

BTCV People's Places Award Scheme Evaluation



INTERIM FINDINGS – NOVEMBER 2005



Foreword

This report presents interim findings from the evaluation of BTCV's People's Places Award Scheme. It is being published to coincide with BTCV's Real Sustainable Communities conference in November 2005. While the report highlights a range of interesting and significant findings there is more work to be done to follow up on particular areas of interest and to gain a fuller understanding of what lies behind some of the statistics. The evaluation project is ongoing and we will continue to work with BTCV to gather, analyse and interpret further data. A full evaluation report will be published in spring 2006 as the People's Places Award Scheme comes to completion.

Richard Hindle
Director, SQW Ltd.



Contents

Introduction	3
Headline findings	5
Reach and focus	6
Social impact	9
Environmental impact	11
Long term legacy and sustainability .	12
BTCV's support and management	13
Conclusions and points for further investigation	14

Introduction

The People's Places Award Scheme

The People's Places Award Scheme operates across England to involve local communities, mainly in deprived areas, in bringing about small-scale improvements to their neighbourhood. Most projects funded by the scheme are concerned with creating, improving or better utilising local green areas and public open space.

The People's Places Award Scheme is delivered through BTCV's extensive network of offices and staff, and each project has a BTCV mentor who provides advice and guidance throughout the project.

The scheme started in 2001 and will be completed in 2006. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund¹ and benefits from additional support from Rio Tinto plc and English Nature. People's Places is a significant scheme within the broader Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme in England, which is providing £130m of lottery funding across the UK to over 3,000 projects involving 11 award partners, including both public and voluntary organisations.

Of the seven strands in England, the People's Places Award Scheme is one of the smallest in financial terms, with just under £6m of funding for projects, but has the widest reach – 747 projects put forward by community groups across England were offered funding. Financial support offered was therefore relatively small, ranging from £3,000 to £10,000 per project. The average award was £8,472.

The scheme has awarded all of its funds. 98% of groups awarded funding took it up and around a third of those projects have been completed.

BTCV's objectives

The award scheme targeted those less advantaged groups and communities within society that currently lack access to green space. It was designed to address the barriers that disadvantaged communities face when trying to improve their local environment.

At the outset, it was envisaged that the impact of the programme would be two-fold. First, to create and enhance local green spaces. Second, through providing resources and support to develop the capacity of community groups, so that they can enhance the environmental and social potential of the site and improve the quality of life within the locality.

It was intended that the 'people's place' would provide the opportunity for play and recreation, social interaction and the development of community spirit. The learning experience of developing the space would bring life skills and employability benefits to individuals involved. The environmental improvement would bring people closer to wildlife and bring visual enhancement to the local area.

For BTCV, the People's Places Award Scheme has helped the organisation to move towards achieving its strategic objectives – through supporting local people and inspiring them to get involved in improving the quality of their environment.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

Over the last six months SQW Limited, economic and management consultants, have advised and supported BTCV's evaluation of the People's Places Award Scheme. The aim has been to review whether the scheme has met the objectives set by BTCV and the principal funder, the Big Lottery Fund, and also how it has contributed to meeting BTCV's purpose and aims.

There are 2 objectives of the evaluation (this report focuses primarily on objective 1):

1. To assess the impact of the People's Places Award Scheme on local environments, communities and individuals.
2. To assess the effectiveness of BTCV's management of the People's Places Award Scheme.

BTCV has seen the evaluation as a means of assessing what the award scheme has achieved – both at the time of the projects and looking forward – where the scheme has been successful and where there are learning points for the future. Internal project data and surveys undertaken for the evaluation have been analysed by BTCV staff.

SQW's role was to help BTCV to design the evaluation, and guide the analysis and interpretation from an independent perspective. The consultants also led a two-day workshop, with over 30 BTCV staff and some external stakeholders, and undertook some of the case studies and interviewed senior management.

¹ Previously the New Opportunities Fund

The evaluation work will continue until April 2006, by which time all the projects funded by the scheme will be complete. This report is to highlight interim findings; a more detailed final report will be published in spring 2006.

Methodology

The award scheme was deliberately designed to encourage feedback, and this interim evaluation draws primarily on self-reported outcomes by community groups, at the end of completed projects, taken from their project evaluation and scheme evaluation forms. Unless otherwise stated, the statistics quoted are drawn from a sample of the 113 most recently completed projects.

In addition, views were sought from those involved in the award scheme at all levels through:

- a two day workshop attended by BTCV staff and joined on day two by 10 external stakeholders
- questionnaires to BTCV staff
- visits to 25 award winning groups
- interviews with senior BTCV managers and mentors

The final evaluation report will include a thorough analysis of information gathered from these sources.

NEWRAD Conservation and Wildlife Group DARWEN, LANCASHIRE



In March 2004 the NEWRAD Conservation and Wildlife group was awarded £9,000 to create a safer, more accessible area, for the local community with a particular emphasis on providing facilities for children. The group's volunteers have worked hard to transform the site into a valuable community space. The project is located in a densely populated area of Darwen, made up of terraced housing and industrial premises. The site was inaccessible to the public and a target for vandalism. Getting local people involved in the project was important to the group so they could increase awareness and reduce the vandalism that took place. Volunteers, who include residents, landscape tradesmen, and builders have all helped with giving the site a new lease of life. They have transformed it, installing a new welcoming entrance, woodland walk, bog garden, dipping pond, and pathways. Local parents are not keen on letting their children fish on the canal as it is dangerous and very isolated. This project has provided somewhere safe to fish, whilst also teaching local children about the environment.

"Juvenile nuisance has disappeared because kids are now joining the fishing club." RITA BILLINGTON, SECRETARY

By encouraging existing wildlife to breed on site and introducing new plants the group hopes to make the site a self-contained wildlife sanctuary which will continue to flourish.

Headline findings

The evaluation so far has found some very positive outcomes. These include:

- nearly all projects have achieved most or all of their objectives and have had a significant positive impact on local environments, and on the lives of communities and individuals
- the award scheme funding has enabled BTCV to reach groups not traditionally perceived to be involved in environmental projects, especially ethnic minority communities. Four in ten groups were newly formed to carry out the project
- the award scheme has achieved good coverage throughout England and in a range of locations. It has supported a variety of types of project and has taken a wide view on the meaning of 'disadvantage'
- the vast majority of groups had a positive experience and would consider applying for similar funding again
- the relatively small level of funding is appropriate for many local communities and can really make a difference
- most groups found the support from BTCV, and in particular the mentoring approach, very valuable in applying for funds and implementing projects.

The evaluation to date has also revealed some lessons for the future, and a number of areas which require further investigation which will need to be addressed before production of the final report.



Reach and focus

One of the aims of the award scheme was a good geographical spread of awards across England, including groups in both rural and urban areas. It was important to BTCV to engage with people who have not traditionally been perceived as being involved in environmental volunteering, targeting hard-to-reach groups.

At the outset, there were no preconceived ideas as to what sort of project would be funded, provided applicants met the scheme's criteria. It can be seen from Figure 1 that the scheme has funded projects, from Northumberland to Cornwall, and with a good spread between urban and rural areas.

Around 7% of applications were rejected, indicating the success of the two-stage application process: community groups were supported by BTCV staff members and inappropriate applications were detected early on.

Overall penetration of scheme

Project locations have been analysed and it can be seen that 75% of groups which have accepted an award from the scheme were in an urban area, with the remaining 25% in a rural area².

Of the groups which have completed³ their projects 41% created a new space in their community. Typically the community has identified an overgrown or abandoned piece of land and transformed it into a useable community space. The remaining 59% of groups have improved a space which already existed in the community, but which was unsuitable for their needs, or which could be improved to provide additional or better-used facilities.

At the outset of their project, community groups identified what their aims and objectives were and what they wanted to spend their award on. 75% of completed⁴ projects have "fully met" their objectives, with a further 14% having "mostly met" their objectives. No groups have "not met" their objectives.

FIGURE 1: Location of groups offered an award by the People's Places Award Scheme



FIGURE 2: Distribution of awards offered by region

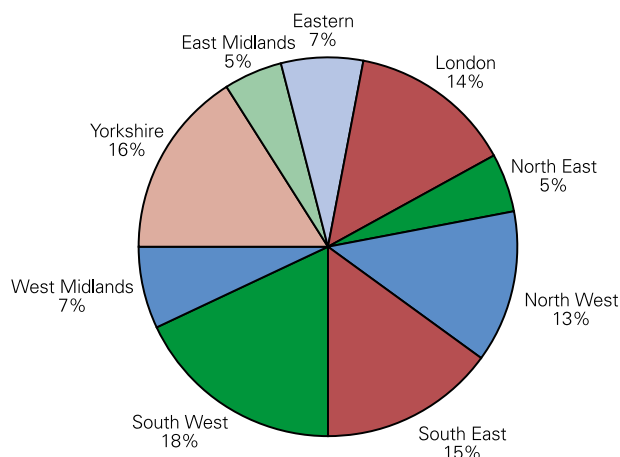
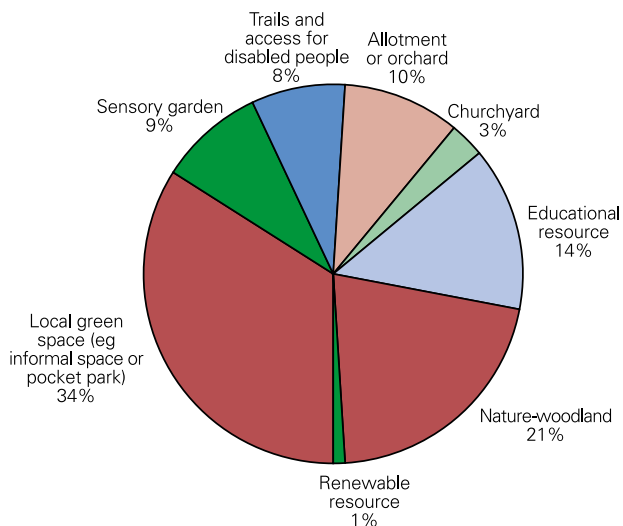


FIGURE 3: Characteristics of projects offered an award



2 Defra Rural and Urban Classification 2004

3 Based on all 238 groups which have completed their projects to date

4 Based on all 238 groups which have completed their projects to date

Projects supported

As applications were received, each project was classified by its main characteristic. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the projects that the People’s Places Award Scheme has offered awards to, according to these characteristics.

Beneficiaries reached

Community groups were asked to estimate the number of people who may directly benefit from their project. Each group may have used a different basis for this estimate, but on average the number of beneficiaries each project is estimated to have reached is 510.

When asked which particular category of people would benefit from their project, 29% of groups stated that people with disabilities will particularly benefit, for example, through the introduction of raised beds on allotment sites.

Groups were asked to think about which themes their project addressed, the results are shown in Figure 4. Nearly all groups addressed more than one theme.

FIGURE 4: Proportion of projects which addressed specific themes

Young people	84%
Provision of disabled access (physical)	77%
Old people	76%
Educational provision	62%
Access for people with learning difficulties	57%
Health	51%
Skills, lifelong learning	50%
Inclusiveness and cultural diversity	40%
Unemployment	29%
Food	21%



Environmental People's Organisation

DAGENHAM, ESSEX

The Environmental People's Organisation started in February 2002 as a group working for sustainable and environmental community development. They received their People's Places award in July 2004 to transform allotment plots which were littered with broken mattresses, old electrical items and household rubbish. The plots were also completely choked with brambles and bindweed.

Since the award was made, a lot of changes have taken place on the site. Plots have been cleared and a mini-orchard has been started with apple, plum and pear trees. A path was created through the site from the main gate to ease access – and a herb garden has been planted which volunteers are keen to expand.

The area has a very mixed population and many people live in rented accommodation without access to their own outdoor space. The project offers valuable work experience, as well as training in the use of tools and health and safety. The project has been educating volunteers about biodiversity and the group is trying to discourage the use of pesticides on the plots. Everyone has a compost bin to manage their green waste.

Some unemployed people who started working on the project have now moved into employment, but it is a testament to the project that several continue to come back and work on the plots.



Social impact

The People's Places Award Scheme targeted disadvantaged groups of people. Applicants could demonstrate they were disadvantaged in one of two ways:

1. being based in a deprived location, or
2. benefiting marginalised or disadvantaged people.

The People's Places Award Scheme used the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000⁵ to identify whether a project was located in a deprived area. If the rank was less than 2000 (i.e. was located in the most deprived 24% of wards in England), then the project would be defined as being in a deprived area. If the rank was higher than 2000 then the community group had to provide some other evidence that their project was in a deprived area (e.g. project in a European Social Fund Objective 1 area, local anti-social behaviour statistics).

Alternatively if the group could show that their project would benefit one or more disadvantaged user groups (such as the disabled, elderly, single parents, ethnic minorities or other marginalised groups) they would also be eligible for an award.

From the evidence presented below it can be seen that the award scheme has met its aims of reaching communities that are deprived or disadvantaged.

Reaching disadvantaged groups

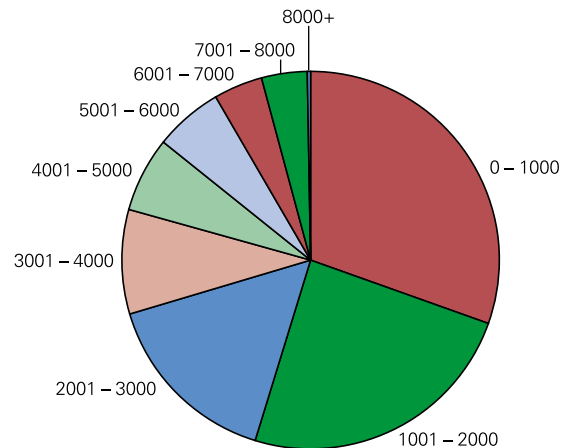
More than half the projects which were offered an award were located in the most deprived 24% of wards in England. This is shown in Figure 5.

However, the award scheme has also funded projects that are located in less deprived areas of England, where the project directly benefits one or more disadvantaged user groups. Projects benefited a range of groups, in particular: disabled groups, old people's groups and ethnic minority groups. In addition, a small number of projects have benefited asylum seekers and refugee groups.

An important aspect of the scheme was that volunteers should be involved in the projects. Over 23,500 volunteers have worked on the 238 projects completed to date.

⁵ The IMD 2000 is a ranking produced by the Government of all wards and districts across England showing the degree of 'deprivation'. Six different 'domains', consisting of a number of different statistical indicators, are combined to make an overall index. The most deprived ward in England is ranked '1', higher numbers represent less deprived areas.

FIGURE 5: Deprivation index of groups offered an award



An indication that the scheme has reached groups not traditionally recognised as being involved in environmental volunteering is that 15% of these volunteers were from a black or minority ethnic background – double the proportion in the population of England. Furthermore, 6% of volunteers had disabilities.

The scheme has provided the impetus for groups of people to get together and make a difference in their community, with 37% of groups newly-formed to carry out their project.

Improving access to space and building social capital

87% of groups said that the People's Places project would have a long-term positive impact on life in their community.

The main specific benefit reported has been that the project has created a space for the community to use, with 37% of groups reporting this. Another significant impact of the projects is that the community has been able to get involved, gaining ownership and taking pride in the space, with 22% of groups reporting this.

"A group of people for whom access is frequently denied have been able to learn about the environment and have contributed to the protection of nature within the community sensory garden."

ADMINISTRATOR, NEWCASTLE SOCIETY FOR BLIND PEOPLE

Four out of five groups reported unexpected outcomes. The majority of these were positive, including reduction in vandalism due to better community relations; an impetus for further work in the community; and increased volunteer involvement and teamwork helping to bring different groups together.

Of the groups who have completed their projects 50% reported that they expected, over the longer term, a real impact in reducing deprivation in their communities, such as increased community cohesion (reported by 36% of groups) or benefits to health (16%).

Just over one third (36%) of groups stated that the project has had a major social impact on life in their community. The project has developed a sense of belonging and ownership for a space within their community.

Benefits to individuals

Nine out of ten groups reported that their project had enabled volunteers to gain new skills and knowledge. To help build their capacity, groups were encouraged to use

“several of the volunteers achieved nationally recognised accreditation in Horticulture through the National skills Profile Unit. A number of them have gained employment since taking part in the project”

MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE BRIDGE, MERSEYSIDE

some of their award money for training courses, or on other less formal ways to help the volunteers develop their skills. In addition, nearly one-third of groups reported that the project has had a specific impact on the life of one or more individuals in their group, through either physical or educational skill development. One in six projects reported a positive impact on the health of the volunteers involved.

Foresight Project GRIMSBY, NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE



Foresight, a charity for the visually impaired has created a sensory garden for their members at a community centre in Grimsby. The new garden is in an area where few people have outdoor space of their own, and the standard of living is low. The site, previously a dumping ground, is surrounded by a high fence for security. However, the blank tarmac and metal fence were oppressive and ugly. The group wanted to enrich the space for visitors and improve its environmental value.

In July 2004 Foresight received a Peoples Places award of £9,800 to create the garden. Since then, raised beds have been constructed and planted with a variety of plants with different smells and textures. Benches have been installed and tactile

paving with raised bumps has been laid to help visitors to find them. Much of the work on the project has been done by users of the centre, helping to build their confidence. 85% of blind and visually impaired people are unemployed, and many are socially isolated. This project has allowed them to get together and work towards improving the quality of their lives.

“It’s a total transformation. It looks fantastic, but the smells, you don’t need sight to enjoy.”

PAUL SILVESTER, DEVELOPMENT MANAGER



Environmental impact

The projects funded by the award scheme had to demonstrate a benefit to the environment. For example, the projects could:

- improve wildlife habitats
- reduce pollution
- improve the appearance of the site
- use and encourage environmentally friendly building techniques or alternative technology.

An award scheme requirement was that the projects should try to improve biodiversity but, due to their size and nature, in many cases it was sufficient that there were no serious negative impact on biodiversity.

Direct environmental benefits

After completion, as many as 93% of groups reported that their project would have a positive long term impact on the environment. This ranged from creating a wildlife haven to installing a 'green' roof and solar panels.

A variety of benefits to local wildlife were reported, including installing bird and bat boxes, retaining established habitats and creating wildlife ponds. 82% of groups stated that their project would have a positive long-term impact on local wildlife.

45% of groups reported that their project would improve local biodiversity, including the planting of native species, and the creation of woodland and wetland areas.

Encouraging environmental awareness and interest

When groups were asked about the positive impacts that the projects have had on the environment and on the community, 16% of groups reported that their project had raised environmental awareness locally, and 14% of groups indicated that their project had increased people's interest in the environment, and in being outdoors generally.

Groups were asked to provide details of any unexpected outcomes which they benefited from during their project. 39% of groups reported an unexpected improved use of the space and 18% that the space had provided unexpected educational benefits to the local community. Groups were not prompted for these responses so these figures are likely to be an under-estimate.



Long term legacy and sustainability

97% of groups reported that the project site would continue to be used after the end of their People's Places funding. The reasons given included:

- the site and access has been improved
- the community has been fully engaged in the project and taken ownership of the site
- there is now a group of regular users.

Two thirds of all groups who have completed their projects have raised funds additional to their People's Places Award. Of these, 46% of groups felt that the People's Places Award helped them to gain these additional funds.



BTCV's support and management

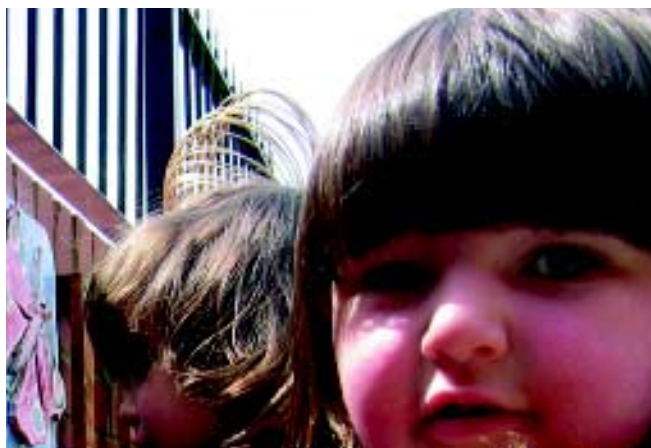
The feedback BTCV has received from groups has been very encouraging. 95% of groups stated that their overall experience of the scheme had been positive; 89% that they would apply for this sort of funding again.

The majority of groups (85%) indicated that the scale of money offered by the scheme was appropriate to their needs. Of the minority which stated that it was not an appropriate scale of funding, most said this was because the whole project cost more than £10,000.

Over 70% of groups said that they found the application process easy to deal with. Both the community groups and BTCV staff felt that the mentor role was very valuable, but a range of suggestions were made as to how this could be improved in the future. While 95% of groups found the mentor support role a valuable asset to the project, and 89% of BTCV mentors felt that the mentoring role was important to the community groups, some groups would have preferred more time with the mentor for practical advice and project planning, while a small number thought that the role was unnecessary.

"The effect on communities by small projects such as this can be great, and possibly the catalyst for other improvements...they can influence many people."

ROY PROUD, ST PAUL'S CHURCH, COUNTY DURHAM



Conclusions & points for further investigation

Analysis of the project feedback has been largely positive, and the evaluation has found that most of the objectives of the award scheme have been met. Nearly all community groups reported that most of their objectives had been realised and that the projects had a significant positive impact, both on the environment and on people's lives. In addition, various unexpected outcomes were reported, including improved use of the space, educational benefits and the acquisition of new skills.

The scheme has had a notable impact on access to green and open space, with just under half of projects creating a new space in their community. Whilst 93% of groups reported that their project would have a positive long-term impact on the environment, less than half stated that it would improve local biodiversity.

The award scheme funding has enabled BTCV to reach people not traditionally perceived to be involved in environmental projects, for example those from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. In broad terms, the objective of targeting deprived communities has been met. 'Deprivation' has been interpreted fairly widely; over half of the projects were in the 24% most deprived areas in the country, but funding was also provided to disadvantaged groups in a substantial number of more affluent areas.

BTCV's support was generally rated positively by project groups, and a particular point of success was the mentoring which allowed relatively inexperienced groups to access funding and plan and implement projects more easily. For most groups, the level of funding was appropriate and enabled them to make a real difference; the vast majority of groups had a positive experience and would consider applying for similar funding again.

The evaluation has revealed a number of areas which require further investigation. These include:

- the extent of networking between groups
- the impact the scheme has had on BTCV
- the effectiveness of BTCV's management of the scheme.

SQW Limited will continue to work with BTCV over the coming months and a final report will be published in spring 2006.





BTCV's People's Places Award Scheme is funded by the Big Lottery Fund with additional support from English Nature and Rio Tinto plc. The scheme is managed by BTCV.

For further information, please call 01491 821621 or 01302 572244.

An electronic version of this document is available at www.btcv.org/ppawards.

Photos: People's Places groups; Jane Alexander; Chris Deeney; Helen Mitchell; Escape Photography; Mark Kellaway; David Woodfall

© 2005 BTCV/SQW

Published by BTCV, Conservation Centre, Balby Road, Doncaster DN4 0RH
Registered Charity 261009 • Recycled Paper

