

Annual Report 2022

Executive Summary

I'm pleased to report another year of progress at WBG in pursuit of our aspiration of Improving the Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing of the Local Community. You will see from my full report (www.garonpark.com) that in 2022 we have formed more partnerships with local community organisations and we are running more programmes like our: In2Volunteering and In2Work programmes that help build peoples' confidence and make them better able to cope with modern life; and our Education Hub 4 Children and Parent (EH4CP) programmes aimed at helping families and individual students to deal with daily life.

Our core physical facility, The Vitality Park, saw user numbers increase from around 16,500 in 2021 to in excess of 21,500 in 2022 (40% growth) as our activities helped people recover from the pandemic and our facilities enabled WBG to play a full role in the recovery of the local community. Our triumphant Platinum Jubilee event was delivered free of charge, staffed by volunteers and was attended by nearly two thousand local people, demonstrated the scale of our delivery potential. While our friendship meals provided happiness, content and camaraderie for Afghan, Ukrainian and my other refugees throughout the year.

Funding wise 2022 saw the end of our first Big Lottery grant that enabled us to start capacity building and begin to reach into the community. It also saw the end of a six month Government grant from the Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) which was designed to help the community over the effects of Covid. These two major grants meant we built a delivery team which included skills as diverse as job interview skills to conservation and eco skills and we took the decision, alongside our business partners Garon Park CIC, that we would maintain these skills on site and continue to bid for further regeneration style contracts, with GP CIC making up the deficit in terms of funding.

We added a youth focus to the mix in the year and this has led the way to our aspirations for 2023 where we are bidding for funds to expand our youth focused facilities and enable our levelling up agenda to reach more and younger local people. We started Garon Park Youth from scratch and have a regular weekly attendance of 60 + local youth - a real success.

We ran an important base line survey in 2022, which highlighted a range of local inequalities for young people and we consulted a with wide audience of local young people who told us exactly what they required to attract them to use our facilities - at the top of the pile was the facilities had to be secure so they felt safe. The survey and consultations are available to view on our website www.garonpark.com.

We are all excited for the year ahead as one of capacity building in the community and raising funds to provide more facilities which our surveys and consultations have highlighted as desperately needed.

Clive Shiret

Chair of Trustees

Introduction

Since our inception back in 2018, thanks to significant funding support, we have been able to complete our initial regeneration phase, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

The early part of the project was implemented when COVID 19 struck and lockdown measures came into place in March 2020, however, thanks to our ability to complete work safely by socially distancing whilst the site was closed to the public, it enabled us to be in a position to be immediately ready to welcome the local community after lockdown in April 2021.

Our user numbers have been building steadily since April 2021 and as a complete site, including our sports and event offers, we saw **182,751** users in 2022, of which **21,638** specifically were Wellbeing at Garon Park.

The increase in user numbers reflect the growth in confidence as local people came out of lockdown and we have seen a considerable increase in our Health & Wellbeing activities in 2022, particularly around education as well as sporting activities as people reconnect and physical and mental health becomes more important after the pandemic.

We have seen a significant decrease in the demand for musical show events after several promoters fell out of the market post Covid, however, this coincides with our decision to move away from as many commercial music events towards hosting more multi-cultural and community-based events in the future.

It has been fantastic to see a significant increase in the number of Wellbeing At Garon Park visitors and the increased use of the Vitality Park and its facilities - the wellbeing walk, the nature school, community shed, community garden, orchard, outdoor gym & playground. We envisage this number increasing significantly in 2023 as we move into a new phase with the increase in number of youth activities, E4CHP programmes and respite camping.

We have also run a number of community events to increase awareness among our local community, to engage with our target audience and to celebrate together key national occasions e.g. The Jubilee and Coronation events. Following the success of these events we have agreed to run at least 2 community events each year, so we develop an awareness that Garon Park is a place where families can come to access a wide range of activities. This will be further supported by a re-branding of the whole Garon Park site in partnership with Garon Park Community Interest Company to create an overall brand for the site as “the home of Health and Wellbeing” and then each of the businesses will be promoted as operators at Garon Park.

The regeneration of the site has allowed us to benefit the local community in a number of significant, high-profile ways, with involvement in national post Covid community initiatives: HAF (Holiday, Activity, Food Programme) where we provide for over 100 local children during holiday periods; and CRF (Community Regeneration Fund) where we provide ‘In2Work’ and ‘In2Volunteering’ opportunities for over 320 local people for the 9 months ending September 2022).

Board of Trustees

Unfortunately, Carol Carr stepped down as a trustee during the year and The Board would like to thank her work and contribution on the project. We welcomed Christine Wyatt and Bill Burrage to the board, and they bring with them a wealth of specialist expertise and experience of the third sector. Christine will be key in taking forward our plans to develop art provision on site and

Bill is a local resident and has been a volunteer at Garon Park for many years, with huge experience working with local scouts.

As the Board continues to work towards their achieving their strategy and moving into the next phase of the project, we are in the process of recruiting new Trustees to bring complimentary skills and experience to the areas in which we would like to see the charity develop. Please do contact us if this is something you would like to know more about.

Staff

WBGPs are incredibly grateful for the continued hard work of the WBGPs team - Mark Stanley (Operations Manager, John Roy - Data Management Officer, Liam King (Conservation Officer), Kay Blackman (Community Engagement Officer), Caroline Reynolds (Commercial Manager) and Lucy Stanley (Fundraiser & Board Secretariat), and Will Burrage (Maintenance Manager). Alisha Threadgold completed her Business Administration level 3 Apprenticeship with distinction, and we have now appointed her as Business Administration Officer. We also have a great team of qualified Youth Leaders and volunteers who work tirelessly with Garon Park Youth and our Garon Park Shed Supervisors - Ian Bysouth and Neil Pettit.

We would also like to thank the many volunteers, apprentices and work experience participants who have worked tirelessly across all areas of our project and have contributed to our successes over the past year.

Finance

WBGPs is pleased to present our 2022 figures which show a slow down in the headline numbers year on year, but in 2021 we were delivering the facilities that we actually used and introduced to the community throughout 2022.

We have made solid progress with our core strategy of providing destination quality facilities in the Vitality Park, which has allowed us to spread our Partner Network with more local organisations and build capacity in our target market.

Funding Support

We are extremely grateful for support from a number of funders during the initial 3-year phase of our project, who have enabled us to complete the first phase. We have received funding support from:

Active Essex	Holiday Activity & Food Programme
Barclays Community Football	Hivedome
National Lottery Awards for All	HSBC
National Lottery Reaching Communities	ROSCA
Carbon Trust	Southend City Council
Community Renewal Fund	SCC Public Health
EASST	Southend Emergency Fund
Essex & Suffolk Water	Sport England - Tackling Inequalities Fund
Essex Community Foundation	St Edmunds Community Association
Southend Fund	Veolia Environmental Trust
FSJ Charities	Waitrose Give a Little Love
Ford Britain	Woodland Trust
Garfield Weston	

Monitoring and evaluation

We continue to invest in an annual data-based evaluation report supported by the University of Essex. We have seen a different and wider user demographic since coming out of lockdown which reflects the significant increase in site users and the activities, we have been able to offer.

We have consulted, reviewed and implemented the suggestions made and will continue to do so. Our project is very much about bringing communities together, with our users being in the lead, enabling us to provide facilities and activities which are fit for purpose and are what local people want.

Equalities

Access and usage levels suggest our processes are non-discriminatory and our staff are trained to ensure there are equal opportunities for all. Our facilities are open to everyone, and we are engaging with numerous diverse groups who are using our facilities and specialist accessible equipment on a regular basis, as we are able to provide a safe and secure space for vulnerable people to improve their physical health and mental wellbeing.

Environment

The environment is a key driver to the project and our fantastic Conservation Officer, Liam King, continues to push our conservation and biodiversity plans forward. Over the past 2 years we have:

- Rewilded 9% of the site in the last 2 years - 2030 goal is 30% rewilded
- Planted 4,500 trees and bushes in 2021; including the planting of a community orchard with heritage fruit trees. In 2022, in partnership with The Conservation Volunteers, we planted a further 6,500 trees and bushes
- We Applied for a prestigious Green Flag environmental award and have been successful
- Provided environmental/biodiversity projects for our partner groups including a 10-week project helping to install the surrounds of our pond within our nature school area.
- Provided large scale work experience and into work opportunities through our CRF programme.
- Provided numerous volunteering opportunities - a planting/maintenance workforce who are responsible for the environmental upkeep of the site through our CRF programme

Communication Channels

Our social media presence has grown exponentially over the past year on both Facebook and Instagram. We are sending a bimonthly newsletter to over 500 people and we are currently revamping and improving our website to reflect the growth and development of the project. We are also implementing a comprehensive online booking system to ensure people are able to book facilities and activities easily across all areas of Garon Park.

In2Work & In2Volunteering

Back in December 2021 we launched our Volunteer and Work experience programme which was also supported by Community Renewal Funding. As part of the programme, we were required to engage with unemployed and economically inactive people to support them into volunteering and work experience.

The programme has been extremely successful, and we have engaged with over 240 people on the programme with over 57 unemployed people starting to volunteer on the site and over 100 economically inactive people now engaged with volunteering. In addition to this we have offered accredited training to those participating and have seen 10 people move into paid employment. Alongside the volunteering and work experience we offer a job club to support people on their journey into work, while for those who are economically inactive, we have seen positive outcomes in respect to raised confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of community.

We look to increase the number of volunteers at Garon Park even further in 2023 as we embark on a newly funded Government UKSPF project. The funding has been designed to support the aims

of the UK Governments Levelling Up agenda; more specifically it has an overarching objective of 'Building pride in place and increasing life chances.' We will be partnering with ATF (Achieve Thrive Flourish), Southend Adult Education College, Asian Ladies Group to provide In2Volunteering opportunities at Garon Park.

Garon Park Youth

In August 2022 we launched a pilot Youth Project called Garon Park Youth. The aim of the pilot was to establish a traditional youth club for local children aged 8-15, offering activities such as sports, games, arts and crafts, cookery, tuck shop, pool, table tennis and the opportunity for youngsters to meet, have fun and make new friends, whilst improving their social skills and physical and mental health and wellbeing. The pilot was such a huge success, with 210 local children joining as members in just 4 weeks.

We have now moved this pilot onto a permanent footing and have increased the range of activities on offer, by way of a programme of specialized sessions, weekly healthy food options/cookery sessions in addition to the regular weekly traditional activities. Around 50 children attend our weekly youth club on a weekly basis.

We conducted in depth community consultation and feedback highlighted that the activities which an organisation offers, are key to engaging with local young people - activities should be what the young people themselves want to participate in. Sports, music, and arts/crafts feature highly on the activities they would like to see at Garon Park Youth. Moving forward, we want to be able to provide facilities and spaces for young people to be able to meet, let off steam and socialize all year round.

Garon Park Shed

Our Garon Park Shed project has gone from strength to strength and membership numbers are steadily increasing. Our shed provides a space for likeminded people to meet and enjoy practical activities, making and mending, learning new skills, improving mental health and wellbeing and reducing feelings of social isolation. The volunteers and supervisors at the shed also provide skill sessions for some of the young people we support on site as part of our EC4HP programme and are also instrumental in making items for use around site, such as bird boxes, traditional games etc. They were responsible for bringing our Storytelling Chair to life, based on the ideas and designs of local children.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement has been central to the success and development of the project over the past 3 years and is vital to the continuing growth of the project at Garon Park.

Engagement has been particularly important post lockdown, when community confidence was low, and people were fearful about reconnecting and engaging with each other. Both the mental health and physical wellbeing of the local community had deteriorated significantly during this time and the role of our Community Engagement Officer has been key to reconnecting the local community.

Developing relationships and consulting with local people, community groups, establishing partnerships with other charities, engaging with local authority representatives on a regular basis, developing our social media presence, working with local businesses - these have all been key targets over the past years and continues to be so as we move into the new phase of our project.

We have developed fantastic facilities, however, what has been crucial has been engaging with local people, telling them what facilities are available on their doorstep and getting them over to site.

Thanks to part funding by two local charities, St Edmunds Community Association and Rosca Trust, WBGP has been able to purchase a 14-seater minibus, This is now being used for a host of community initiatives which we are running on site - the benefit to being able to bring people to site has been incredible and will prove invaluable moving forward.

Highlights of 2022

- The GP Community Orchard is planted with heritage fruit trees in January 2022 by over 100 people from local families, schools and community groups.
- Community fridge donated by St Edmunds Community Hall to support in the provision of meals for volunteers and local groups
- GP CIC / WBGP awarded the Government funded Community Regeneration Fund project - launch highly successful In2Volunteering / In2Work initiatives.
- Garon Park welcomes the local community to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee together. Over 1500 attend a fantastic community event. Funded by the Lottery and Essex Community Foundation
- The Festival Cricket Ground is renamed The Peter Butler Oval in memory of one of our strongest supporters.
- By April 2022 we had topped 220,000 visitors to Garon Park since April 2021, 16560 being Wellbeing At Garon Park visitors
- Work on the nature school project is complete and the Hive Nature School, funded by local business Hivedome Ltd, is officially opened by Southend Mayor, Margaret Borton. The logo for the nature school is designed by a pupil from Hinguar School and is brought to life by a Design Student from the University.
- The Garon Park Community Shed is officially opened by Mayor Margaret Borton
- Garon Park CIC/Wellbeing at Garon Park establish partnerships onsite with Steps Ahead to run the Nature School and The Fitness Shack to run the PT/Fitness sessions on site
- Wellbeing at Garon Park takes delivery of a community minibus thanks to match funding from St Edmunds Community Hall
- Community Meals/Friendship Groups begin, working in partnership with Welcome to the UK bringing migrant families to Garon Park to enjoy a meal together and to build friendships
- Pilot family offer to EHCP students / parent at a local school. Establish Educational Hub 4 Children and Parents (EH4CP)
- SUCET make Garon Park their permanent home
- Garon Park Youth Club is established after a successful pilot with over 250 young people registering in the first 4 weeks. The club continues to go from strength to strength.
- A pilot project working in partnership with Sutton House Academy providing support for disengaged young people is a huge success and paves the way for future collaboration
- Wellbeing at Garon Park host their first hugely successful Christmas Community Event for local community groups

The Official Opening of Garon Park Shed by Mayor Margaret Borton



Conservation and Rewilding



The Official Opening of the Hive Nature School



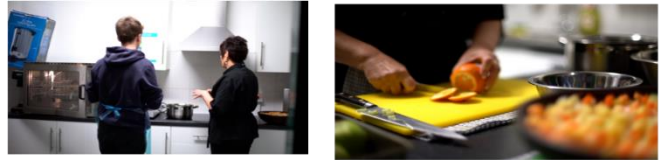
The Outdoor Gym & Seating Areas



Little Heroes City Fest Celebrations



SEN Cookery Lessons



Wellbeing Walk & Sensory Garden Construction



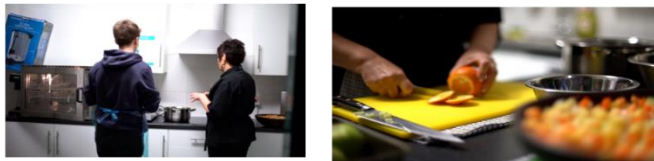
Garon Park Youth



Little Heroes City Fest Celebrations



SEN Cookery Lessons



Wellbeing Walk & Sensory Garden Construction



Garon Park Youth



Sustainability

Wellbeing At Garon Park and Garon Park Community Interest Company are working hard to increase the opportunities and resources for community groups to deliver their services on our site and receiving income in return. Our project is about leveraging opportunity through scale and mix of activities and we have made a great start on the sustainability trail. The reason we were awarded the CRF and HAF projects was the scale of our facility and the basis of the services we provide.

Moving forward we will be well placed to secure more of this type of opportunity and we place great emphasis on delivery

In 2022 we ran a pilot project partnering with local schools who support primary and secondary aged children with EHCP's, who have challenging behaviours or have been excluded from mainstream schools and are disengaged or have behavioural issues. We have provided youngsters and parents with an alternative learning base and activities to improve their social and academic skills. We provide a programme of activities such as sport/physical fitness, maintenance/woodwork, cookery for the children and life skills for the parents. The result from the pilot were extremely positive with improvement in engagement and behaviour by both children and parents and we have a waiting list from local schools keen to participate. This project will move to a permanent programme in 2023.

Moving forward

For the next phase of our project WBGP, working alongside Garon Park CIC, will be focussing on growing and developing the facilities and activities on offer, offering opportunities to volunteer and gain experience, whilst streamlining and making our operation efficient and sustainable for the future.

Our immediate priority for the next phase is to increase youth provision at Garon Park and this will be a key focus for the year ahead.

WBGP and GP CIC are working together to deliver complimentary activities for the broad spectrum of the local community, ensuring diversity and equality so that each Garon Park facility is of 'destination quality', scaleable and everyone gets a fair allocation of resources at a time that best suits.

Youth Plan

Our mission is to improve the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the local community and we have consulted extensively with youth who attend our site currently, those who do not, and Southend's Youth Council and we realise the site plays an important part in the lives of those who attend and has the ability to act as a vehicle of change for many more.

We have a clear vision of where we want to be within the next 3 years. We are aiming for positive sustainable youth development, implemented at scale with auditable effectiveness and accountability, which includes the voice, ideas and experience of young people in the decision-making process.

The focus of all our youth projects will be early intervention, improving physical and mental health and wellbeing and reducing anti-social behaviour in an area of high deprivation, where gang culture, drugs and knife crime are sadly commonplace.

We want to offer activities across site which will benefit children and young people right through their childhood, extending to young adulthood where they can gain work experience and training as well as the opportunity to volunteer.

Our current Capital focus is to add more facilities aimed at local Youth with the focus on early intervention, improving their health and mental wellbeing, allowing them to feel safe, build their fitness, skills and confidence, with enough hobbies, work and leisure experiences to make life choices. We will support them to feel engaged in their local community through a large conservation project which allows them to improve their wellbeing, whilst underpinning environmental awareness for the future and allowing them to take pride in their local outdoor spaces

Our revenue resources are aimed at creating employment, apprenticeships, internments and volunteering opportunities to support the Capital facilities and to ensure a safe, organised and well run project, which engages with the local community. Every activity will be guided and supervised and every young person will be listened to, recognised and included in our plans and shown pathways to navigate their formative years.

In Conclusion

WBGPs growth and reach has been dynamic over its lifetime and our performance to date justifies our strategy of establishing a need, consulting to find out what the community really wants to fulfil the need and then providing what has been requested.

Our next step is to continue and segment our community so that we can establish more areas of need within the different segments and we are starting with a concentration on Youth in our community and establishing safe pathways for them to develop and fulfil their potential.

Clive Shiret

Chair of Trustees