

Capacity Building Project



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 13

The Organisation:

Friends of Gunton Community Park

The Challenge:

To transform a under utilised playing field into a community park

The Response:

Establishing a new voluntary group with the aim of promoting and implementing their vision

Examples of Good Practice:

1. Forming a residents' community group as an Unincorporated Association
2. Developing a project in partnership with other stakeholders
3. Engaging the community in the project

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The Organisation: Friends of Gunton Community

The Friends of Gunton Community Park is an Unincorporated Association that was formed by a group of concerned residents of Gunton. The residents wanted to transform five hectares of land in Gunton not being used to its full potential into a community park. The group is entirely voluntary and is run by a management committee of 12 residents.

The Challenge: To transform an under utilised playing field into a community park

The site for the new park is on an existing open public space in Gunton which is situated in North Lowestoft. The area was subject to fly tipping and was under utilised. The play equipment needed updating to keep in line with modern requirements and legislation. The site is “land-locked”, being completely surrounded by houses, and many residents didn’t even know the land was there because it is not visible from the road. The land is owned by the Waveney District Council.

Gunton is a mixed area of owner occupied homes and council owned properties. The area has high levels of unemployment and is included in Waveney’s areas of deprivation. There is very little open space for the community and residents wanted to see the land regenerated in order to improve opportunities for residents to access open space and, hopefully, have an impact on the residents’ quality of life.

The group’s vision is to create a community park for residents of all ages with a football pitch, an adventure playground, play equipment for toddlers, a wildlife area and a “peace” garden for the older people. Easy access for the whole community is considered important, so landscaping will include paths, lighting and disabled access. This is an ambitious, long-term project, with several stages being phased in over a period of 5 years. Approximately £250,000 needs to be raised for the whole project.

The Response: Establishing a new voluntary group with the aim of promoting and implementing their vision

The concerned residents held several public meetings with Waveney District Council and key voluntary organisations aimed at getting the community interested. Out of this process, enough people came forward to commit themselves to working on the project. These people formed a committee called the Friends of Gunton Community Park. A partnership with Waveney District Council was formed and a community development worker from the council worked with the new community group to prepare a business plan and look at future funding for the project as the initial money came through the Waveney District Council as part of a Lottery grant award called “Transforming Your Space”.

Raising the profile of the community park has been important in order to engage the community in the project and this has been achieved through the local media, through community research and consultation and through a series of community events.

Examples of Good Practice:

The Friends of Gunton Community Park have developed from being a group of concerned residents into an “Unincorporated Association” working in partnership to implement a major community project. From the foundation provided by its constitution, the group has an appropriate structure to pursue its objectives. Working in partnership with the council to build a clean, safe park and engaging the community in the project has enabled the group to have some early successes in pursuing its vision.

1. Forming a residents’ community group as an Unincorporated Association

All voluntary groups need a structure and the structure chosen for the new group in Gunton was an “Unincorporated Association”. This involved adoption of a constitution, the governing document that contains the rules for the running of the organisation. The advantage of this structure is that it costs nothing to establish and is quick to set up. There is also no accountability to an outside agency, although the organisation is democratic and is accountable to its members. WDC own the land and are accountable for funding secured so far, so there is no financial risk to the community group. The group will, however, be accountable for future funding if the application for the peace garden is successful.

The new group developed a constitution based on a model constitution obtained from SAVO, which was adapted to the needs of the group. Having a constitution enabled the group to open a bank account. A management committee was formed with a chair, secretary and treasurer and nine other members. The committee meets once a month and the roles and responsibilities of all committee members are clearly defined. Because of the high level of commitment to the vision of the community park, committee members are also committed to their committee roles. The committee works as a team, sharing responsibilities according to people’s skills and interests. This was achieved through training sessions with SAVO and has led to more specialised training giving the group more confidence to move forward.

2. Developing a project in partnership with other stakeholders

The Friends of Gunton Community Park came about after campaigning and consultation sessions with Waveney District Council for the idea of a community park. The council’s support and the willingness of the community grew quickly to establish the partnership and move the project forward. Other partners supporting the project include the Tenants and Residents Association, Gunton Baptist Church, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Volunteer Bureau, Surestart and Waveney Community Forum. The council is taking a lead on all technical aspects of the project such as design and project management and a community development worker from the council has been supporting the group in its development. Committee members have also attended training on how to design an open space and how to organise open days and events to promote the park. This has been very successful and they are now working with local businesses to secure sponsorship for future events.

Funding bids have been made in the name of the council on behalf of the Friends of Gunton Community Park and this has improved the chances of success. These grants will enable the group to commence stage one of the project, which involves building the paths and installing lighting. Committee members are now planning to attend further training to learn how to apply for funding for the “peace” garden.

Even though the project is still in its early stages, the physical environment of the park has already been improved with the installation of litter bins, dog waste bins and the removal of rubbish. There has been a noticeable drop in the rubbish being dumped there and community events have already been held at the park. A partnership agreement is planned with the council, setting areas of responsibility for the

future management of the park by the council in partnership with the Friends of Gunton Community Park. This will ensure the long-term sustainability of the park. The council will be responsible for mowing and heavier maintenance tasks while the group will continue to represent the interests and concerns of the community and will be responsible for low-level maintenance.

3. Engaging the community in the project

One of the challenges faced by the project was the fact that some residents in the area were not aware that the playing field was there or that it was in such an under utilised state. Raising the profile of the project in the community was therefore a high priority. Photographs of the field were taken, which have helped raise awareness in the local community of the need to regenerate the land. One committee member is well-connected with the local media and has been able to get good coverage for the project in the community section of the local newspaper. The group has also publicised events through the Beach Radio station, Radio Suffolk, Radio Broadland and has made good links with journalists on the Lowestoft Journal and the Waveney Advertiser.

The business planning process included research into community needs and interests. A survey of Gunton residents was undertaken in the early stages of the project giving residents the opportunity to contribute ideas for the park. The findings showed overwhelming support for the idea of a community park. Public consultations were also held to gather the views of residents, particularly the children, about the type of play equipment they would like to see in the park. These will continue to be held.

A number of community events have been held to build local enthusiasm for the park and all of these events double as fundraising opportunities. Fun Days with marquees, displays, music and bouncy castles have been popular with the local community. There are plans to build a “welcome entrance” to promote the existence of the park and make it more welcoming for residents.

Sharing the Learning:

Community projects should engage the community through a range of promotional activities and, where possible, work in partnership with other stakeholders to advance the project. Community groups can form an Unincorporated Association, which is an appropriate structure for managing a small group.

Lessons Learnt

Forming an Unincorporated Association is a quick and simple process and is an appropriate structure for small voluntary groups.

A constitution and management committee are essential for effective management of an Unincorporated Association.

Partnership work enhances cooperation between stakeholders and maximises funding opportunities.

Engaging members of the community in local projects is essential for successful outcomes that will benefit the whole community.

Questions To Consider

- Are you formally constituted as a group?
- If not, would the Unincorporated Association provide an appropriate structure?
- Is your management committee working effectively as a team and do they follow your constitution?
- Who are the potential partners for your project?
- How can you work together to maximise benefits for all partners?
- How do you raise the profile of your project?
- Are you making effective use of the media, and engaging the community through events?