Pride in Place: Tackling Incivilities
Case Study: Civic Pride
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Photographs courtesy of Civic Pride

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The Challenge
Rossendale in Lancashire has traditionally been an industrial community comprising a number of mill towns and villages with a strong sense of identity. Following a period of economic change and the loss of a number of major employers, high levels of litter were resulting in a sense of a spiral of decline in Rossendale. Litter was also felt to be impacting on external perceptions of the area and potentially impacting on local businesses as a result.

The Response
Civic Pride has been tackling environmental issues in Rossendale since 2000. Initially formed with a focus on litter, the group’s remit has widened to include maintenance of public space and planting.

Local volunteers plan and deliver all activities, which to date have included the introduction of new planting and litter clearance along key routes as well as maintenance of improvements. The group has actively engaged local partners including Rossendale Borough Council, local businesses and residents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that activities have helped to reduce levels of littering and increased pride in the area. For example, there have been only very low levels of vandalism in areas of new planting.
How it worked

- Civic Pride was established in 2000 by a local businesswoman to tackle the litter problem that she thought was impacting on perceptions of the area and as a result, on her business.

- The group’s remit has expanded beyond litter in the last two years to also tackle other local issues - for example, poorly-maintained public spaces and a desire to increase greenery.

- The organisation has secured funding from the Rossendale Neighbourhood Forum to support its activities over the next three years and is also alert to other opportunities to draw in funds to both support a growing maintenance programme and deliver new projects.

- Board members are residents and all activities are delivered by volunteers from the local community who prioritise, plan, deliver and maintain improvements.

- Activities have helped to increase pride in the area, the amount of litter has reduced and there is greater respect shown to planted areas, reversing the spiral of decline and creating an upward spiral of improvements.

- The group has inspired others to deliver similar activities in the area having seen the results, eg the recent launch of Bacup Pride.

- Civic Pride plans to continue its maintenance programme and deliver an expanded programme of activities, including improvements to lay-bys and planning and maintaining new public space created by the demolition of derelict properties. It also aims to engage members of the youth and Asian communities.
Background to the project

Rossendale in Lancashire comprises the towns of Rawtenstall, Bacup, Haslingden and Whitworth, as well as a number of villages, each with a strong local identity. It is a traditional industrial area that has suffered decline as major employers that sat at the heart of the community have been lost, and is amongst the 25% most deprived areas in England.

Established in 2000, Civic Pride exists to tackle litter in the Rossendale Valley. A local businesswoman, Jan Shutt, established the group because she felt litter was detracting from her business and providing a poor image to potential customers.

The original members of the group (who are Rawtenstall residents and businesses) felt there was a lack of pride in the area. The presence of litter and poorly-maintained areas was resulting in a spiral of decline. A ‘broken window’ scenario was evident with pockets of under-maintained land resulting in negative perceptions of the area.

‘If it doesn’t look cared for there is no impetus to look after the place.’

Civic Pride volunteer

‘If a place is full of discarded rubbish, dirty litter bins, broken seat benches, unpainted railings etc, then it makes it very easy for someone to add to that mess by throwing away a cigarette carton, chip wrapper, or whatever. We can’t teach children that it’s wrong to throw litter on the pavement if they’re already walking through it.’

Local resident
What the project does

Civic Pride initially focused on litter picking and delivered activity on an ad-hoc basis in response to rising litter levels on roads in the centre of Rawtenstall. Small donations were secured from local businesses and residents, to support one-off litter picks.

Over the past two years, a number of changes have been made coinciding with key group members having more time available to commit to the project. Changes include:

- The appointment of a new Chairman to lead the group’s activities.
- Introduction of regular events - every Wednesday evening for two hours between March and October and the first Sunday of every month for two to three hours to deliver major projects. Activities happen whatever the weather.
- Development of a new constitution (further details below).
- Approaching local businesses such as Asda, Tesco and fast-food outlets to tackle sources of litter.
- Development of a brand which is used on all materials and signage to draw attention to the improvements achieved by the group.

Current funding sources include in-kind contributions from Rossendale Borough Council (eg litter bags, litter collection and provision of surplus plants and bulbs), a £30,000 grant from the Rossendale Neighbourhood Forum, Woodland Trust support and recently offering the opportunity for individuals and businesses to make regular contributions by standing order. Spend during 2010 was approximately £2,500 rising to £4,200 in 2011, the majority of which was secured as local authority grant funding. The group has built up a supply of equipment, but lacks heavy-duty electrical goods such as strimmers and hedge trimmers which remain funding priorities. The new constitution has broadened the organisation’s remit beyond litter to include:

- Clearing leaves and introducing new planting;
- Restoring derelict land;
- Cleaning the town centre;
- Citizenship and environmental education;
- Improving the sense of community;
- Working with local businesses and other organisations to take action that benefits the local community;
Assisting local community associations with their work.

It has also ensured that formal structures are in place to support the greater programme of activities currently being delivered and planned for the future, as well as increases in associated resources and monitoring requirements. The group recognises that:

You can’t rest on your laurels, you need to stay alert.’

Project team

Although the organisation’s remit is Rossendale wide, the focus of activity has been on Rawtenstall. The group regularly liaises with Rossendale Borough Council, Lancashire County Council and the Highways Agency, for example to secure lane closures and ensure that activities are coordinated. Support has also been secured through the local MP, who describes their work as ‘invaluable’.

Examples of work to date include maintaining land in the centre of a dual carriageway, planting and maintaining around car parks, creating and maintaining new flower beds and planting and maintaining hanging baskets and flower boxes on railings.

The organisation recently received and planted a royal oak tree as part of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The day brought together high profile dignitaries, including Lord Shuttleworth, the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, the Mayor and senior representatives of the Council, fire and police services.

I am extremely impressed by what I learnt of the work of Civic Pride in improving unloved and untidy areas of the town – and all done by volunteers, too. I hope Civic Pride will be well supported by even more people wanting to volunteer and by all the authorities in whose area they work.’

Lord Shuttleworth
Civic Pride’s activities have created a significant programme of ongoing maintenance work, including continued litter picking and maintenance of flower beds and hanging baskets. They also have ambitious plans to continue to improve the local environment and engage a cross-section of the local community. Plans include:

- Engaging young people through visits to primary and secondary schools to help raise awareness of Civic Pride’s work and promote environmental education.

- Engaging with the Asian community by linking into existing groups and active members of the community to help show that Civic Pride is for all.

- Improving lay-bys by reinstating kerbsides and introducing litter bins and new planting.

- Creating a topiary deer, an ancient Rossendale symbol, to be positioned on the main roundabout as people enter Rawtenstall.

- Working with the Council and partners to plan and maintain new public space at the Valley Centre where buildings are currently being demolished.

- Planting native trees to screen off under-used and unattractive sites.

- Holding garden competitions in future years.

A recently-approved £30,000 grant from Rossendale Neighbourhood Forum will support Civic Pride’s activities for the next three years. The programme of activities can be amended either upwards or downwards to fit the resources available, both in relation to funding and the number of volunteers.

Members of Civic Pride are also keen to co-ordinate their activities with those of other local groups, for example friends of local parks groups and Incredible Edible (an organisation that grows and campaigns for local food). The Chairman of Civic Pride has an active role in the Environmental Sub-Committee established under the Rossendale Neighbourhood Forum which aims to co-ordinate activities across all groups delivering environmental improvements in the borough.

Plans for the future
Community involvement and leadership

All of Civic Pride’s activities (including management and delivery) are undertaken by volunteers. The group was established by members of the local community to deliver improvements for their own community. The local focus ensures a sense of ownership and also allows volunteers to benefit from the improvements they deliver. Project awareness is raised through publicity materials (e.g., adverts in the local press), seeing volunteers on site, word of mouth, use of social networking sites, the Civic Pride website and networking.

‘There is a sense of “we’re doing it for ourselves”.’
Local community worker

Priorities reflect volunteer suggestions, funding opportunities and wider Council proposals. Anyone can suggest an idea and volunteer to run a major project, allowing people to influence the group’s work programme alongside rolling commitments. Examples include volunteers’ suggestions to plant and maintain flower beds on Bank Street close to the market and to create the topiary deer (to be delivered in the future).

People are encouraged to give whatever time they can to the project, to help on a one-off or regular basis. Wednesday evening activities regularly attract approximately 15 volunteers, while major events at weekends can attract 40-50 volunteers. Over 110 individuals and organisations are on Civic Pride’s mailing list.

Project achievements and impact

The main impacts of Civic Pride’s activities are visual. Group members take photographs before and after works which are posted on their website and through social networking sites. Improvements are also visible to all visiting and passing through Rawtenstall, due to a focus on the main routeways through the area:

‘People can see what has happened to their money.’
Project team member

The group has started to monitor the volume of litter collected per annum, based on the number of bags collected being multiplied by an average weight. Figures cannot be compared year on year, however, due to changes in the number of volunteers, number of working sessions and a growing number of sites benefiting.

Littering is believed to have reduced, flower beds that once provided through routes for pedestrians are no longer trampled on and flower displays have been left undisturbed. If littering or destructive behaviour is seen, members of the group will approach offenders to explain the work that has been undertaken by local people which helps to increase awareness and is believed to reduce repeat offending.

Local people are now believed to have greater pride in Rawtenstall. They can see the works that have been completed and it changes the way people think of the area.

‘If a place looks cared for people will take more care of it.’
Civic Pride volunteer
‘People are proud because it looks good.’
Rossendale Council staff member

‘Removing litter makes a hell of a difference to the appearance of the area… the little things made a difference… People have noticed change and that’s important and they talk about it… They [Civic Pride] have made an amazing impact both physically and people noticing change.’
Local councillor

‘Local people are taking pride in the environment of the area and well-being of the community.’
Local police

Civic Pride’s work with local businesses has resulted in fast food outlets and Asda taking responsibility for removing litter from the area close to their premises and Tesco installing a new litter bin. While the group feel that further work could be undertaken with some businesses, this is a promising start.

The group believes that having demonstrated their ability to deliver change, they are now better placed to attract funding. They have scoped the activities of the project carefully, ensuring that they consistently deliver what they have committed to, rather than talking about what they would like to do.

Civic Pride’s achievements are widely recognised and are helping to inspire other groups. They were runners up in the Pride in Rossendale Awards Environmental category in 2011 and, having seen the success of Civic Pride’s activities, a similar group, Bacup Pride, has recently launched in the neighbouring town to tackle litter.

‘Raising the profile of Civic Pride has inspired and encouraged other projects to get going.’
Local community worker

‘People who see us working appreciate what we do.’
Civic Pride volunteer.

There have also been benefits for individuals. Volunteers feel that they give something back to their community and they meet new people. In the future, opportunities are also being explored for volunteers to have access to further training opportunities, for example to support maintenance.

‘You get a nice feeling from seeing what you’ve done… It’s amazing what you can get done with a dozen people and a couple of hours.’
Civic Pride volunteer.
Reasons for project successes and lessons learnt

Civic Pride volunteers believe that there are three primary reasons for the group’s success:

• Being organised - including having regular activities that are planned in advance so people know how they can help, where and when:

‘People are much more willing to come out if there’s a specific thing to do and it’s part of a sustained programme.’

Project team

Activities take place whatever the weather to ensure momentum is maintained.

• They don’t just talk, they deliver - the group has been very pro-active in taking opportunities to improve the area and once decisions have been made, are quick to implement them. They don’t believe in having meetings for meetings’ sake, so have clear agendas and communicate by email in most cases. This ensures transparency and other organisations (eg local businesses and the Council) see that the group is active and do as they say they will. A Rossendale Council staff member commented: ‘They certainly get on with it’ and a local councillor said: ‘They don’t wait for opportunities, they create them. They are pro-active.’

• They have been professional - although a voluntary organisation, they believe that they have been very business-like in their operations. For example, ensuring they have a clear record of how funds have been spent and that their profile has been raised over time.

These strengths are recognised by partners:

‘Civic Pride has got a mix of everything - strong personalities, main themes and issues but also a vision and good organisation.’

Rossendale Council staff member

The time committed by volunteers sits at the core of the project’s success. A Rossendale Council staff member commented that Civic Pride is:

‘Lots of like-minded generous people putting lots of time into their community... They really care about where they live and want to make it better.’

The group has regular volunteers and the pool of people continues to grow.

Rossendale Council staff member.

Lessons learned include ensuring that the group engages all members of the local community (to be considered further as part of their future plans) and that persistence is required to engage local employers, particularly when part of national organisations. Securing funding has also presented a challenge, but has prompted the organisation to look to new opportunities, such as regular monthly contributions, to help sustain their activities.
Advice to other communities

Tips the Civic Pride team would give to others looking to start similar projects are:

1. Start small - it is better to focus efforts on realising a small objective that can be realistically achieved and provide tangible benefits, rather than looking at a wider objective that will take a long time to achieve and may result in disappointment or loss of momentum. Small achievements can always be built upon to achieve a wider goal.

2. Identify a clear focus - set some clear parameters for activity, for example a particular geographical area or type of activity to ensure focus is maintained and a clear identity and reputation can be built.

3. Be inclusive - make sure you reflect the community you serve by actively engaging residents and businesses to develop and deliver improvements that they have ownership of.

4. Don’t be afraid to ask for help - for example local authorities can offer advice on funding, insurance and group constitution.

5. Be organised - being organised and presenting a professional image are considered important to engage residents, businesses, project partners and funders.

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