

CASE STUDY

Background

Heanor is a former textile and mining community, which has, in recent decades seen a significant loss of jobs and a sense of identity allied to a lack of aspiration. The town centre's shops have lost out to a large national supermarket and the weekly market has dwindled. We have a higher than the national average of adults employed in skilled trades and lower than average adults in professional and managerial professions.

Mundy is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled junior school within the jurisdiction of Derbyshire County Council Local Education Authority. We currently have with 179 pupils on roll, a Pupil Premium uptake of approximately 25% and most pupils are of white British ethnic origin. There are only a small number of pupils with English as an additional language. In September 2005 we moved to a new state-of-the-art school building through a government initiative leaving behind cramped Victorian site. The new site provided us with nearly 5 acres of land, which included extensive playground area, and a large playing field. In 2008 we gained our first green flag for our environmental work and have now collected four in total.

Borne out of a vision for creating a genuine sense of cohesive partnership with our local community the school wanted to provide much needed allotment space. We wanted to expand and draw upon the expertise and knowledge of local people. This wealth of experience, particularly of the older generation, is an amazing resource which could be lost if it is not tapped. We had developed the immediate school grounds to a significant extent but having the luxury of a large playing field we saw the opportunity to provide growing plots for both the school and our community partners.

Planning

We began the planning process nearly a year before we could actually begin the project. Complications arose through the district and borough authorities being unable to decide which was the responsible body. A significant amount of time was wasted as the project was passed back and fore. The planning was finally agreed to by the borough as it was eventually recognised that the community aspects made this the most appropriate route. Sport England, in the case of schools and their playing fields, is potentially a significant barrier to overcome in gaining planning permission. In hindsight, it appeared to us for this reason alone, that the borough was the best option.

Governors

The need to take people with you cannot be overemphasised and you have to appreciate that concepts such as the 'community interest' can be challenging for some Governors. They are entitled to ask the question 'what is in it for us/the children?' You have to be careful that whilst

you may be convinced that the idea is excellent you have to construct a compelling argument which anticipates understandable questioning. We could have handled this aspect of the project far more effectively.

Finance

To enable us to realise our vision we needed financial support and through Awards4All and NatWest granting bodies we were able to raise in the region of £16,000. The money enabled us to employ a horticulturist who, with the School Business Manager project managed the scheme. The building work began amidst the snow of April and we worked to a deadline of June 29th for our official Opening.

Note:

Do not underestimate the man hours and cost to implement a large project when applying for funding. If you have to recruit there is a significant time element to be considered.

It is important that spending is accurately recorded and evidenced as A4A expect good accounting records for their end of project report and do, on occasions, audit projects. They can be flexible on end of project dates. We negotiated a six month extension on ours but you need clear reasoning, which in our case were the delays in acquiring planning permission. We would encourage dialogue with the grant bodies as it is better to explain in advance necessary changes to spending rather than presenting them as fait accompli.

A Plan

We produced a Gantt Chart which outlined the time frame with which we had to work to. This was critical in the light that we only had a 12 week window in which to complete the project. This was primarily due to the complications in gaining planning consent.

Quotes were sought for all the large resources i.e. the fencing, shed, sleepers and polytunnel. The first step was to secure the site with the fencing and move the sleepers (assisted by a local farmer and his tractor!). The large project items were then built: first the community shed then the polytunnel and then the installation of the plots themselves. These were constructed through the voluntary help of parents, governors and local community members.

Marketing

During this process we marketed our project using the following activities:

NatWest video and local newspaper articles

Local events i.e. our local St George's Day Celebration and Community Fair.

Big Seed Challenge distributing packs containing: seeds, pots, soil and instructions to all our pupils and staff to take home and grow with their family.

The Big Plant. (planting out from the Big Seed Challenge)

Logo Competition aimed at all our children with the winning logo now featuring on our headed notepaper (see heading at the top)

Class and individual growing plants competitions

Any surplus plants and produce sold at our Community Fair and a market stall that the children hold each Friday afternoon at the front of school.

Note:

Tap into local companies to help support your project i.e. the local locksmith your local garden centre, wood yards and local farmers which bridged the skill and resource gap.

Updates

The children and governors had regular presentations and updates on the project to keep them informed.

Mission Statement and Licence Agreements

The Senior Leadership Team, alongside the governors produced a Mission Statement to embody the philosophy of our project which works alongside the licence agreement. The Licence Agreement was drawn up with the help of CLAS (Community Land Advisory Service) which was accessed through a training session in Birmingham.

Note:

Seeking professional advice on your leasing agreement is key to the smooth running of your project. It makes for peace of mind and clear boundaries.

Official Opening

On June 29th 2013 the gardens were officially opened during our summer fair. Lease agreements including Mission Statement and application forms were made available to any interested parties.

Once the potential plot holders were identified, the children conducted interviews and approved their tenancy if they satisfied the criteria.

The licence agreements were signed, the rent received and keys distributed and the plot holders were then free to start gardening. A number purchased polytunnel space but all members were free to use the Community Shed and all the equipment.

Sector: Green Spaces

Subjects: Literacy, Numeracy, Science, Enterprise and Citizenship