

IT'S YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD - MARKING SHEET

Name of group: Murieston Environmental Group (MEG)	Assessment date: 3 August 2015
Name of assessor: John MacLennan	
<p>Introduction:</p> <p>Situated on the south side of Livingston New Town and amid the houses of Murieston is an area of tranquillity which is Campbridge Pond and its environs. The group, MEG, endeavours to maintain and improve this green space for the mutual benefit of residents of Murieston and Bankton, and to encourage a greater element of biodiversity as well as providing an educational resource for the community. The end result is a semi natural environment which is a haven of peace providing space to unwind, yet is an area of biodiversity and of environmental uniqueness.</p>	
<p>Section A - Community Participation (40% or 40 points)</p>	
<p>It is clear that this dynamic group has brought the wider but defined communities closer together, with its clear focus on 'what you want us to do' approach as indicated by the Bandstand consultation, and it is evident that the community has ownership of the environment by use of the area for dog walking, exercising, litter picks and environmental study classes.</p> <p>From a short evening visit it is difficult to highlight everything that was gleaned but examples of specific community involvement include: Dedridge Environmental Ecological Project, and Bellsquarry Working Group. The MEG Chair is also actively involved with the Livingston South Blue/Green Network.</p> <p>A wider local spectrum would include the group's engagement via social media, and with face to face contacts, encouraging involvement by all ages in its work. An example of the value of its social media is that during the visit a lost dog appeared but, by a quick posting, the lost dog was found in a matter of an hour and during this time the dog was cared for and exercised by a group member.</p> <p>The group is run by those who live and/or work in the Murieston area and they clearly indicate their ownership of the Campbridge Pond. There is also an involvement from West Lothian Council with regular input from the Tree Officer as well as easy access to the relevant Council staff taking place.</p> <p>The provision of materials for soft and hard landscape, together with labour, is carefully coordinated and donations of such are appreciated (but the group respects businesses charging a basic cost if need arises).</p> <p>If only one area of community activity needed to be highlighted, it would be the total informality that results in full participation from the community.</p>	



Total points assessed for Section A (out of 40)	39
Section B - Environmental Responsibility (30% or 30 points)	
<p>With a name 'Murieston Environmental Group' it is clear that responsibility for environmental issues is the groups' prime objective. It is difficult to differentiate between community and environmental matters, as the two are closely intertwined. A problem MEG has is to ensure the site is litter free and, at the time of the visit, there had been an unplanned weekend BBQ with alcohol. This causes the group some concern as the encouragement of the community to use the area needs to be welcome, yet the result of bottles and burnt grass does not give a clear message of local environmental responsibility. It was explained that the Council would be notified that there was debris to be removed, and a team member would be removing the floating bottles in the pond that evening. It is clear that an instant response to such problems is given by the group and this is to be commended.</p> <p>MEG encourages the involvement of young people in numerous environmental surveys such as toad watching - so much so that a local fencing contractor was required to design specific toad related features! MEG has live contact with specialised groups such as Buglife and Froglife, and these areas of expertise can be called upon to assist. The work that MEG undertakes with fish indicates another strength, with electric fishing being undertaken to count species present in the streams that pass through the area. From a horticultural purist viewpoint, eyebrows could be raised as when a tree falls into the water - stream or pond - it is left to decay naturally as this will encourage fauna and flora. This focus on conservation and environmental management indicates that MEG have numerous gifts to share with other groups.</p> <p>Through the contacts that MEG has with River Forth Fisheries Trust, there are sessions for school age children entitled 'Fish in the Classroom' with the scope of developing these in adult / community education spheres.</p> <p>This corridor of peace bursts with wildlife – deer, rabbits, badgers, foxes, rodents, frogs newts and toads, and bats to name but a few. The habitat is well managed and mapped by MEG and the groups' input ensures the area is in safe hands.</p>	
Total points assessed for Section B (out of 30)	27
Gardening Achievement (30% or 30 points)	
<p>MEG is endeavouring to maintain an area of non-cultivated land in a form true to its environment. There is a structured plan to remove invasive species such as Rhododendron ponticum and Fallopia japonica, and to plant a range of native trees. Links exist with The Woodland Trust which assists in genera and species choice. The area is a good example of the local flora which MEG ensures is maintained.</p> <p>The landscape features are well maintained and, for example, the new stairs and walkway blend softly into the existing landscape. Although it was a concern that the 'bandstand' was vandalized - by discussing its loss and its replacement, the community is engaged with the development of the landscape.</p> <p>The ongoing maintenance is cared for on volunteer days and by assistance from the Council or its sub-contractors. MEG has excellent contacts with local landscape firms who are sympathetic to its aims.</p>	
Total points assessed for Section C (out of 30)	25
GRAND TOTAL POINTS ASSESSED	91
LEVEL ACHIEVED	Outstanding





Areas of achievement:

MEG is in focus with the environmental needs of not just Livingston South but all those affected by the groups' activities. With the River Almond running through Cambridge Park, MEG ensures that its work dovetails successfully into the wider ecological community. It continues to increase local awareness of environmental and ecological issues through its schools activities, group activities within the park, and by input via social media. The group is involved with various other local initiatives where members freely give their knowledge and experiences.

Areas for development:

Perhaps the next stage is to consider simple interpretative features, which are in keeping with the pond and park environment and probably subtle in their approach; discussion with similar projects may be required as well as input from Scottish Natural Heritage. Links could be developed with higher education providers so that the resource may be used in project work and the groups' excellent work becomes more widely known.

RESULTS

Level	Description	Points
Level 1	Establishing	0-35
Level 2	Improving	36-52
Level 3	Developing	53-68
Level 4	Thriving	69-85
Level 5	Outstanding	86-100

