



Greenlink Online Survey



January 2009

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1. Executive Summary

The Greenlink is a 5km cycle path creating a direct route from Strathclyde Country Park to Motherwell Town Centre. This report presents the results from a small piece of research undertaken in the latter part of 2008. The study sought to measure the perceived impact of the Greenlink upon the local environment and people's lives.

The survey was conducted purely online and consisted of seven simply worded questions with options for qualitative responses. It was advertised on the Greenlink website, in the Greenlink newsletter and through word of mouth.

A total of 38 people completed the survey. The quality of responses was extremely high and most people surveyed took advantage of the opportunity to express their feeling towards the project in their own words.

In overview, the results indicate that the Greenlink has had a pronounced positive impact upon the local physical environment. According to the sample, this has mainly been achieved by removing hazards and improving the visual appearance of the area through improving the pathways and planting.

In terms of the impact upon the local people, the results gathered show that the project is having a profound affect on local people. This is particularly true in terms of mental well being and evidence is also presented indicating that people have benefited from improved physical health too.

In addition to personal benefits, the Greenlink has also had a positive impact upon the local community. It has encouraged people from different age groups to mix and work together and provided a platform upon which to share ideas and hopes for the local area.

Finally, results indicate that local people see the Greenlink as an important part of their future. Many respondents are passionate about the project and feel strongly that it should be given every chance to consolidate, develop and expand into other areas of activity.

2. Background

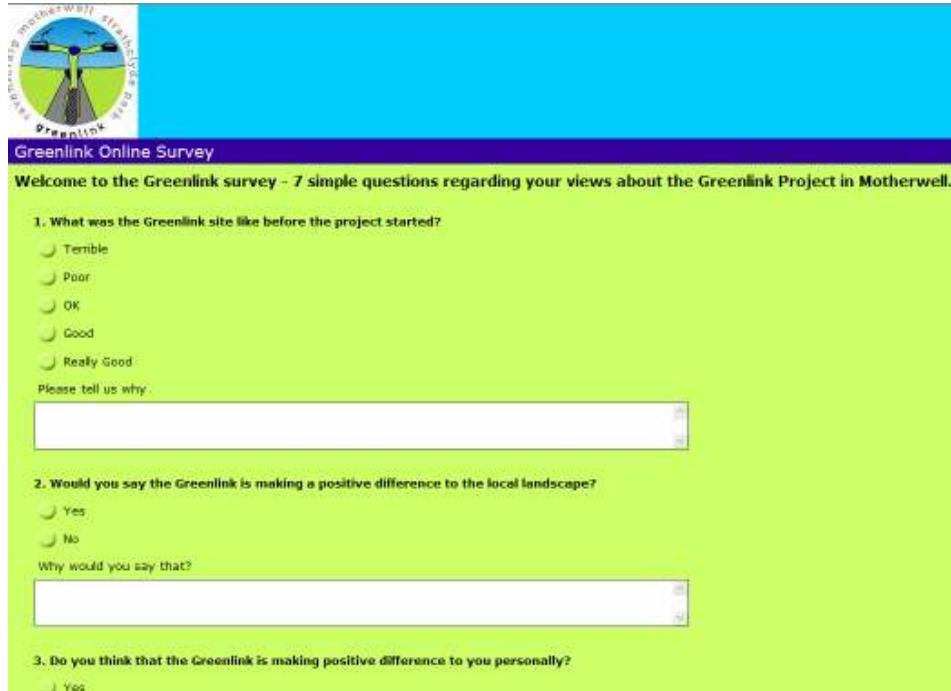
The Greenlink is a partnership project that uses environmental action to bring about social regeneration in the deprived communities of the northern part of Motherwell. The project encompasses a 5 km cycle route with Strathclyde Country Park and Motherwell at either end and a 5 year programme of management of the degraded woodland and open space resource along the valley of the South Calder Water. The Greenlink itself was originally envisaged as a means to access jobs and services at Ravenscraig, but the delay in progressing this project has provided an opportunity for a more socially focused programme of work including the establishment of a community development group, regular conservation work and health walks, activities with local schools and a wide range of events on site to encourage cohesion, capacity building and healthy lifestyles. The project is supported by two full-time staff who also manage a number of enthusiastic local volunteers.

During October 2008, the Greenlink and the Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) embarked upon a small research project which sought to measure the perceived impact of the Greenlink Project upon the local environment and people's lives. To this end, a brief survey was drafted including a number of questions regarding what people think about the Greenlink.

It was decided that the best device to undertake this research project would be a short online questionnaire. It was recognised that by adopting this methodology, certain members of the public would not be encouraged to participate in the research – particularly those without home internet connection and/or who are not accustomed to the internet. The view was taken that these drawbacks were outweighed by the low cost of adopting the technique in comparison with more labour intensive methods (eg door-to-door canvassing).

A web based survey resource (www.survey.monkey.com) was used to conduct the research. This tool was chosen because of two reasons; firstly the device had proved itself to be easy to use in the past, and secondly, CSFT already has a business account with the organisation and could therefore take advantage of added features such as logos.

An image of the survey as it appeared online is shown on the next page.



The image shows a screenshot of the Greenlink Online Survey interface. At the top left is a circular logo for Greenlink Motherwell, featuring a stylized tree and the text 'Greenlink Motherwell' and 'Greenlink'. Below the logo is a blue header with the text 'Greenlink Online Survey'. A green banner below the header reads 'Welcome to the Greenlink survey - 7 simple questions regarding your views about the Greenlink Project in Motherwell.' The main content area has a light green background and contains three questions. Question 1 asks 'What was the Greenlink site like before the project started?' with radio button options: Terrible, Poor, OK, Good, and Really Good. Below this is a text box labeled 'Please tell us why:'. Question 2 asks 'Would you say the Greenlink is making a positive difference to the local landscape?' with radio button options: Yes and No. Below this is a text box labeled 'Why would you say that?'. Question 3 asks 'Do you think that the Greenlink is making positive difference to you personally?' with a radio button option: Yes.

The survey went 'live' at the start of November 2008 and closed at the start of January 2009. The main methods of encouraging people to fill in the survey were an advert in the Greenlink Newsletter – a publication delivered to 7000 households in close proximity to the Greenlink. This was supplemented through word of mouth and links were created on the Greenlink and CSFT websites.

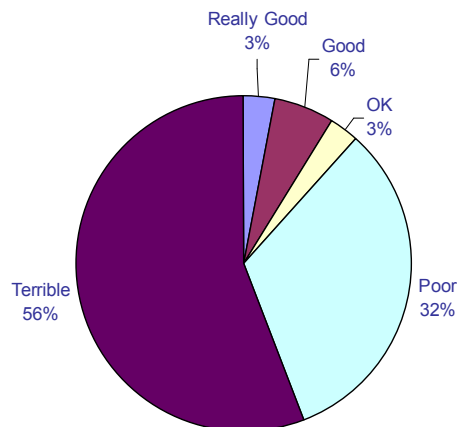
3. The Results

In total, 38 people responded to the survey, the majority (33) during November 2008. Some of the 7 questions were arranged in two parts necessitating an answer selected from a predefined list followed by a qualitative exploration as to why that response was given. This technique appeared to work well and, as can be seen below, many of the respondents were highly articulate in describing their reasons behind the initial response.

1. What was the Greenlink site like before the project started?

As shown in Chart 1 below, before the Greenlink started, nearly all respondents thought that the site was of either *poor* or *terrible* quality.

Chart 1: **What was the Greenlink site like before the project started?**



The main reasons behind this were because of litter (including large items like cars) and poor quality of existing path – principally because of mud and overgrown vegetation. Due to the combination of these two factors, several people felt the area to be a hazard to pedestrians and unusable for people in wheelchairs. Poor lighting was also identified as an issue which some respondents felt encouraged people to frequent the area leave litter cans and bottles.

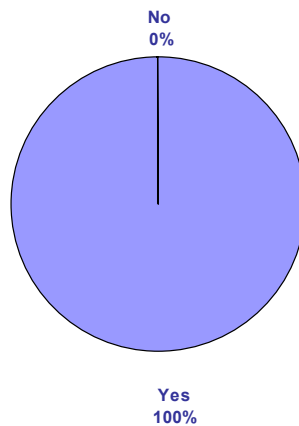
One person was able to eloquently summarise many of the answers given. This response paints a very negative picture as to what the area looked like before the Greenlink:

Overgrown shrubbery and woodland. Burnt out vehicles (lots of). Shopping trolley. Burnt out wheelie bins. Broken glass. Discarded household furniture and domestic appliances. Graffiti. Gangs hanging about most of the time. In short an absolute no go area.

2. Would you say the Greenlink is making a positive difference to the local landscape?

Everyone who replied to this question felt that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to the local landscape.

Chart 2: **Would you say the Greenlink is making a positive difference to the local landscape?**



The main reasons behind this overwhelmingly positive response were that the negative aspects noted above had been addressed,

It is nice to go for a walk in a nice environment and not be tripping over old cans and bottles and any other rubbish that people just throw away.

Well maintained paths in most of the areas. Litter and alcohol containers no longer such a problem. Does not seem to be a gathering drinking area that it used to be.

There is also evidence of schools and other organisations using and valuing the physical improvements made to the site,

The paths are much more accessible for everyone and are very attractive. Our school, Calder Primary, has been involved in a number of projects to make the landscape around the area more attractive and these have been very successful. At our recent Greenlink day with the school we were involved in a number of wildlife activities which were possible because of the changes to the landscape.

It is clear that people now feel that they have an attractive recreational resource literally on their doorsteps,

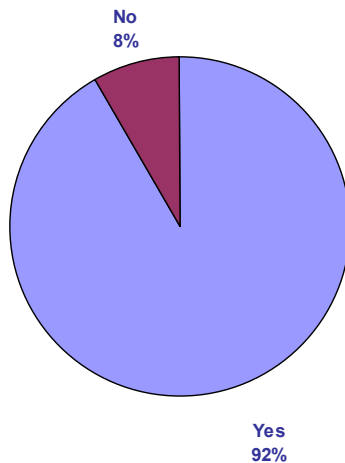
The physical transformation of the area has been tremendous; a brighter and safer area to use.

The area has been transformed since Greenlink came to the area. Opening up new exercise and learning opportunities for the connected communities. The landscape is a real delight in the summer and spectacular in the Autumn and Winter and always exciting in the Spring basically a joy to behold all year long.

3. Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to you personally?

Again the response to this question was overwhelmingly positive and in the qualitative follow-up to the question, it is evident that, at a personal level, people are benefiting from the project.

Chart 3: Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to you personally?



Below are some descriptions of the personal relationships which six different local people have developed with the Greenlink. The answers speak volumes about the special bond which local people have developed with the project.

Absolutely. It has brought a renewed sense of confidence, accomplishment and pride after a bout of illness. It has helped me to build my physical stamina, meet new people and feel part of a team. I've learnt more about the great outdoors and how doing my bit can make a difference not only to myself, but to others in the group and the local community. I absolutely love my time at the Greenlink, and it has certainly helped to lift my mood following depression.

As a retired person I regularly go on the Health Walks. This gives me exercise that I can cope with plus meeting new people. The guide leaders and the group in general are very friendly. As I live alone this gives me another interest in my life.

Having recently moved to the area I have met some very nice people by participating in the health walks and also after being ill I am getting fitter.

Helping me to understand the connectedness of all of nature which i am part of.

It has enabled me to make a positive contribution to an area I grew up in and watched in despair, as it was neglected over the years, I enjoy playing a small part in maintaining its regeneration and use it many times a week, as a real breath of the countryside; in what is otherwise an area really lacking in social amenities.

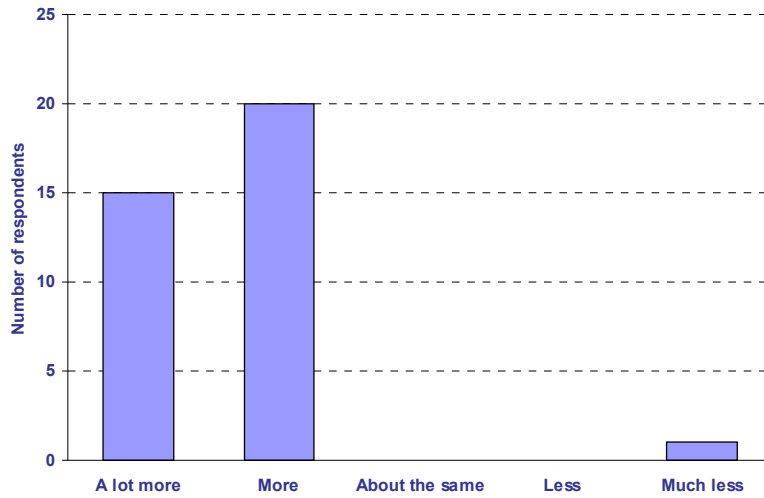
My mental state has been more positive since the Greenlink got involved in my area. My spirit is lifted and my faith in humankind has returned.

It is obvious from these statements, that for many people, the project goes far further than community engagement. For these individuals, working on the Greenlink has been exceptionally positive and life-changing.

4. Would you say your usage of this area has changed since the Greenlink started?

Responses to the previous question clearly showed that people's mental well being has been positively influenced. As shown in Chart 4 on the next page, nearly everyone who responded said that they had increased their usage of the site as a direct response to the creation of the Greenlink. This infers that people are taking more exercise locally and therefore are benefiting from activities which can contribute towards improvements in physical health.

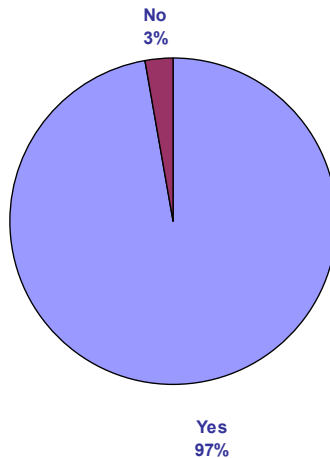
Chart 4: **Would you say your usage of this area has changed since the Greenlink started?**



5. Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to your local community?

It is apparent that the physical improvements to the area and the work of the Greenlink Team has had a profound effect upon the local community, encouraging local people to use the site who might not have thought about using it otherwise. As shown in Chart 5, nearly everyone feels that the Greenlink is benefiting the local community.

Chart 5: **Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to your local community?**



Several people said that a key reason behind this positive response was that the Greenlink provides opportunities for local people to interact with and become part of the local community.

You not only have a nicer green link to different communities which is great in itself but you find that there is much more community spirit with families and individuals chatting to each other along the walks and getting involved in the summer events.

[It] has become a safe and pleasant place to use and is managed by Greenlink volunteers and the local community to develop and sustain beautiful surroundings, returning the area back to the habitat which existed over 40 years ago: a place of recreation and interest for all families to enjoy.

New planting and restoring wild flowers, bringing the groups together in a common project and showing by example what individuals and groups can do in the local community.

It has created a great deal of the once lacking community spirit. I now witness the lonely/isolated enjoying socialising among neighbours.

Other respondents noted that the project has created a *feeling of local pride* shared throughout the community.

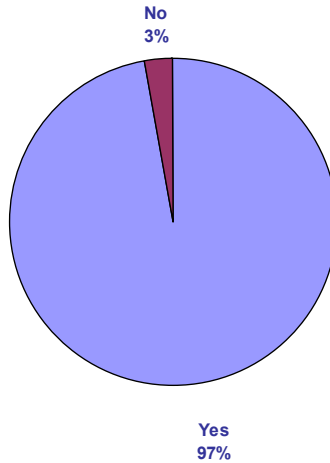
I see the kids and adults in the local area come together and feel a sense of pride that they have made a difference to area that had been neglected for some time. There is a real community spirit and inquisitiveness to find out more about the project - from people simply stopping us in the street to ask how they can get involved, to the thanks we receive that someone is taking the time to care for their community.

It has given local people the opportunity to have a real say in our local area. I also support people with disabilities who live in the locality; to volunteer on the green link, This enables people to make a positive contribution to their local community in a totally inclusive manner. People who have been volunteers can often go on to paid employment, using the valuable skills and confidence gained, by being part of this wonderful initiative. Finally, there is a sense of pride, which has been restored to communities along the Green Link, which had eroded over the years.

6. Do you want the Greenlink to continue?

As might be anticipated from the previous responses, people are very keen to see the project continue.

Chart 6: **Do you want the Greenlink to continue?**



Several people took the opportunity of the presented in the *Further Comments* section (Question 7) to explain why:

Yes it is vital for greenlink to continue it has preserved land for all to enjoy in our area that before was nothing more than dumping ground and unused. Also greenlink is raising awareness how important keeping areas green is of vital importance to young and old alike and all nature.

Greenlink should continue why stop now just when they have helped some of the people better to continue and help a lot more They have made a difference and I feel sure they can go on and help a lot more.

7. Further Comments

This section of the survey allowed people record their views regarding other aspects of the Greenlink and their feelings toward the project.

Some comments conveyed heartfelt thanks to the Greenlink Team for their work over the previous three years and confirmed continued support,

I would personally like to thank everyone involved with Greenlink for the continued association with Calder Primary. The staff and volunteers work so hard to provide events and activities for us and the children thoroughly enjoy working with them.

If you need any more help campaigning, I am up for it individually and I'm sure Pavilion people would help as a group.

During the latter part of 2008, the Greenlink was in the process of applying for and securing further funding. As such, the future of the project was unclear during the survey period and several people showed awareness of this issue and voiced concerns,

Good luck with the funding and I hope for the regeneration of our local area continues so that my kids and grandkids get the benefit.

Greenlink has made a huge difference in areas of extreme disadvantage. There is still much to do. Of all the fads that come in go in an ever desperate effort to create social cohesion and stronger communities Greenlink has proven it has the ability to deliver for the community that use the area. While the team can show ways of building on the success of the past three years they should be given the finances to realise their dreams with challenging targets and strict monitoring of progress funders can be confident that their money is having the desired effect on the community and is being well spent and properly accounted for.

If greenlink does not continue then I feel that area will gradually slip back to the sorry state of repair before this work started.

On a related issue, it is clear that many respondents viewed the money spent on the Greenlink as being worthwhile and the project represents excellent value for money - delivering several far reaching outputs.

In my opinion The Greenlink Initiative has made a difference to everyone who lives in the local area, and to the Volunteers who give up their time to contribute to its development and maintenance. If funding has to be found to continue the project, then this is definitely excellent value for money , giving development and sustainability of the environment, real community ownership and participation, and last but not least, true social inclusion.

The Greenlink isn't just about improving the physical presence of a community, it extends to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the volunteers and local community. On a personal level the Greenlink has been a fundamental part of my rehabilitation and without it I would not have progressed as I have. It has encouraged me to get outside more, believe in myself and improve my overall mental, physical and social wellbeing. The money invested in the Greenlink reaches far beyond the 4.5km of pathway.

Another common theme explored in this section of the survey was the potential for the Greenlink to undertake and inspire further local activities in the future,

The site could potentially be even more widely used in the future because of the new developments taking place there. It is very important Greenlink continues their work to make the best use of this area. It is a significant benefit for the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence in schools.

...we do not have a lot of organised activities for the young and families. The Greenlink is one group that has started to make a difference, with its emphasis on health both mental and physical. Its new project the allotment will have a positive effect by having people think about their diet and because of our current state of affairs, as well as being healthy it will save a good few pennies on the family budget.

4. Conclusions

The first thing to note about this study is that it worked well as a piece of research. A return of 38 people from advertising the survey in the Greenlink newsletter, the website and from word of mouth is good. In effect, this maybe considered to be a measure of the high regard which local people hold the project.

The survey script also worked well, and may be considered to have been a contributing factor in the success of the research. Having seven simple questions (with supplementary qualitative prompts) on one page was clearly able delivered the objectives of the study and elicited a wide variety of considered but also impassioned responses.

Results show that the Greenlink has had a beneficial impact upon the local physical environment. The majority of people thought the area was in a *terrible* state before the project started with litter, overgrown vegetation and mud, poor lighting etc. In short, the conditions were hazardous and some suggested that this may have encouraged unsociable behaviour in some the people who visited the area. The survey revealed that the project has directly addressed all these concerns and problems. Everyone in the survey agreed that these activities have been very successful and have made a positive difference on the local landscape.

In terms of impact upon the local people, the results gathered in the survey show that the project is having a profound affect on local people. This is particularly true in terms of mental well being. Taking the example of litter picking, it appears that people gain a palpable mental benefit from undertaking a physical activity which results in an improved local environment.

Futhermore, the Greenlink has become valuable driving force in developing the community spirit of an area which has been adversely affected by economic and social deprivation. Through one off special events, and regular walks and conservation activities, it has encouraged people to meet and provided a structure for them to make supportive friendships.

Although, none of the questions directly asked about improvements in personal physical health, nearly all of the sample said they used the paths more frequently. It is therefore highly likely that they have become physically fitter as a result of this higher usage be it through cycling and or walking.

In addition, several of the responses indicated that they had become fitter due to participation in Greenlink activities, for example, through conservation work and health walks.

In short, the qualitative comments gathered in the survey show that for many people, the individual mental and physical improvements achieved through the Greenlink have been nothing less than life changing.

In addition to these personal benefits, the survey revealed that the Greenlink has also had a positive impact upon the local community. For example, it has encouraged people from different age groups to mix together and provided a platform upon which to share ideas and hopes for the local area. The project has given the community a positive reason to come together and find a shared voice and sense of local pride.

Linked closely to this theme is that people obviously see the Greenlink as an important part of their future. Several are well informed regarding the Project's financial position and maintain that it represents good value for money. Many feel passionately they it should be given the chance to consolidate, develop and expand into other areas of activity.

Further recommendations

Whilst it has been noted that the study was successful, it could have been improved. For example, a larger sample would have improved the robustness of the results. And, as noted in the above, the online nature of the survey does skew the sample towards people who have easy internet access and are willing to undertake web surveys of this nature.

To counter these two issues it is suggested that similar research also includes clip board based paper surveys conducted by trained research in locations throughout the Greenlink and local community. The same questions could be used for both online and paper based methods and results could be collated into one sample. In this manner a more representative and larger sample could be gathered.

An aspect of the research which could have been improved is a deeper understanding of the physical health benefits which are due to Greenlink related activities. In some respects research of this theme might best be served by an additional project which specifically explores the subject matter.

Appendix

Copy of the Greenlink Online Survey text

Welcome to the Greenlink survey - 7 simple questions regarding your views about the Greenlink Project in Motherwell.

1. What was the Greenlink site like before the project started?
Terrible / Poor / OK / Good / Really Good
Please tell us why
2. Would you say the Greenlink is making a positive difference to the local landscape?
Yes / No
Why would you say that?
3. Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to you personally?
Yes / No
Please tell us why
4. Would you say your usage of this area has changed since the Greenlink started?
Much less / Less / About the same / More / A lot more
5. Do you think that the Greenlink is making a positive difference to your local community?
Yes / No
Why do you think that?
6. Do you want the Greenlink to continue?
Yes / No
7. If you wish to make any other comments please use the box below.