café.
Attendance at Nailsworth Youth Forum x 2	?	Local young people, youth forum organisers.	The junior project worker has now attended this forum twice. He has spoken to local young people and conducted a group listening exercise.
Picking up litter around Forest Green - Lawnside and Norton Wood Area	05.05.19		Great attendance for a litter pick and collected 6 full bags of litter.
Picking up litter around Forest Green - Lawnside and Norton Wood Area	14.07.19		Great attendance again, and all new local people compared to the last community litter pick.

4.9.3 Project activity

Table 2: Summary timeline of project events

Project timeline		
2018	January	
	February	
	March	EKC attended ALS 1
	April	
	May	
	June	EKC and GB attended ALS 2
	July	Started door knocking
	August	

	September	Hosted ALS 3 at the Arkell Centre
	October	EKC attended ALS 4 Forest Green Rovers Mental Health Event - attended Finished door knocking Breakfast café event at the Arkell Centre – attended Halloween party - attended
	November	EKC, GB and LB attended ALS 5 Table Top Xmas Event – attended Community newsletter started to work on
	December	
2019	January	EKC, GB and LB attended ALS 6 Community Organising qualification started for Trainee Community Organiser
	February	EKC, GB and LB attended ALS 7 Breakfast café event at the Arkell Centre – attended
	March	EKC, GB and LB attended ALS 8 Community newsletter delivered
	April	Started door knocking
	May	Community Litter Pick
	June	
	July	Community Litter Pick
	August	
	September	
	October	
	November	Resident's meeting
	December	
2020	January	Resident's meeting
	February	
	March	Resident's meeting

5. Community engagement with the project: summary

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

Activities led or supported by the project	Indication of community reach or engagement	Source/Note
Door knocking	483 houses door knocked	Project Tracker
Listenings	132 conversations with local people	Project Tracker
1-2-1 conversations with participants	12 members of the community	Project Tracker
Group project development	2 meetings in order to develop ideas in a group environment	Project Tracker
Partner meetings	12 meetings with local partners	Project Tracker
Group listenings	6 occasions when COs have listened to a group of people, e.g. at an event	Project Tracker

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

Resources and division of time

The community organisers were asked to think about how their time is divided up in terms of project tasks. At our initial meeting in April 2019 they felt that door knocking was their primary project activity and that it probably took up around 35% of their time, whilst roughly 28% was spent on administrative and office-based tasks. The rest of the role was largely taken up with 'listenings', followed by 1-2-1s with participants, group project development, partner meetings and group listenings, as illustrated in the chart below.

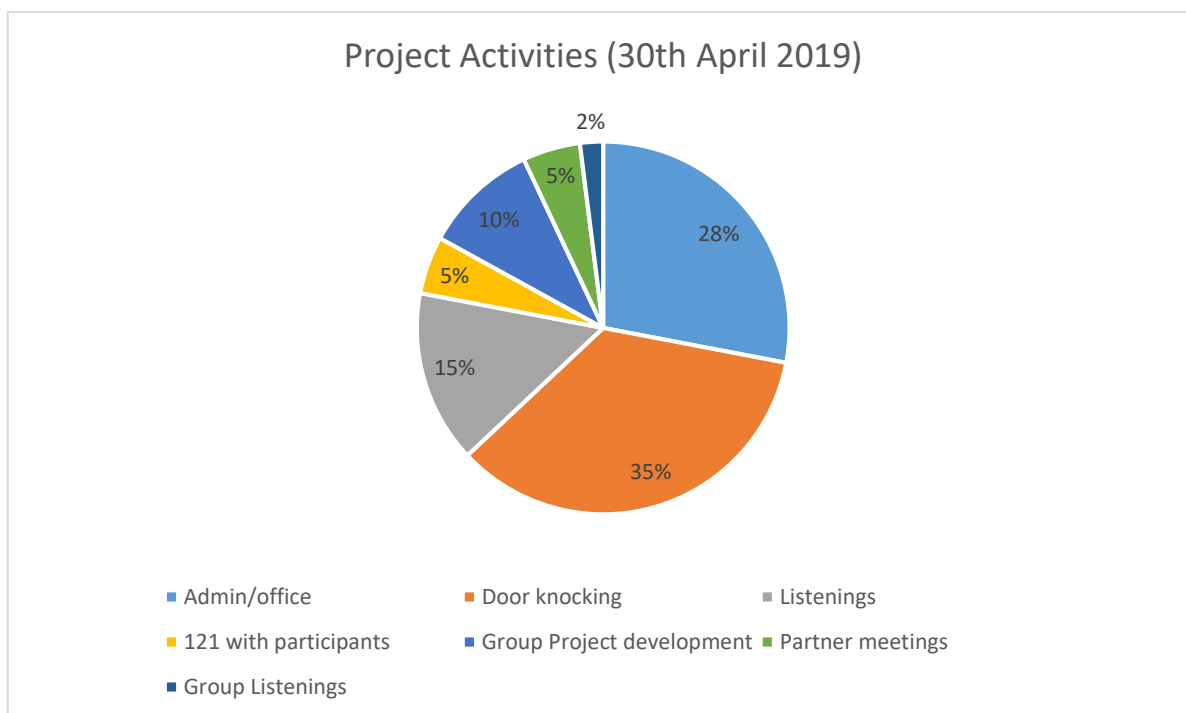


Figure 17 – project activity time distribution at the start of year 2 (Spring)

However, as the project continued to progress and due to the seasonal nature of door knocking, this changed over time and by our second conversation in February 2020 the division of time had been revised to the percentages shown in figure 14 below.

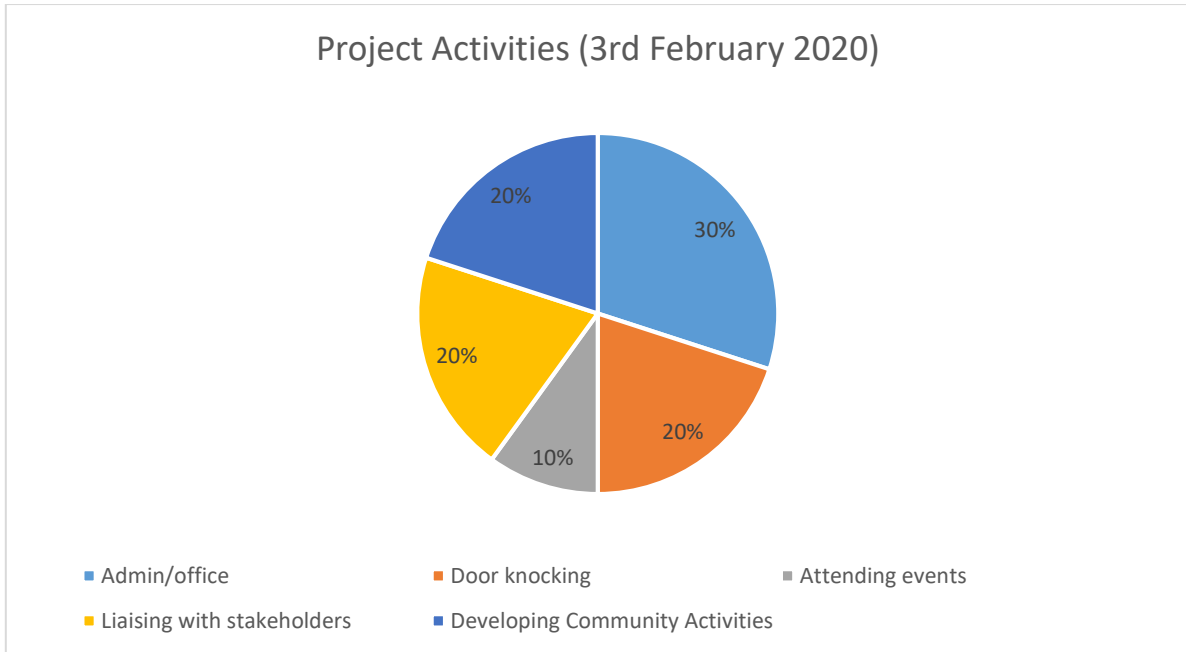


Figure 18 – project activity time distribution at the end of year 2 (Winter)

This clearly demonstrates a shift towards developing community activities and liaising with stakeholders as the resident group was forming and collective ideas discussed.

Project budget

The finalised project budget for the duration of the project can be seen in table 4 below.

Table 4 – Project budget

Direct Project Costs	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Total at 31/1/2020	Total Expected at Project End	Difference
<i>Trainee Community Organiser</i>		£ 8,521.50	£10,764.00	£19,285.50	£ 19,285.50	£ -
<i>Senior Community Organiser (Training and Supervision)</i>		£ 7,280.00	£ 7,280.00	£14,560.00	£ 14,560.00	£ -
<i>Additional Senior Co for project set up</i>		£ 1,500.00	£ -	£ 1,500.00	£ 1,500.00	
<i>Laptop and phone</i>		£ 799.00	£ -	£ 799.00	£ 890.00	£ 91.00
<i>Training (CO 18+19)</i>		£ 225.00	£ 250.00	£ 475.00	£ 465.00	-£ 10.00

Call Costs		£ 120.00	£ 120.00	£ 240.00	£ 240.00	£ -
Admin - printing etc		£ 100.00	£ 100.00		£ 200.00	
Room Hire					£ -	
Volunteer Expenses/Costs		£ 194.45	£ 36.64	£ 231.09	£ 1,000.00	£ 768.91
Travel and parking		£ 790.00	£ 625.00	£ 1,415.00	£ -	-£ 1,415.00
Social Action Projects		£ 125.00	£ 100.00	£ 225.00	£ 1,000.00	£ 775.00
Recruitment		£260	£ -	£ 260.00	£ 260.00	£ -
Totals		£ 19,914.95	£19,275.64	£38,990.59	£ 40,000.00	£ 1,009.41

Added Value						
Meeting rooms/Deskpace		£798	£1,260			
Volunteer Time	No of hours at £11.5ph	£69	£161			
Training	Accredited training provided by Community Roots	£1,125	£225			

7. Engagement with the SLC programme Action Learning Set

As part of the SLC programme, workers have been encouraged to attend a regular Action Learning Set (ALS) meeting. These meetings were hosted on a rotation, with each area hosting at some stage in the process. Hosting an ALS generally required the worker to present their project and to discuss a 'burning issue'.²⁰ The rest of the group were then invited to ask challenging questions and offer support to the worker in order to help them find solutions to their issue. This frequently resulted in good reflective practice – not just for the host, but for all attendees – and was a valued opportunity to share learning and community development experiences.

The community organisers and their project lead from Stroud District Council all engaged fully with the ALS process, as demonstrated by the attendance table below:²¹

²⁰ Intrac guide

²¹ ALS Meeting records

Table 5 – attendance at Action Learning Sets

Action Learning Set 1	Project lead attended
Action Learning Set 2	Project lead, and senior community organiser attended
Action Learning Set 3	Forest Green hosted – all three attended
Action Learning Set 4	Project lead attended
Action Learning Set 5	All three attended
Action Learning Set 6	All three attended
Action Learning Set 7	All three attended
Action Learning Set 8	All three attended
Action Learning Set 9	Two community organisers attempted to host, attendance very low
Action Learning Set Share and Learn event	Neither able to attend

When Forest Green hosted the ALS it was the first area to do so as meetings one and two had taken place during the planning and organising stage of the project. However, the community organisers embraced the format and presented their model to the group, many of whom were not familiar with their way of working. The ‘burning issue’ that the community organisers presented was how to engage young people in their work, as their views don’t tend to be captured through door knocking activities. However, the conversation was largely based around the model and provided a good learning opportunity for other attendees, as well as an opportunity for reflection for the workers.

Although the Community Organisers were unable to attend the last share and learn event, they had good engagement with the meetings over the rest of the programme. They also incorporated regular reflective practice into their work.

8. Sustainability and future development of project activities

The overarching hope for the project in terms of sustainability has been that it will be able to pull together a group of local people who are interested in making changes in the community long term under the banner of ‘Friends of Forest Green’. This working group has now been successfully formed and shows good promise in terms of sustainability. The current group are working well together, encouraging friends to join and have agreed some key priorities for the area. Some activities are already up and running, with regular engagement. With some support, these should be easily sustained over time.

Subject to future funding and resources, door knocking and listening exercises will continue and the resulting conversations be fed into the group, making the cycle of community organising an ongoing process that can be sustained long term and led primarily by local residents. ¹⁰

9. Discussion of strengths and main areas of project success

One of the strengths of this project has been the presence that the two workers have had in the local community, particularly Community Organiser 2 who is a resident. They have made strong connections with local people, particularly those living in sheltered accommodation at Craddock Court who they actively reached out to. They have also offered excellent support to residents who were keen to start activities, and those individuals have been empowered to make positive changes within their community as a result.

The workers in the project are friendly and approachable, and have benefited from the local knowledge of the more junior worker who has grown up in the area. The support of Stroud District Council's project lead has also been invaluable, and she has been supportive of the project and present throughout. As she is also a local resident, this too has added value.

Throughout their time talking to local people through listenings and door knocking activity, the workers have kept excellent records which have led to a broad range of information on which to draw. Much of this information has also recently been analysed by one of the Community Organisers, which has been helpful in identifying local priorities within the newly formed Friends of Forest Green residents group. This group is now becoming well established and is growing. They have successfully agreed on their initial activities as a group and have a number of other ideas to take forward in the future.

Although the project does not aim to particularly connect directly with local stakeholders, the workers have formed positive relationships with both Forest Green Rovers and a local councillor. Fostering these positive relationships will help keep lines of communication open for future discussion and possible collaboration.

Communications with the local community have also been consistent and effective, with the creation of a Facebook page, newsletters and blog posts to ensure that local people can keep up to date with the development of the project. Communications with local people via the blog and other written media channels have been very useful in helping to build trust locally. As a result of conversations with local people and this coordinated approach to connecting with local people, the workers have now successfully identified some local people to take part in and lead on community litter picks and local activities such as the football club. However, keeping lines of communication open and updated regularly may present a challenge in the future if the Community Organiser's posts are not continued.

The project has also benefited from the skills of experienced community organisers who have been able to perform a mentorship role for the junior worker. Thanks in part to their support, the latter is now qualified as a community organiser in his own right, and with the skills he has gained in post will no doubt be able to train and support others into the future.

10. Discussion of challenges arising for the project

Although the project has been successful in identifying a number of potential community leaders towards the end of the project, it has taken time for these to be translated into tangible project outputs. Some of the potential community leaders who were identified earlier in the project experienced delays or issues with taking their ideas forwards (for example one person who was keen on starting a pop up café has unfortunately been on long term sick and therefore unable to get this off the ground). This problem is largely associated with the amount of time available in which to complete the project, and at times the length of the project has been somewhat at odds with the community organising model, as this work tends to take time in order to build relationships and establish connections. There were also issues related to this from an evaluation perspective, given that quantitative measurements did not necessarily lend themselves to this way of working. As a

result, the model has ultimately been best assessed through case studies and a narrative account of its development as the project has progressed.

The more experienced of the two workers left the project early in June 2019, and although she was replaced reasonably swiftly and much work was done to maintain continuity, this will undoubtedly have had some impact on the project delivery.

Forest Green has struggled perhaps more than others in terms of existing assets and organisations on which to draw – other areas have been able to build on existing networks and groups that were already well established, whilst Forest Green had very little in place at the start of the SLC project. There were few local services, and the ones that did exist were not very well organised. In other areas of the SLC project there were already active community members to enlist, but again this has not been the case in Forest Green. Furthermore, as the asset map showed, the area also struggled with lack of community spaces which could be utilised. These factors will potentially have had an influence on the pace of the project and its subsequent achievements.

Finally, as with many community projects the area suffers from some minor issues with power dynamics which need to be overcome. These include other stakeholders being realistic about the limitations of the area (for example the youth club not being able to cater for all ages), as well as the lack of openness of the Arkell Centre's trustees being more open to having a community hire rate for the building.

11. Conclusions

The project has been an ambitious whole-neighbourhood programme of door-knocking to listen, record and build on the views of the maximum range of residents. As a consequence, the workers have had a strong presence in the area and are well known to the community. There has been successful facilitation with new groups (beyond those already engaged with agencies) to lead on community events such as litter picks and the new football club. The Community Organiser model has been embedded in the locality through training a local resident employed through the project, and the project has started to disseminate the model in Stroud district.

Community organising in Forest Green has been effective in identifying a number of local residents who are interested in bringing about change locally and making the most of the assets they have. They appear engaged and are now active members of the local community. The fact that they are able to use the information taken through the earlier door knocking and listening activities means that they also have a mandate from residents to take prioritise certain aspects of the work.

12. Sources of data

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

1. Stroud small area profile
2. Strengthening Local Communities Summary Updated Objectives Sep 2018
3. Prevention Fund – District Council bid
4. Information gathering – Stroud, Forest Green document
5. Interview with the Community Organisers, 30th April 2019
6. Taylor, M., 2011. Community organising and the Big Society: is Saul Alinsky turning in his grave? *Voluntary Sector Review*, 2(2), pp.257-264.
7. Checkoway, B., 1995. Six strategies of community change. *Community Development Journal*, 30(1), pp.2-20.
8. <http://www.communitycolab.co.uk/award-in-community-organising-l2l3.html>
9. ALS 3 meeting notes

10. Second Interview with Community Organisers, 3rd February 2020
11. www.arkellcommunitycentre.org.uk/history/regeneration
12. SLC Project Tracker 13.09.2019
13. Results from conversations with residents PowerPoint presentation
14. Strengthening Local Communities baseline questionnaire for participants
15. Case studies provided by the junior community organiser
16. Friends of Forest Green newsletter, Winter 2018
17. Friend of Forest Green community organisers blog
18. ALS Meeting records
19. Notes from observations at the first resident's meeting
20. Intrac guide
21. ALS meeting records