

AN EVALUATION OF THE FRIENDLY BENCH NETWORK

September 2023
by Sarah E. Frost

"TFB is doing 'what is says on the can' and becoming a meeting point ...where friendships are being made and strengthened."



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Executive Summary

This independent evaluation by Sarah E. Frost was commissioned in February '20 and completed in August '23. This evaluation aimed to explore how an innovative community infrastructure project, The Friendly Bench (TFB), is being used and how people and communities benefit. The evaluation draws on data provided by TFB network members, interviews with key stakeholders, and a survey of TFB users.

The Friendly Bench: Innovative, specially designed, outdoor community-led social space with integrated seating, accessible community planters and sensory planting. Independently funded and managed by a local group. Three-fold purpose: connecting people to each other, places and nature.

The Friendly Bench CIC is a social enterprise established in 2018 that is dedicated to addressing issues of loneliness and social isolation and nurturing community cohesion.

The Friendly Bench Network provides 1:1 support, advice and guidance in areas such as fundraising & marketing. Helps with publicity and promotion and supports connections across the network and with local and National organisations.

The evaluation began with the development of a theory of change and a related mindmap outlining the aims, outcomes, and activities of TFB, as well as underpinning evidence for the approach. The evaluation presents clear evidence that TFB has a valuable role in helping to create communities where social connections and opportunities for engagement can develop and thrive.

The evaluation identified a range of uses of TFB including; as a meeting place, as a venue for planned events or activities, as a place to take a rest or relax.

- **TFB connects people to each other by** offering a welcoming environment and inviting place for people to meet, relax, engage, and connect with others, as well as activities that encourage connections and participation.
- **TFB connects people to places by** signposting people to community resources, connecting organisations, as a destination in its own right and, as place to rest.
- **TFB connects people to nature by** being located in, or close to, green spaces, engagement in gardening and maintenance activities, collaborating with other groups focused on developing green spaces.

Events and partnerships

Various events and activities have been held at TFB, bringing people together and acting as a mechanism to develop partnerships with other organisations. Over 150 connections have been made across the network with a wide range of local organisations, groups and stakeholders, enabling connection of community resources and increased promotion. TFB CIC has also developed links with national initiatives.

Benefits for individuals and communities

For individuals, the benefits of TFB were promoting wellbeing, increasing social interaction, reducing social isolation, and encouraging engagement. Benefits for communities were improved places and spaces, a community asset and a sense of pride, a social hub for increased engagement of local groups and community activity, access to funding to expand the TFB offer, and a creative space for imaginative thinking and new experiences.

Key enablers for TFB in local areas were:

- The partner groups who lead TFB locally
- Active involvement and commitment of local people
- Regular activities at / with TFB
- Support from local stakeholders
- Location of TFB
- Attractiveness and accessible design
- Open and informal style of TFB
- Collaboration with key community organisations
- Being an outdoor, safe space

Key challenges for TFB in local areas were:

- Demands on TFB Leads (especially when volunteers)
- Poor local community engagement
- Vandalism and plant damage
- Time for local promotion and advertising
- Securing funding for local events and TFB maintenance
- Engaging with National Organisations
- Weather conditions
- Maintaining TFB
- Location specific issues
- COVID-19 impact

TFB CIC has taken deliberate action in terms of anticipating and addressing some of these identified challenges, some of which have been out of their control.'

The TFB Network

TFB CIC provides a wide range of support, information and guidance to TFB network members in different ways. Whilst views of the benefits of the TFB Network and levels of engagement were mixed, elements of the support that were valued by members were: TFB Facebook page; the potential for connections and collaboration; TFB Network Events. Some barriers to engagement in TFB network include the lack of time to attend Zoom meetings, varying comfort levels with social media and online meetings, and competing demands for time, especially for those running organisations. Despite these barriers to engagement, members recognised the potential of the TFB network.

Conclusions and Opportunities

The report ends with some conclusions, key learning and opportunities for the future for both TFB leads and TFB CIC.

1) Introduction

About The Friendly Bench

Established in 2018, The Friendly Bench CIC is a social enterprise dedicated to addressing issues of loneliness, social isolation, and nurturing community cohesion. At the heart of this mission lies an innovative, specially designed outdoor community-led social space known as The Friendly Bench® (abbreviated to TFB).

With integrated seating, accessible community planters and sensory planting TFB is a community infrastructure project designed around three core aims – to improve connections between people, places, and nature. TFB is designed as a place to meet, seeking to improve sense of belonging in local communities and enhance personal and community well-being.

Aims of The Friendly Bench



To connect people to each other. A hub for friendship, and regular community events and activities which help grow and strengthen people's social networks with their wider community - helping improve their mental and physical wellbeing.



To connect people to places. Serves as a hub connecting individuals to various local services and groups as well as providing a convenient and comfortable place to stop and rest on the way to local services and places. TFB is also a 'place' and destination in its own right where people of all ages and abilities can come together and connect with their community.



To connect people to nature. Enables easy accessible interactions with nature, wildlife and the outdoors to help improve people's physical health, mental well-being, social behaviour, self esteem and life satisfaction.

About this Evaluation

This independent evaluation by Sarah E. Frost was commissioned in February '20 and completed in Aug '23. This final evaluation report builds on the findings from two interim reports produced in 2021 and 2022. The aim of the evaluation is to explore how TFB's are being used and how people and communities are benefitting in relation to the intended outcomes (see below).

Drawing on data provided by TFB network members, interviews with key stakeholders, and a survey of TFB users, this evaluation aimed to establish the role and impact of TFB scheme in relation to the following seven intended outcomes which will be referred to throughout this report. These outcomes sit under the broader overarching aims of fostering connections between people, places, and nature.

In addition to this final report, a [film about TFB](#) has also been produced.

SEVEN INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE FRIENDLY BENCH

Local people have...



increased **social interaction** (reduced social isolation and loneliness).



improved **mental well-being and physical health**.



increased **connection with nature and the outdoors**.



increased awareness of and **connection with local services**.



improved sense of **pride, appreciation and respect for the local area**.



increased **sense of belonging in their community**.



Communities are more cohesive and have increased **social capital**.

2) Background

TFB is designed to be a place for people to meet, chat, build friendships, a sense of belonging and connect with nature. TFB aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation and be a place where community led activities are held to encourage everyone from the community to participate.

The first TFB was installed in 2018 in Bottesford, Leicestershire the home of the founding Director of The Friendly Bench CIC and creator of The Friendly Bench concept - Lyndsey Young. Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and others, there are now [15 TFB](#) across England. Each TFB is independently managed, funded, and operated by a local partner group, all of whom become part of TFB Network. The locations, partner groups and installation dates are below.

Location	Partner Group / Organisation	Date Installed
Ipswich	NW Ipswich Big Local Trust	1st July '20
Kiveton	Alana's Caring Cakes	6th Aug '20
Rugby	Hillmorton & East Rugby Together Community Group	30th Sept '20
Chester	Friends of the Countess of Chester Country Park	16th Oct '20
Bury	Corrie Gardeners Community Group	17th March '21
Halesowen	Halesowen BID	7th June '21
Brandon	Brandon in Bloom CIC	5th July '21
Culdrose	Culdrose Community Centre	19th July '21
Burbage	Burbage Community Library	25th Aug '21
Thetford	Charles Burrell Centre	15th March '22
Boston	Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service	22nd March '22
Howdon, Newcastle	Family Gateway charity	25 th Sept '23

TFB Network and support to members

All TFB network members receive support from The Friendly Bench CIC in the form of 1:1 support, advice and guidance on areas such as fundraising, marketing, sharing of best practice to help maximise sustainability. The network also helps with publicity and promotion of events and activities and supports connections with local and national organisations. Network members also have access to:

- A) **The Friendly Bench Network Members Facebook group** provides an open platform where news, ideas and resources can be shared. It also allows Network members to connect and get to know the CIC and other members better. Members regularly use this space to support each other and ask questions.
- B) **The Friendly Bench Network Member Newsletter** is issued twice yearly and includes features such as: TFB CIC updates including new installations & network members; Member News - interesting, fun or inspiring ideas from groups; Member spotlight; Meet the team; Opportunities to get involved in; Best practice advice and tips; Round up of social media posts; Funding news.

C) **The Friendly Bench Network Member Evening Class.** The evening classes give TFB groups an opportunity to hear from relevant organisations already partnering with a TFB member or who wish to partner with TFB. Two classes have been held so far, which featured Playlist for Life and the Community Help Point Network in Halesowen, as well as Make Music Day UK, an annual celebration of music-making that takes place in communities across the world on the 21st of June.

D) **Peer Learning Sessions.** TFB network members have engaged in online Peer learning sessions as part of this evaluation. Five of these sessions were held between Nov '21 - June '22. The purpose of these sessions was to provide an informal space for members to meet and connect and to share progress, challenges, and ideas with others. Members have shared ideas on a range of topics including funding opportunities, effective partnership working and how to engage particular groups, Feedback on these sessions suggested they are useful for those who attend: *“extremely useful to meet up and chat”, “good to further build the links”*.

Benefits of the TFB Network

'It is wonderful to see and hear how our members are supporting each other across the Network. Examples have included our members sharing resources with each other, offering practical support and learnings where there may be gaps in knowledge and also helping promote events and activities that their fellow Network Members are hosting.



The Network encourages a sense of belonging and community where members are happy to share their wealth of knowledge and experience with others. This support builds trust between everyone in the Network, helps our groups to remain sustainable whilst enabling us all to work towards shared goals and objectives.'

Lyndsey Young,
Founder & Co-Director of The Friendly Bench CIC

3) Evaluation Approach

The TFB Theory of Change and Mind Map

At the start of the evaluation, a Theory of Change and related Mind Map were created (see below and Appendix 1) to help inform the approach. The Theory of Change outlines the following: i) problems / issues TFB seeks to address, ii) outputs / activities to be delivered, iii) milestones, iv) mid-term outcomes and v) longer term outcomes.

The Mind Map summarises:

- the principles, design, and features of TFB concept (shown in orange and dark blue);
- the three overarching aims of TFB (in green text) - which feed into;
- the multiple outcomes of relevance to TFB (shown in green boxes).

A brief review of relevant research evidence helped to establish additional outcomes that might be expected given the principles, design and features of TFB (shown in the yellow boxes). All the outcomes (green and yellow boxes) were then condensed into the seven intended outcomes (listed on page 4). These outcomes helped to provide focus for the evaluation.

Evaluation Methods

The following data sources have been used in this evaluation:

- Six-monthly reports provided by local TFB sites
- Survey data from 82 people who have used TFB
- Case studies of people involved locally
- Interviews with all TFB site leads
- Interviews with / feedback from wider stakeholders
- Conversations with TFB CIC Team
- Data from online peer learning sessions for TFB site leads 5 peer-learning sessions held between Nov '21 - June '22.

Evaluation limitations

As with any evaluation, there were certain limitations with the approach. These included:

- Lack of reports - limited response to request for 6 monthly reports
- Time available to engage with evaluators due to volunteer roles.
- Lack of use of standardised well-being or loneliness measurement tools (e.g. UCLA, Campaign To End Loneliness)
- Heavily reliant on self-reported data.

Reported impact on loneliness and social isolation was limited to qualitative data collected via interviews and case stories, which is self-reported. The evaluation captured the impact on some of the factors known to contribute to feelings of loneliness such as; social connections, feeling isolated, ability to access social activities, a sense of purpose /reason to get out, confidence and mental wellbeing.

Local groups supported by and report to TFB CIC

- Sharing - share local news and events
- Learning - share best practice and learning
- Networking - Actively connect TFB network members
- Provide guidance and support to TFB members e.g. training, operational, promotional, marketing

Bench design & features



- Clean - maintained to high standards by local TFB group
- Safe - a place people feel safe and comfortable
- Good design, high quality build and planning
- Spacious - room for 10 to 20 people to sit (dependent on social distancing rules)
- Accessible - DDA compliant & free to use



connecting people, places & nature

A locally led group manages TFB in each area

- Make links with local groups
- Maintain bench and planting
- Collect data and report to TFB CIC
- Plan, coordinate and promote events
- Access funding for events

Community Groups

Connecting people to nature Connecting people to each other Connecting people to places

Each TFB has integrated Mini Garden and sensory planting - focal point for activity and conversation icebreaker

Green spaces

- Increase sense of community
- Increase mental health and well being
- Increase connection with nature
- Increase skills and knowledge
- Encourage physical activity and healthy eating
- Improve physical health
- Improve quality of life

Free and inclusive community led events at or starting at TFB (regular or one off / local or national / targeted or open)

Events

- Increase sense of pride in local area
- Increase engagement and participation in activities
- Increase links / partnerships with services and community organisations
- Increase social interactions and connections
- Neutral space to socialise
- Social hub for people to meet
- Reduce social isolation
- Inclusive - events for all community members

TFB as a 'bumping space' designed as a place for people to meet informally e.g. sit and chat

- People have fun, feel accepted and valued
- Increase social interaction / reduced social isolation
- Increase community connection and resilience
- Improve mental wellbeing

All TFB lead somewhere / are a route to a place (e.g. shops, local services) helps widen peoples roaming range

Neighbourhood Design

- Increase physical activity / walking
- Improve physical health
- Transformation and enhancement of underused space
- Enhance overall streetscape / environment
- Refresh the way people view and use the space and environment
- Revitalise the area and aspect of community
- Improve sense of pride, appreciation and respect for the area

KEY:



4) Rationale and What We Know Already

The Theory of Change and Mind Map identified that the following principles, design and elements are likely to facilitate change, and therefore produce positive outcomes.

Emphasis on Green Spaces

TFB are mini green spaces in communities. Research¹ shows that green spaces are associated with a range of community wellbeing outcomes:

- Boost community cohesion & civic activity
- Improve individual mental wellbeing
- Improve social relations/interactions
- Increase individuals' knowledge/skills
- Increase social capital
- Encourage physical activity & healthy eating
- Community gardens can increase a sense of community and positive social interactions.

Green space interventions that provide the opportunity to participate in activities or gatherings can improve social interactions; increase social capital; increase physical activity and healthy eating; and improve community members' skills and knowledge. These outcomes were therefore considered relevant when evaluating TFB.

Incorporation of elements known to improve mental wellbeing

Evidence informing the '5 ways to wellbeing' ([created by NEF](#)) suggests there are 5 main ways to improve mental health and wellbeing (see Box 1). The aims of the TFB connect with the majority of these in providing opportunities to connect with others, to (give) volunteer, learn new skills (through activities and events), be physically active (through gardening or walks around TFB) and to take notice, through the visual and sensory planting and increased connection to places.

Box 1: 5 Ways to Wellbeing

1. Connect with others
2. Be physically active
3. Learn new skills
4. Give to others
5. Take notice

Reliance on volunteers

All TFB rely on volunteers to some extent. Volunteering brings economic impacts in terms of in-kind contribution to community projects and can improve employability skills by helping to:

- Build confidence and communication skills
- Offer experience of the world of work

¹ Power in Purpose, NLCF (2021) Nature: How connecting with nature benefits our mental health (Mental Health Fdn) Places, space, people and well-being. What works Centre for Well-being. 2018.

- Strengthen work-related abilities such as timekeeping, punctuality and dealing with other people².

Also, research by TCV³ (The Conservation Volunteers) found that volunteers felt emotionally more positive after engaging in outdoor volunteering opportunities. Green health or environmental volunteering also increases contact with green space, increases levels of physical activity and improves overall mental wellbeing. The reliance on volunteering in TFB model suggests that some of these listed outcomes will be achieved by TFB.

Incorporation of factors known to reduce loneliness

A key aim of TFB is to help reduce loneliness and isolation. Loneliness can be caused by many different factors⁴, which can be at the individual or community level. At a community level, there is evidence that loneliness can be linked to physical barriers, such as lack of access to good quality green and public spaces to meet in, or a lack of groups to join. People who live in deprived areas may be at increased risk of loneliness due a fear of going out and about. Others may face barriers, due to a lack of emotional or financial resources that may be needed to take part in social activities⁵. The Theory of Change therefore documents that TFB's feature of offering a free public space and somewhere for groups to meet, may help to reduce loneliness in the communities they serve.

Involvement of social networks:

Evidence tells us that positive social relationships and networks can help promote health and well-being through;

- providing individuals with a sense of belonging and identity
- sharing knowledge on how to access health and other support services
- influencing behaviour, e.g. support from friends to take more exercise, stop smoking, or to access support
- providing social support to help cope with challenges e.g. becoming a new parent, bereavement or retirement

A systematic review by the What Works centre for Well-being⁶ found promising qualitative evidence of relevance to TFB, highlighting that:

- Changes to neighbourhood design can positively affect sense of belonging and pride in a community.
- Interventions that provide a focal point (such as TFB), or targeted group activity, may help to: promote social cohesion between different groups; and overcome barriers that may prevent some people from taking part.

² Time Well Spent. Amy McGarvey et al. NCVO (2019)

³ Inspiring people, Improving places, BTCV. (2010)

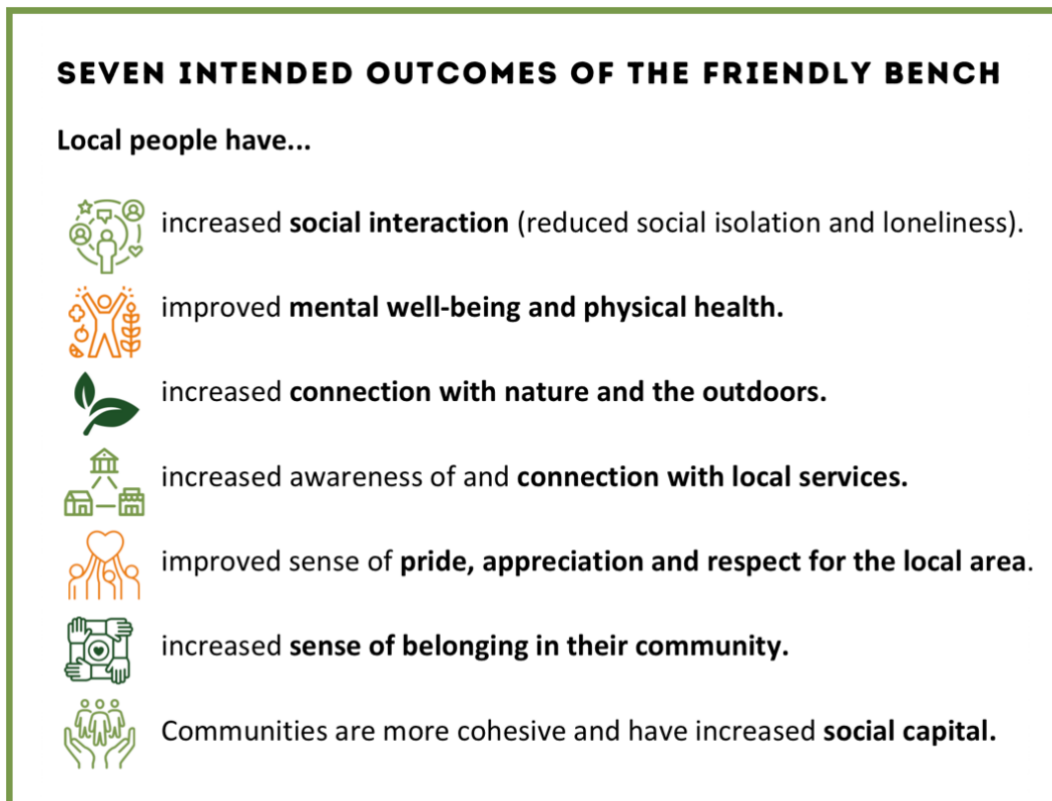
⁴ https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_lonely_society_report.pdf
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/about-loneliness/>
<https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Risk-factorsGFLA.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation>

⁶ <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/systematic-review-of-community-infrastructure-place-and-space-to-boost-social-relations-and-community-wellbeing-five-year-refresh/>

5) Evaluation Findings

This section summarises the evaluation findings overall. The evaluation focused on seven key outcomes of TFB.



The evaluation found that many of the activities and initiatives involving TFB addressed a number of these outcomes rather than just one. Therefore, the results are presented as themes. Within each theme, the relevant outcomes being addressed are highlighted.

A summary of the themes and the relevant outcomes is presented on the following page. **It can be seen that all seven intended outcomes are achieved through a range of different uses, activities, events, connections and partnerships.**

The findings section of the report is structured into the following themes:

- How TFB is used
- Connecting people to each other
- Connecting people to places
- Connecting people to nature
- Events and activities
- Connections and partnerships
- Benefits of TFB to individuals
- Benefits of TFB to communities
- Challenges
- Key enablers to success
- Value of TFB network

l) Key learning and opportunities

Section of the report	Outcomes that are discussed in each section of the report						
	Increased social interaction	Improved mental well-being and physical health	Increased connection with nature and the outdoors	Increased awareness of & connection with local services	improved sense of pride, appreciation & respect for the local area	Increased sense of belonging in their community	Communities are more cohesive & have increased social capital
How TFB is used	X						X
Connecting People to Each Other	X						
Conecting people to places				X			X
Connecting people to nature			X				
Activities and events	X	X	X	X			
Connections and partnerships			X	X			
Benefits for individuals	X	X					
Benefits to communities					X	X	X

5a) How TFB is Used

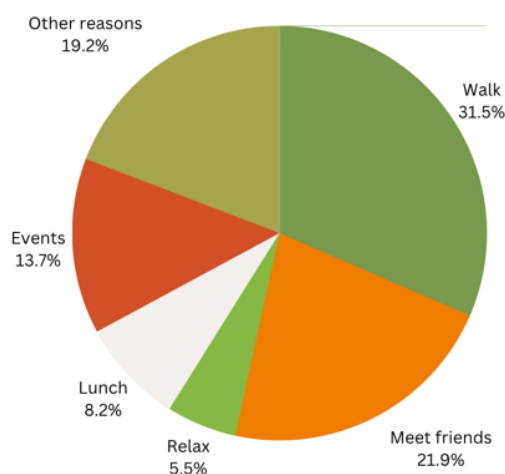
Relevant outcomes:

Local people have increased social interaction (reduced social isolation and loneliness).
Communities are more cohesive and have increased social capital.

The evaluation identified a range of uses of TFB including; as a meeting place, for planned events or activities, as a place to take a rest or relax and as a lunch spot. Data from a survey of 82 users of TFB shows the different reasons people use TFB (see Chart 1).

Around a third of survey respondents said they had stopped at TFB whilst on a walk or used it as a destination for a walk, others start and end their walks at TFB. Around a quarter (22%) use it a place to meet friends and 14% were there to attend events. Others use TFB as a place to sit and relax (5.5%) or to have lunch (8.2%).

Chart 1: What brings you to TFB today?



TFB as a Meeting Place: [See also section 5B - Connecting people to each other]

Many people use TFB as a place to meet with friends or others. In providing an inviting environment to meet and socialise, TFB is an alternative to meeting indoors or on the street. It is seen as a welcoming place which encourages social interaction among strangers and fosters connections between people.

“You meet at somewhere that has more of a purpose, and a welcoming and homely environment that can help encourage that social aspect. ...I can see strangers, sitting opposite and people engaging - there was an older lady with dementia who came on one of the walks and we finished the walk at the bench, and there was a family there with a small boy, and she's playing with him. So it really is a place that you are brought together.”

“what I value most is its gravitational pull - as a meeting point...it's a welcoming point, bringing people together and just a really nice space to meet, that isn't just a car park or somewhere else, and from there it could help reduce [people's] anxiety of it. And it is really lovely just seeing people chat and meet, where strangers talk to each other. It's just that nice, focal point.”

TFB as a venue for planned events and activities [See also section 5E – Events and Activities]

TFB is used as a hub for various activities and events and offers a useful central location for these. 14% of survey respondents were there to attend events or activities.

TFB is also used as an informal outdoor venue by many groups, organisations and individuals. Examples include:

- Alexander Stafford MP held his street surgery at TFB Kiveton
- West Midlands Police as a meeting place for talking to vulnerable members of the public.
- Local college used TFB for adult social care students to practice. ‘conversations with a purpose’
- Local youth worker uses TFB regularly as part of an organised programme with the young people.
- Local church led a Mothering Sunday Family Service from TFB to a virtual audience. The TFB was decorated with laminated quotes about mothers. (Kiveton)
- For a birthday party for a local lady who doesn’t have a large garden.

“it's a focal point and a meeting point for different groups...walking groups and pensioners groups...it's like a little hub.” TCV Chester:

"A place where new people can be involved... always something new can happen... new people, new experiences, new contacts.."

“It's used a lot, by organisations and groups using the community centre. At lunchtime, in particular, they use the TFB space with some of their clients that need that outside space, rather than being inside and confined, having to step through a door or several doors, and just need no barriers So it's used quite a lot in good weather, with organisations in in that way, as well... some of the subjects that they're being asked to talk about can be really difficult....sort of money management, and debt and, and poverty and people that are struggling with their mental health as well, on those kinds of things. So it's used a lot in that way...” Ipswich

Use of TFB during the pandemic

*“we were still social distancing and so an outside space was really important. We’d done quite a few Facebook Live things... so to be outside into the community space was mega important - to be seen... - when some people were vulnerable, and some were struggling with confidence...so that was really quite crucial...people saw me on Facebook Live and came to the Sunday service, people were coming along and saying hello, so it was just a point that drew people together in the centre of our community. The church is kinda offset from the centre of the community really... its on a side street, it's Ecclesiastical - it was inside- **the bench was central, outside, available to all in the open air - it was just a great position.**” Local Vicar, Kiveton*

TFB as a place to take a rest, relax and reflect

Around a third of survey respondents said they had stopped at TFB whilst on a walk or used it as a destination for a walk, others start and end their walks at TFB. TFB offers a casual place to stop and rest. It is seen as a safe, open welcoming place where people can sit and relax and take time. Examples shared included people using TFB to make personal phone calls, sharing emotions or celebrating significant life events.

Informal gatherings with veterans at TFB has allowed conversations to flow around topics including mental health, and sharing of challenging military experiences.

Who is using TFB?

Data from the interviews with TFB leads shows that TFB is used by many different groups and individuals, including community members of all ages. It is accessible and available to anyone seeking a welcoming space, thereby helping to increase community cohesion.

There has been increased engagement with young people in some areas. Some young people had assumed that they would be 'moved on' and that TFB 'wasn't for them'. Asking the young people for ideas for what they could do to help (e.g. litter pick) has helped increase their engagement and ownership. Encouraging involvement has also helped young people respect TFB. In some areas, the involvement of youth workers, rather than police officers has helped with the positive engagement of young people.

Reflections from TFB Users:

"Somewhere peaceful to sit and reflect."

"a lovely spot to sit alone or with friends and reflect."

"a safe place, somewhere to sit and enjoy a minute alone."

"Love just sitting on the lovely bench and taking in the lovely town of Brandon"

"one person...goes to chill and have her breakfast [the strawberries grown at TFB], it's a real positive for her."

"a nice spot to sip a latte and watch the world go by."

"enables me to have a safe space to come and sit and relax either by myself or with my friends."

"the number of people we walked past who were there daily, just having lunch, or just sitting down after doing a bit of shopping or waiting for the taxi to arrive – it's so well used and now it's become a focal point. It's like a landmark, I'll say, we're all by the friendly bench. Everybody knows where it is which is great."

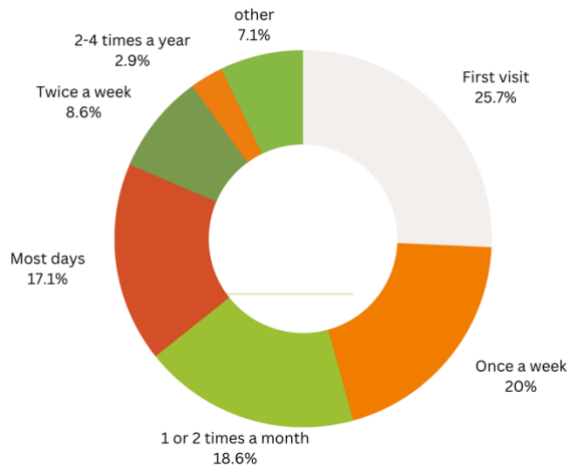
"you see more and more people meeting there. But it doesn't just stop at the older generations, we find that kids are using it as a meeting point, on weekends after school."

One TFB lead highlighted how children had taken responsibility in looking after TFB and the surrounding area:

"sometimes you'll get small groups of children or teens using it, in the early evening or something, because obviously a lot of them haven't got anywhere else to go. And some people will say, 'well, they're undesirable. We don't want to attract them.' I'm saying, 'well, they're part of the community, therefore they should be allowed to use it in the same way that a mum and toddler group can use it.'" Thetford

"seeing children take some ownership of something that they didn't put in. ...and they get quite upset if anyone has put anything in that flowerbed [that shouldn't be there]. ...And they get quite cross if they see people standing on it. And I've had little children tell teenagers, please take your feet off the friendly bench. When you look at that, if we're teaching children, to be responsible for their environment, and if we sow that seed now, imagine what they could be doing in 5-10 years time. I think that it's a change in attitude...and the children take on a bigger ownership and responsibility of their environment...And I've told them that it will be their responsibility to make sure that when I'm long gone...that's our legacy that says that we achieved something during a pandemic...so an element of pride in that too."

Chart 2: How often do you visit TFB?



Frequency of use of TFB

Gaining data on the frequency of use of TFB in any systematic way is challenging. However, the survey data gave an indication of how frequently people access TFB (see Chart 2). Of the 82 people who responded, 17% visited it most days, 20% came once a week, 18% visited once or twice a month, 8% visited twice a week. For around a quarter of survey respondents, it was their first visit to TFB, however this may have been due to the fact the TFB had only recently been installed in some areas.

5b) Connecting People to Each Other

Relevant Outcome:

Local people have increased social interaction (reduced social isolation and loneliness).

TFB serves as a platform for connecting people to each other through various means, including events, volunteering, casual meetups, and more. It is an informal place where people meet with friends or connect with others they don't yet know.

Key aspects of TFB as a place to meet, socialize, and connect with others include:

- **Meeting Friends and Groups:** TFB provides a gathering place for friends and groups to meet, socialise, and spend quality time together. For some, it offers an escape from isolation and an opportunity for social interaction.
- **Community Interaction:** It helps strengthen community bonds by offering a space for residents to relax, chat, and engage with each other outdoors.
- **Welcoming Environment:** TFB is viewed as an inviting place to meet and connect with people, both familiar faces and strangers.
- **Joining Activities:** Besides informal use and casual meetups, it also facilitates participation through organised activities.
- **Meeting Passersby:** TFB acts as a meeting place for groups and a spot for friendly interactions with people passing by.

"Brings people together for a chat"

"a place to meet with our community, relax, chat, spend time with each other outside."

"It's a place to meet friends, or groups, people that are alone go there

to chat to others"

"The Friendly Bench helps the community get together and is a great place to socialise."

"a place to meet with our community, relax, chat, spend time with each other outside."

"a meeting place for groups or just to chat to passers by"

"I meet my friends as a way to get out of my house."

*'The Friendly Bench sits grandly at the front of the Charles Burrell Centre providing an inviting welcome to come, sit and 'mardle' (a Norfolk/Suffolk dialect word to have a leisurely chat; a sharing of community). **The Bench is a welcoming visible symbol of inclusive community** set in a green space... we have been delighted to witness the draw that it has been with mum's stopping for chat on the way back from the school run to a family who made it a destination for a picnic. The word 'invitation' is central to the draw of the Bench. We have witnessed strangers talking about the Bench and moving on to other topics of conversation; the start of a friendship or just making someone who is lonely feel visible? Perhaps both.'* (Thetford)

"It's about bringing people together...getting people to meet new people. And providing that space for that to happen. And almost not always making it an event but letting it happen naturally on its own." Kiveton

Examples of events specifically aimed at connecting people to each other

Friday friendship group: "It started with around three older people and by the end of it, there were 11 older people who met every Friday for quite a long time over the summer. And they had tea, coffee, cake, and

other people came along and dropped in, younger people, people with children, and they sat with the older people...you could see, they were all quite happy and kind of making more friends.” TFB Rugby

Eileen, Dudley CVS, Wellbeing Walk Leader

Eileen works for Dudley CVS. She uses The Friendly Bench in Halesowen as a welcoming place to develop Wellbeing Wander Walks. She got involved in TFB through her collaboration with Halesowen BID. Eileen sees TFB as a natural location for running community activities and has observed people using it as a social focal point and for casual chats. "I use it as a place to meet people...being outdoors, it's less threatening than other places..like meeting in a coffee shop.." The bench helps connect people to each other, to nature (through Wellbeing Walks), and to nearby places through a What's On Guide which shows people what on within a 10 minutes walk from TFB. Eileen see TFB as contributing to health and well-being by encouraging open conversations and fostering social connections and community cohesion. Eileen values TFB as a community and connecting tool, a place to address mental health issues, loneliness, and isolation. She would like to see another bench in the area. "It's a place to make social connections...improve mental health - loneliness and isolation are big issues after Covid have got worst..it's a place to take a breather..get some time for yourself."

5c) Connecting People to Places

Relevant outcomes:

Local people have an increased awareness of and connection with local services.
Communities are more cohesive and have increased social capital.

The evaluation found many examples of TFB's role in connecting people to local places, both in terms of local places in the community as well as to other services and groups. Three aspects were identified, i) TFB as a signposting hub, ii) TFB role in connecting organisations, iii) TFB as a destination.

- i) **Signposting Hub:** TFB serves as a signposting hub, helping community members discover new local places and activities. Through activities and conversations at the bench, people often learn about local services, events, or other community resources they may not have been aware of.

"I was chatting to an older guy who is relatively new to the village and didn't know where to go to meet people. And he was talking about things he liked in the past. And he liked football - and we are quite heavily involved the football, so we said 'go tomorrow, there's cafe and you can have a cup of tea' and he started nipping up and suddenly he is like, 'can I come again?'. It's those things - a bit of signposting...because while he's chatting you're suggesting other things in the village that are going on." (Kiveton)

"there's links and the ability to be able to reach out to activities and things that are going on, not just within the library, but within the whole parish" Burbage

- ii) **Connecting Organisations:** TFB has played a role in developing connections with different local groups and organisations, both strengthening existing relationships and creating new ones. It serves as a space for local groups to come together, connect with people, and share their work and initiatives. [See also 5F partnerships section].

As an example, in Halesowen, TFB is part of a 'Cluster Connect group' made-up of multi agency partners, including NHS organisations, the police and other voluntary organisations. The purpose is to connect and share what's going on in the area and facilitate partnership working, enhancing community cohesion.

"we get to be seen as a place where organisations can meet and people connect with other people. We're helping in that we provide the venue and refreshments and connections to people and groups that might want to join their organisation." Boston

"we've made some really quite good connections with different organisations. And I think, the friendly bench has also helped us to strengthen existing relationships" Ipswich

"group who use the library, then uses the TFB. It's very much a 'together thing' - the library and [TFB] they work well together.." Burbage

- iii) **TFB as a Destination:** In many areas, the TFB is seen as a destination in its own right - for some it is a walk destination or a place to head for a picnic or planned events. It can help

minimise the need for local people to travel to get to activities, providing a convenient meeting place closer to home. In some places, TFB also provides a convenient place to stop and rest, particularly for those with limited mobility or older people who find it a welcoming spot to stop during walks on their way somewhere.

Examples of events / activities specifically aimed at connecting people to places

“we're working with the zoo to get trails connecting from the zoo into Chester and from [other areas] and into Chester. And the area that Chester West communities together work with is one of the most deprived areas in Britain...to get them into the nature areas on the other side of Chester. So all the trails connect and the friendly bench, is one of the big resting places on the trail.” (Chester)

“we've had a few of the older generation come up from the town...they have gone for a bumble around Helston and then walked up to the friendly bench because it's just on the edge of the town, sat down, had a little rest and then walk back down into the town again,” (Culdrose)

“it's the convenience for people. So that people haven't got to trudge to the town centre or whatever, they can just walk outside their door, and it's right there for them....on their doorstep.” (Boston)

“Burbage Heritage Group is going to do a walk to highlight Burbage history heritage, so they're going to do a walk starting at the friendly bench, and then they'll go around the village to these highlighting key places and come back to the Friendly Bench for refreshments.” (Burbage)

5d) Connecting People to Nature

Relevant outcome: Local people have increased connection with nature & the outdoors

TFB connects people to nature through providing opportunities for involvement in gardening and related maintenance activities and connections with other environmental focused groups focused on developing green spaces such as Wildlife Trusts, Bat Conservation groups, Men's Sheds, Helston Incredible Edibles and British Trust for Ornithology.

A number of TFB are also located in, or close to, other green spaces such as parks and community gardens – facilitating and encouraging access to and use of these spaces. Volunteers in some areas have worked to rejuvenate these nearby green spaces by planting trees, creating "bee corridors," and establishing raised beds to enhance the natural environment around the bench.

"The rejuvenation of the area around the bench as a result of the bench being in situ. There have been 50 trees planted around the site to help build on extending the project and we are looking at "bee corridors" and raised beds across the patch." [Culdrose]

"TFB in the Countess of Chester Country Park is fortunate to have many trees planted close by that are a tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth II. We love to watch people come back to see how their trees are doing and taking a pride in them" [Chester]

"we'd had a project to build a wellbeing garden and were involved in the million trees project...to plant lots of trees in Norfolk... we felt that the friendly bench fitted neatly with that overall package." [Thetford]

TFB volunteers also participate in gardening tasks, including planting, watering, weeding, and replanting seasonal flowers and bulbs. Some areas have established dedicated TFB gardening teams, while others collaborate with local "In bloom" groups. Examples of green volunteering include:

- Brandon in Bloom volunteers run regular nature-based activities. They plant and care for TFB which has won an RHS Gold Award for 'Best Garden for Special Needs' and also a RHS 'Achievement' award for 'Cultivating your Community'.
- Rugby volunteers engage in weeding, dead-heading, and planting new sensory plants to maintain the TFB's appearance.
- In Culdrose 12 volunteers and many children maintain the area around TFB and ensure its tidiness and security.
- In Chester, adults with learning difficulties took on responsibilities such as weeding and watering, providing them with meaningful activities and results to be proud of.

Nature-related initiatives have also been integrated into some TFB sites, enhancing the sensory experience for visitors. For instance, a sensory trail, developed in collaboration with the charity Sense, features sensory experiences centred around wildlife, including a tactile bug hotel and sensory planting near the Friendly Bench.

Feedback from TFB users highlights the positive impact of the garden element. They appreciate the sensory aspects of the garden, including its visual appeal and scents. The garden provides a calm and peaceful place for people to rest and relax, described by some as a "green oasis of calm."

"Lovely nice quiet place with well looked after greenery to rest and calm down."

"Flowers and scents are beautiful and bench is great place to sit"

Examples of other events / activities specifically aimed at connecting people to Nature

Strawberry picking We planted strawberries at the bench and the community had a great couple of weeks picking and eating strawberries. (Kiveton)

Iona Cowell, Engagement and volunteer coordinator, RECORD in Chester

Iona uses The Friendly Bench (TFB) as a meeting point for organising wildlife-related events in Countess of Chester Park. She became involved with TFB through RECORD's relationship with the Friends of the Park, using the bench as a starting point for community events. The benefits of TFB for her work include aligning with their goals of connecting people to nature, enabling interactions among participants, and serving as a focal point for outdoor activities. TFB supports their focus on health and well-being, including the "5 Ways to Wellbeing," by promoting physical activity, mindfulness, and social connections. Iona values TFB as a fantastic meeting place and acknowledges the helpfulness of the Friends of the Bench. In summary, TFB serves as a vital meeting and focal point for their park-related activities, and Iona sees the potential for improved visibility on social media and mapping platforms to enhance its impact.

5e) Activities and Events

Relevant outcomes:

Local people have increased connection with local services.

Local people have increased social interaction (reduced social isolation and loneliness).

Local people have improved mental wellbeing and physical health.

All TFB seek to engage local people through a broad range of events and activities, both planned and informal 'drop in'. These events serve as a mechanism to bring people together and have helped get different groups of people involved.

There were over 311 reported events held across the twelve sites between Aug '20 and Aug '23. The actual number of events is likely to be higher as some take place weekly. There were also some gaps in reporting. The total reported number of people engaged in these events was over 3,800.

The actual number is likely to be higher due to some figures not being provided although the Covid restrictions, and some remaining hesitancy about coming out to socialise may have had an impact on numbers of events and attendees. (See Appendix 2 for a list of events held). The evaluation data identified 6 main categories of events held at TFB (see Box 1) although many events fit into more than one category.

Box 2: Six categories of events:

Events / Activities led by other organisations

Awareness raising events

Marking an occasion or celebration

Fundraising / donations / collections

Informal drop in

Official TFB opening

Examples of events and activities held:

1. Events / Activities led by other organisations

Heritage Walk – Burbage: Burbage Heritage Group planned a walk to highlight Burbage history heritage. They planned to start and end the walk at TFB and go around the village, highlighting places on a 'Heritage' tea towel. They asked TFB to provide refreshments at the end. "people from the whole of the community be able to have access to that."

Mini Donks – Thetford: A closed session for families who have children and adults with severe special needs held with Norfolk charity, Mini Donks for Wellbeing. Small Mediterranean donkeys came down with two shire horses and a petting farm. "it was wonderful because the mini donks were so small, they could get into the [TFB] space. It was really really nice and...it was a place for people to go."

Wellbeing choir – Halesowen- Meet each week and come and do outdoor performances at TFB. The Black Country buskers set up at TFB and sing an entertain.

Yoga at TFB Chester –Free yoga sessions run by professional yoga teacher at TFB every Friday throughout August.

2. Marking an occasion or celebration

Halloween in BOO! (The Witches Lair!): Coffee & Cake, sweet treats, and spring flowering bulbs were given free to attendees. A ‘Best Dressed’ competition for children. The bench was decorated with witches themed decorations and “Wicked” witch and ‘Scream’ (local actors from Shoestring theatre) entertained the visitors. (Brandon)

Christmas lights at TFB Rugby - TFB was lit up at the same time as the community Christmas tree. A local singer sang and live-streamed Christmas songs from nearby.

Knitting group in Kiveton: *“They still meet every week....They have around 250 members - some of those people won't come out of the house. We go and drop them things off. And we pick things up from them so they can still get involved. They've never stopped and if anything, we've got more people engaged in that than we ever have. And they've become very protective of the area around the bench. It's now the area that they decorate. So is there always something there now and they've got a full schedule for the year of themes. Remembrance day, Christmas, spring and Easter. Pride, Women's World Cup. we've linked that to the school as well and we've put a wool donation stations so people have donated wool that way...and some children have used the wool for creative activities”*

Remembrance displays at TFB made by local community members (Ipswich). In Brandon, the local yarn group decorated the bench with knitted and crocheted poppies.

3. Awareness raising events

Playlist for Life help point: Volunteers created a playlist of music, mainly aimed at people living with Dementia, which encourages flashback feelings whenever you hear the music, which takes you back to a happier time or place.(Halesowen)

Rural Community Council– Comedy Expresso: *“Different people come along and join in either as little or as long as they wanted to...The actual group themselves is about mental health support and to try and encourage people to come out of the house. It's really another general chat and laugh and they had games. ..So that was really successful....And it was based around making people have a laugh...you know, people have struggled with mental health after COVID .”*

Hello bench: Part of a ‘Say hello’ campaign to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation, fronted by comedian, John Bishop. *“We did it across the whole of the borough. Ours was called the Hello bench, because we had the friendly bench. So having the purpose built space to run an initiative like that was great.”* (Halesowen)

Butterflies for Freedom. TFB Brandon was decorated with crocheted butterfly bunting. Over 100 Butterfly RAOK (Random Acts of kindness) gifts were left at the bench for people to take. (Brandon)

Rubbish walks , Ipswich *“about tidying the community, giving a chance to chat to somebody else whilst also getting a bit of exercise. They're run by a chap that has developed a real movement of support for improving the environment...he's done a fantastic job raising awareness of the impact*

of litter on the environment and is now bringing people together to do 'Rubbish walks' which is brilliant, particularly for our male litter pickers.... we start and finish at the friendly bench and have refreshments at the end."

Support for Ukraine : TFB Brandon was decorated with blue/yellow pom poms to show support to Ukraine.

Meet my Mask – Opportunity to highlight the importance of the sunflower lanyard scheme for hidden disabilities and the relevance to wearing masks. (Kiveton)

4. Informal drop in

Art in the Park sessions: These drop in sessions were accessed by people who would not normally access art workshops. Many had a go at the activities even although they thought they 'would be no good at it' (Chester).

Getting to know the community strolls: Aim to encourage residents to get together, make new friends, with a little gentle exercise with a small friendly group where we get to know our community a little better.(Ipswich)

Storytelling Tuesday Local storyteller at TFB on afternoons in school holidays (Rugby)

Pop up café Kiveton "The pop up cafe was one of the most successful things we did... We set up a pop up cafe and tables out in front. It was really positive with several hundred people coming along. We got some funding from the local council, which covered tea and coffee and crafts for the kids...we had a, Made in Kiveton craft stall and hired a magician who just went round the table doing tricks."

Naturehood event - with LincsWT, planting wildflower meadow, building bug boxes and bird houses (Boston)

Informal cup of tea meet up at TFB Chester.

5. Fundraising / donations / collections

The TFB Christmas Food Collections have quickly established themselves as a way people can help those who are in food poverty, homeless, or in temporary accommodation. "The generosity that we see is overwhelming and the charities we send the collections to are extremely grateful. We are already planning this year's and will hold it earlier in order to help the charities meet the high demand that they are expecting" Chester

Marie Curie Yellow Bring and Buy Event - Joint event with Mens Sheds, Boston College and TFB to raise money for Marie Curie charity (Boston)

Christmas care box drop off - event for local residents to drop off care boxes for the local nursing home. (Kiveton)

Bake sale /raffle - fundraiser for The Mental Health Foundation and Burbage Library at TFB Burbage.

“The knit and natter groups in Burbage started at TFB and moved into the library – knitting squares for the local neo-natal unit that has now reached out further into involvement of other people within the community who have come along and said, Okay, we will do it at home...so the tendrils are reaching out in people's homes as well.” Burbage

6. Official TFB opening (all areas)

- Opening of TFB Ipswich – supported by Suffolk Community Foundation, who opened the event.
- Official opening of TFB Culdrose officiated by Cdr Rob O'Kane, Commander of the Merlin Helicopter Force, and Base Warrant Officer Douglas, was watched by members of Cornwall Council, and the Naval Families Federation's South West Families Advocate Pete Hawley.
- TFB Kiveton official opening by Cllr Dominic Beck and Alexander Stafford MP.

5f) Connections and Partnerships

Relevant outcome: Local people have increased connections with local services.

All TFB sites reported they had made new connections with organisations, groups and key individuals or strengthened existing connections. Across the sites, over 150 connections have been made (see Appendix 3). These include local businesses, local councillors, funders, police, churches, libraries, other health and well-being service providers, and other voluntary sector groups.

Working alongside and forming relationships with other community groups and resources has helped in terms of promoting TFB, sustainability, fostering a collaborative ethos and connecting community resources (e.g. access to physical spaces, skills, other groups). Connecting with and involving the right people can also lead to funding opportunities. In some areas people and other groups join together and promote each other's events, do shared funding bids, etc. "the bench helped us to re-establish links following the lockdowns." (Brandon)

These new connections made by TFB groups have served a number of purposes (see box 4 and Appendix 4) and many connections have served more than one purpose.

Box 2: Purpose of new connections:

- Access to funding / donations
- Delivery of activities
- Signposting to other services / activities
- Promotion / raise profile
- Working on joint initiatives
- Corporate volunteering
- Increased engagement

Example Connections

Access to Funding / Donations

Links with local businesses has led to the donation of goods and provision of refreshments in Ipswich. "*Forged a good relationship with Morrisons, Asda and Co-op who have all donated items to use for events, prizes and refreshments.*" (Ipswich)

Donation of bulbs for TFB from Morrisons (Ipswich).

Sport England funding in Chester used for delivery of activities aimed at improving physical health.

Delivery of activities

In Chester, TFB have developed new relationships with local artists and musicians to help attract a wider and more diverse group of people. The art and music events we have put on have helped us do this and it has been a pleasure to see all ages take part in them.

Nature Walk at TFB with Ipswich Borough Council Park Rangers.

Dementia awareness event - joint social event with Memory Lane Group, Boston Dementia Alliance and Alzheimer Society to raise awareness, sign post and support those who are affected. Alzheimer Society Group interested in showing the mental health and memory benefits of being in nature and socialising at events (Boston)

Get Together at TFB - Coffee morning for Royal British Legion at TFB Burbage

Signposting to other services / activities

Wellbeing Walks - TFB in Bury had linked with the local social prescribing service who will use TFB as a base to start and end well-being walks from.

Working on joint initiatives

Overslade House care home residents made decorations for TFB Rugby. They also planned a trip to TFB on 4 June to celebrate national fish and chip day. They plan to work with HEaRT Community Group to put on seated exercise classes.

Nature on your doorstep - Joint event with RSPB Frampton Marsh and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust at TFB to encourage people to care for their local green spaces.

Promotion / raise profile

The local Mayor came to a number of events and then talked to Rotary clubs about TFB which led to more funding (Culdrose).

BBC Radio Suffolk - Matt Marvel visited TFB Ipswich to broadcast live.

Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) - RHS photographed TFB Brandon for inclusion in their National newsletter and website. TFB Brandon was also filmed for BBC's The One Show (Brandon).

The local Burbage Heritage Group came to TFB to give talks and provide archived information.

A local councillor for the area where TFB is situated in Ipswich, who also lives very close by, is a keen gardener and now is fully committed to the ongoing maintenance of TFB and is part of TFB gardening group. Following on from this, TFB was included in promotional material for the Conservative party under a headline of Community Groups Matter.

Celebrations at TFB Chester - for Friends of Countess of Chester Country Park (FoCCCP) winning Land Trust's Best of Friends award. Also, celebration of planting of Mersey Trees & TCV Merseyside with Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire and Sheriff of Chester at TFB.

Corporate Volunteering

Links with local business Cemex who provided a corporate volunteering day to help maintain TFB Rugby.

Connection with Greencore whose staff have volunteered to help maintain the garden and area around TFB, Kiveton.

World Book Day event at TFB supported by Morrisons and Asda (Ipswich).

Increased engagement

The Life central Church in Halesowen joined the Christmas lights event at TFB, some members of the church used the bench to promote themselves and reach out to the community.

Halesowen Friendship group meet regularly to maintain TFB, it has given them a project, a place to meet, a reason to get out and meet new friends: *“we have already seen TFB achieve its potential and to know its helping to improve lives of people in our town is heart-warming.”*

Cross Community Pebble painting event: TFB Boston organised and delivered a cross community Pebble painting event to create a pebble art pathway at TFB. Groups they engaged with and who contributed included Ancaster Court Supported Living, Age Concern, BEAM café (a new community-led mental health café), Boston in Bloom, Boston College Adult learners, Castle Street Cubs, Carlton Road Academy, Memory Lane Group, Old Leake Primary Academy, Seedlings Nursery, Singing for Fun, Scott House, Thistle’s (a community group for adults with a learning disabilities).

5g) Benefits for Individuals

Relevant outcomes:

Local people have improved mental wellbeing and physical health.
Local people have increased social interaction.

The case studies, interviews and survey results highlight a number of benefits of TFB for individuals. Many of these benefits overlap with the aims of TFB in terms of being a place to meet with others, a place to enjoy nature and explore the local area. Examples of the impact of TFB for individuals related mainly to:

- promoting wellbeing
- reducing isolation
- encouraging engagement.

i) Promoting Wellbeing:

TFB has a role in promoting wellbeing through providing a place for people to meet and connect with others, offering opportunities to participate in events or to volunteer. Simply spending time at TFB was seen to help with mental wellbeing, and some users highlighted how it was beneficial in terms of a peaceful place to relax and be calm.

TFB Users Feedback

"the benefit for mental health for individuals in sitting and unwinding is just as important as the mini events"
(Chester)

"I think it reduces social isolation and builds a sense of community." Rugby

"Helps me with my anxiety and stress before and after being around people. (which gives me panic attacks)"

"It means when life is getting tough I have a calm quiet place to sit"

"Just somewhere I get some peace and quiet"

"It's promoting the wellbeing of people...inviting them to spend time there, sitting at the bench... getting involved in events and volunteering. So promoting wellbeing"

ii) Reducing Isolation:

TFB has been a tool in reducing social isolation, especially during the pandemic. It provides a safe, neutral, and calm space where people can connect and have conversations, helping to combat loneliness.

“it has been just an absolutely fantastic tool for us to work on reducing social isolation, as we came at the pandemic. Even for ourselves, you know, if you go and sit up there on a lunchtime, you find yourself losing half an hour, because you start talking to people. And that is what it's all about.” (Halesowen)

“it's been quite an emotional journey in the last 12 months has been quite a difficult time for us as a community but to have that somewhere that safe, neutral, calm, somewhere that you can just go and be....we kind of made the point that if you sat in the friendly bench you can be approached and said, ‘if you stop there, don't be afraid if someone comes and says hello.’ “ (Burbage)

“we've had a lot of people that struggled following the pandemic, with social anxiety....and the community centre can be quite overwhelming, but to sit on the friendly bench and know that if, one of the staff team or one of the volunteers sees you, they might come over and offer you a brew, and sit down and have a chat – that can be the difference between coming and getting involved or someone feeling completely isolated”.Culdrose

“every time she comes., she'll say ‘You're my life saver’...because she's moved back into the area ...And she just so looks forward to coming either to the library or to TFB and meeting people...because it's lonely when you're sat at home for long periods of time” Burbage

*“I think it **reduces social isolation and builds a sense of community** really, and it looks nice.” Rugby*

“It's a place to make connections...social connections...mental health, loneliness and isolation are big issues after Covid have got worst..it's a place to take a breather...get some time for yourself..”

Some TFB leads have plans to work with mental health organisations locally to increase support for local people experiencing social isolation and poor mental health. In Kiveton, prompted by the lack of youth provision locally, TFB plans to use funding from the Co-op to pay for support with mental health and reducing loneliness for young people. Working with a local youth worker, who has a counselling and coaching business, young people will be able to access a 10 week block, for an hour, one evening a week. *“It'll be very focused 10 weeks to support them with their own mental health.”*

“We were thinking of looking at isolation and working with groups that specifically target people who struggle with poor mental health, with [TFB] being one of the areas that they could meet in small groups, to support people who are struggling with isolation.... my theory behind it was that it's a lot less intimidating if you're struggling with social anxiety.” Culdrose

“ a charity offering mental health support for service personnel and veterans and their family have identified that the outside space would be really good for to start their walk and talk with individuals who are having counselling.” Culdrose

iii) Encouraging Engagement:

TFB is seen as a tool to encourage social activity and interaction among community members. This may simply be through its presence in communities or through involvement or attendance at activities and events at TFB or through volunteering.

"I think subliminally it's helped people with the [social aspect] in those projects, they haven't recognised that it's the friendly bench has been part of that social aspect. It's just, you know, the place that we meet, but if that wasn't here, people might not know where we are, they might not be able to sit down – it's a simple thing like with flowers around or have that space where you can have more than two people sit down. So I think subliminally it has been a great way to encourage social activity." Chester

*"opportunities for **social interaction with other people are a definite benefit**. Because quite often, when the group is there, there will be maybe another group or just individuals using the bench, so it gives people that interaction with people who they probably wouldn't normally interact with on the street."* (TCV Chester)

Volunteers express how participating in TFB activities has given them a sense of purpose, helped them feel like part of the community, and encouraged them to engage in more community initiatives.

"I've learned that I enjoy doing groups in the community...and that makes me happy....TFB has given us a place to work from, before I would have thought, 'Where would you start?'...I think it's just made me feel a part of the community. And realising what I can do - I want to do more now I've started it. I want to be involved in in other groups and help." TFB volunteer, Boston

"when you do get people along to volunteer...they get a lot out of it, you know, maybe they're a bit nervous. Or, you know, am I gonna be overburdened? But actually, it's a great way to feel part of something." Rugby

CASE STUDIES

These case studies highlight the role TFB can play in enhancing the well-being of individuals, reducing isolation, and fostering a sense of community and support. Examples of positive impact shown in these stories relates to TFB's role in:

- Reducing anxiety and helping reconnect people with community.
- Being a safe place for a retired couple to socialise and feel less isolated.
- A place for social interaction for a widower - helping them cope with grief.
- People who were isolated found purpose through volunteering at TFB, leading to increased self-esteem.
- A woman found support and friendship at TFB during a difficult time.
- Providing a volunteer with a sense of purpose, keeping him on a positive path.

CASE STORY: Robert (Ipswich) Robert was an older man who was retired. Life was extremely challenging for him and he had been recently released from prison on probation into a hostel. He was working really hard to keep out of trouble and to reconnect with family. It was an even more challenging time due to the imposed lockdown due to covid. Ron was desperate to reconnect with society and to get out of the hostel for any time that he could, once restrictions permitted. One of the organisations supporting his rehabilitation, contacted TFB to see if we could support him as one of his hobbies in the past had been his garden and allotment. Being outside, in the fresh air and with other people doing basic gardening tasks really helped Robert. It helped to lower his anxiety, gave him a purpose and showed him that there are people out there that can and want to help him. Robert said that he had really enjoyed meeting us and doing something meaningful again. We chatted about his previous garden and allotment and his plans for his future. He was back in touch with his family, was feeling less depressed and more focussed on rebuilding his life.

CASE STORY: Jim and Joan Joan and Jim are a retired couple in poor health. They rarely went out anywhere except to do their shopping. They came across The Friendly Bench whilst on a short walk and now use it as a regular spot to sit and talk to other people. They now feel they have a safe place to sit that's close to home, and have met new people from the neighbourhood. Engaging with and talking to various people at TFB has helped them feel less isolated. They say: "Please come and sit, always someone passing, a free, safe space to sit and enjoy" (BURY)

CASE STORY: Barbara and Leon. Barbara had advanced dementia and it was becoming increasingly difficult to do things with her. The family first brought the couple over to the Friendly Bench in September 2021. They sat in the sunshine and various people stopped to chat to them – including people they knew but had not seen in a long time due to COVID. Leon really enjoyed looking at all the plants in the bench as well as meeting people. They returned for the Remembrance event. Leon had been unable to attend a service due to infirmity but the event at the Library / Friendly bench was OK for him and Barbara. Again, they met lots of people they knew and Leon especially enjoyed chatting to old friends. In March 2022, Barbara died aged 92. They had been married 70 years and Leon is grief stricken. He was invited to come along to the gardening party at TFB. He sat on the bench, directing operations and advising on pruning. An old friend passing spotted him on the bench and stopped to chat. He also knew some of the gardening party members. He had a really enjoyable time. The family will continue to bring him over to the Friendly Bench as he always finds someone to chat to when he is there. (BURBAGE)

CASE STORY: Three Ladies Three ladies, who had been socially isolated during Covid restrictions, started coming to weekly events at TFB. These ladies felt TFB was a safe outdoor space where they could meet others. The events gave them a purpose and something regular to look forward to. They now serve the refreshments for other events and suggest what we can do to encourage others to join in at TFB. Their self-esteem has risen and they have been given the opportunity to help others by becoming volunteers themselves. (CHESTER)

CASE STORY: Knit and Natter Member - I first came to the Burbage Friendly Bench in Summer 2022. I was going through a difficult time and felt I needed to meet new people. I saw the 'knit and natter' group advertised and went along despite not being able to knit! I was met with friendly faces and a welcoming hug, it was just what I needed. I attend most Saturdays and have watched the group grow and flourish. The Friendly Bench looks gorgeous as it is planted with some lovely blooms and is always well maintained. If the Friendly Bench wasn't there I wouldn't have met the very special people I now call my friends. (Burbage)

Case Study: Biscuit, Halesowen "Biscuit is one of our local volunteers. He struggles with his mental health, he's lost his mum 11 years ago, got no other family, but it gives him a purpose in life to actually come down

[to TFB] and help. He's the one who will do all the wood treatment on TFB. if he wasn't engaging with us and doing stuff at the bench, he would be in the pub..because of his adverse childhood effects. He could potentially find himself in trouble. So what he does with us, keeps him on the straight and narrow. He comes to me every morning and says Vic, what you what do you got me to do what you got to do today? So that he's just asked about watering the plants so he'll be the one who gets the Bowser and watering the plants and - he's a fantastic . It's just transformed him because he now feels like he's got a purpose to get up in the morning. And he comes and spends time with us. And he feels like he's giving back."

The Singer - Boston *"there's a lady that always walks by and sings with a microphone... she's a very isolated, very lonely lady, and she won't come and join us, she won't actually come to [TFB], she stays a few yards away on the pavement - joining in from a distance...We have 'singing for fun' at TFB and she joined in with all the songs...and on Remembrance day, we were making poppies, and she said, 'Can I make a poppy?' And she's like, 'I can't come over', so I took the stuff to her...it's only a small step...and I think that's the power of it - it's a good way of connecting with people."* Boston

"a lady came in [to the community centre] and was obviously very nervous and wanted some help because she was having challenges paying her bills and getting enough food...The receptionist said, ' let's have a chat', and she started obviously feeling embarrassed, nervous and started backing away as she didn't want to give lots of details about her life and she left the building. So [receptionist] went after her and took her to the bench to sit down and gently talk her through things...and the bench is somewhere for lots of these sorts of conversations that need to be a sitting conversation. It could have been done in the cafe, but she obviously felt inside will be a bit too claustrophobic...and the bench provided that sort of platform that allowed them to go to have that conversation and she could get the help that she needed at that particular moment." Thetford

5h) Benefits to communities

Relevant outcomes:

Local people have an increased sense of belonging in their community.

Local people have an improved sense of pride, appreciation and respect for the local area.

The evaluation highlights a number of key benefits to communities provided by TFB including:

- i) **Improves / Revitalises Places and Spaces:** TFB has helped to revitalise public spaces in many areas, transforming them from underused locations into places that people admire and want to be a part of.

"It's [part of] a hub now where it was just a building before and just a 'nothing' space...it's something people admire and they want to be part of..." (Burbage)

- ii) **Community Asset:** TFB is viewed as an important asset to communities and as a connecting point for groups and individuals to come together. Many describe TFB as a focal point - a meeting place for various groups and individuals. It is seen as a welcoming space that promotes kindness and is accessible, encouraging shared time with others, helping to reduce social isolation. TFB is seen as a valuable landmark in the community, contributing to its identity and providing a welcoming place for reflection or socialising. Some TFB leads and users described TFB as a place can offer a place for moments of peace and tranquillity within the community. "A little green oasis in the town centre"

"It's a welcoming space - people say 'this is a life changer for me – this is great for me' and it shows a kindness, there's not enough of that – it epitomises that it's a kind space.... Come and join it." Burbage

- iii) **Sense of Pride:** TFB helps instil a sense of pride within communities, especially amongst those involved in leading activity and maintaining the planting and woodwork. In some areas, it has helped foster trust with younger generations, providing them with a safe space to be themselves without feeling awkward or antagonized. It has helped to contribute to a sense of pride and responsibility in the younger generation, supporting a legacy of community engagement and ownership and responsibility for their environment. In some areas, children actively participate in its maintenance and educate others about its significance.

"I feel such pride for the friendly bench...I'm so proud of it. I really am...it's got so much potential for bringing people together.....and immense pride at the plants growing in it and seeing the pleasure on people's faces when they visit." (Ipswich)

"It's been a sense of pride getting the friendly bench for our community" Bury

"it gives you a bit of a glow really to think that it's being used for people to enjoy" (Burbage)

"getting [TFB] in the park is one of the biggest achievements in my life.. it was a big process to go through, it involved networking with the local MP, councillors, the hospital, the police,

things I would never normally have done. So it was a challenge, but a huge, huge reward. Then, people that I've met through the friendly bench, it's just been lovely. It's, I feel part of a wider community, not always just the people who sit on the friendly bench and enjoy the events...I got to know lots of individuals in the community and I've got to network with people that we never have networked with before. So the rewards are huge and it's great just to see the children using it and families picnicking there or older people resting there - it's presence is huge." TFB Lead

- iv) Social hub:** TFB has led to increased engagement for and with other local groups and increased people's engagement in community activity through volunteering and increased engagement in activities. TFB aligns with larger community initiatives, such as The Big Lunch, RSPB Big Garden bird watch, tree planting projects.

"TFB has become a focal point for us to meet with other organisations... to sit together outside in a lovely setting and talk about...not just TFB but other things that are happening – good and bad in the community." (Ipswich)

- v) Enabled Access to Funding:** Having a TFB has enabled some lead groups to access additional funding from a range of sources. These have included Co-op Local Community Fund, 'levelling up' funding, The Westminster Foundation, Sport England, 'Green health' grants, grants from local authority and via social prescribing. These funds have been used to develop resources and expand the range of things that can be offered at TFB.

"to say you're part of a bigger thing... that helps when you are talking, whether it's to council, other organisations, by saying that you're part of the friendly bench... it demonstrates something which makes us appealing to external providers and grant funders, we therefore have a different relationship and we're a trusted partner." (Thetford)

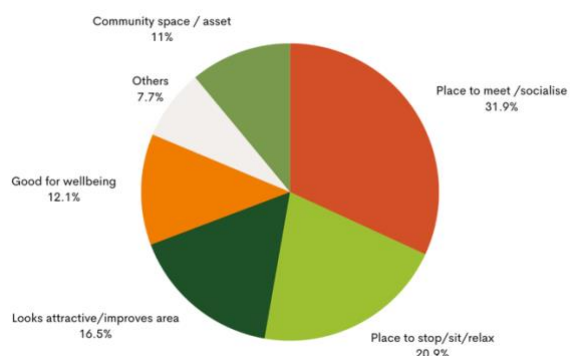
- vi) Creative Space:** Some saw TFB as a creative space for imaginative thinking, offering opportunities for new experiences, connections, and community projects, "[it's] allowing people to do more... thinking outside the box about what you can do more of to benefit the community."(TFB volunteer)

*"I think its an **imaginative**, stepping aside from what people might expect from such a thing."*

"Its' acted as a bridge into other community projects and ideas.."

The evaluation showed that TFB means different things to different people. The survey of TFB users showed that around a third (32% / n=82) valued it as a place to meet and socialise, 21% valued it as place to stop and rest. See Chart 3.

Chart 3: What does The Friendly Bench mean to you and /or your community?



Feedback from TFB Users: What you most value about TFB?

"It's a great place to meet, people sitting on it, being by it...a gathering place."

"The Friends of the Bench [network members] are great...really helpful".

"Giving people the space to be..."

"The cooperative ideal of it all..."

"The openness and possibilities...the open endedness ... you never know what could and might happen next - that's quite joyful and exciting!"

"Its all welcoming to people.."

TFB: An Asset-Based Approach

Asset based approaches are built on the idea that communities possess a wealth of resources, strengths and resources (assets) that can be used to promote well-being and build stronger communities. TFB aligns with this concept through:

Utilising community assets: TFB is a tool to enable use of assets already present in a community e.g. volunteer time and skill, local groups and organisations, knowledge and skills of local people. It creates a space for social interaction and support and focuses on leveraging and enhancing the existing strengths and assets within a community to encourage social connections, well-being, and support.

Building social connections: A primary aim of TFB is to promote social interaction, combat loneliness, and encourage positive relationships among community members. This is achieved by bringing people together informally, at events or through volunteering.

Tapping into local talents and expertise: The success of TFB relies on the involvement of community members who volunteer their time and skills to organise events, activities, and support networks. Harnessing the local talent and expertise in the community.

Empowering residents: Individuals can initiate or participate in activities at TFB or take a role in maintain the bench and spaces around it - fostering a sense of pride, ownership and responsibility.

Strengthens community resilience: By promoting social connections and support networks, TFB enhances the community's resilience to challenges, such as isolation, bereavement and poor mental health. It fosters a sense of togetherness and belonging, which can help community members cope with adversity.

Encouraging local leadership: Each TFB relies on local community leaders, volunteers, and residents promoting local leadership and self-sufficiency.

Stakeholder Views

Darren Kench, Community Network Developer, Eden Project Communities

The Eden Project Communities is a charity focused on connecting people with nature and each other. Through events like 'The Big lunch', their goal is to bring people together, share their diverse skills and actively engage with each other and their local places. Darren has taken part in various activities at TFB in Halesowen, which has provided him with an opportunity to share information about the work of the Eden Project Communities, emphasising the role of The Friendly Bench, especially in combating loneliness. Darren describes TFB as a unique, safe and welcoming space that 'envelops' people who sit there. He likes the 'cocoon-like' design which helps encourage conversations and connections, "it probably feels a bit safer and enclosed so when you're in there, you are really immersed in it, and I think that probably helps the flow of conversations a bit better..." He sees the TFB location in Halesowen town centre as offering an 'oasis of calm' and a 'chance to pause and reflect', "it provides that 'bumping space' for communities to come together, put down the shopping bags for a while, and just make connections..." Darren felt the greenery and flowers at TFB were aesthetically pleasing, beneficial for mental health, and an enabler for engagement. "you're surrounded by nature, which is beneficial to your mental health and for people who may not have any sort of horticultural knowledge or experience it might be a gateway into that, encouraging people to think about biodiversity and pollinators. And also people might think, 'oh, that's looking a little bit untidy - can we maybe help out in some way or while we're here? and then that might bring people in to help with the upkeep and give them some purpose..." Darren sees The Friendly Bench as a multi-purpose space and a valuable community resource integrated into a broad calendar of events. It brings people together, fosters connections, and provides a space for reflection amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Christine Shaw, Local Councillor, Ipswich

Christine is an elected member linked to Big Local Trust. She played a key role in connecting The Friendly Bench (TFB) to the local council and was involved in selecting a suitable site. She has been actively involved as a volunteer in keeping the bench tidy and connecting stakeholders. She sees the benefits of TFB to be; attracting volunteers, providing a safe space for people to engage at their own pace, fostering community cohesion, and connecting people to nature, local places and other services and groups. "There's cross fertilisation, for example with the Community Police Safer Neighbourhoods team ...and Social Prescribing, and we can share what's going on [at TFB] with these groups." Christine values TFB for its cooperative ideals, openness, and the possibilities it offers for bringing the community together to develop new opportunities. "A place where new people can be involved...always something new can happen... new

Victor Lukaniuk, Suffolk County Councillor for Brandon, Elveden and Santon Downham. As the Councillor who initially realised the potential of the site I am delighted to give you my personnel assessment of this brilliant wooden feature. Very quickly it gained iconic land mark status from Brandonians. Previously it was simply "Bury Road Triangle", not any more, "meet me at The Friendly Bench" is now a much vaunted phrase around the town. It truly is a social hub and a proper place to make friends and meet friends and long may it continue.

Chris Durham, Anglia in Bloom “Brandon friendly bench ‘ a real community initiative that includes the whole community , a place to encourage social networking and community bonding . A quiet space that is harboured by nature and its suitable choice of plants blends to a calming ,pleasant environment . An ideal place to reflect and for all to feel comfortable safe all in the heart of the community.”

Rev Gary Schofield, Kiveton

Gary is really supportive of TFB in Kiveton and believes it is a, “great thing for the community”. During lockdown and the pandemic, he used TFB for Church services when churches had to close and gatherings were banned. He says of TFB; “it’s an open stage where people can gather, and are welcome and a place where all are equal. It’s a really good facility where anybody and everybody is welcome. So you can go there to take a phone call from somebody who’s, I don’t know, maybe phoning you up and saying that they’re pregnant or something. Or you can go there and cry, lost your mum or grandma, because it’s got such a wide remit. So it’s a place of bringing together that fulfils many, many different purposes. Can’t just put your hand on one kind of thing, its remit is really, really wide.”

Neil Senior project officer at The Conservation Volunteers

Neil is involved with The Friendly Bench in Chester where he manages volunteers and coordinates various groups within the park, including those with learning disabilities. He makes use of TFB to facilitate community engagement and involvement. Neil sees The Friendly Bench as a focal point in the park, attracting different groups. He values the outdoor space it offers, especially in times of COVID-19 when people were anxious about indoor gatherings. The prominent location in the park makes it easily recognizable landmark. He feels the design, with ‘open horseshoe-like’ layout, encourages social interaction while offering a level of privacy and the versatility and accessibility of the bench, allows it to cater to various groups and activities. Neils sees the active involvement of community leaders like Morag as contributing to its success. The bench's impact lies in its ability to serve as a central meeting point and

5i) Challenges Faced

The evaluation highlights a number of potential challenges for TFB leads and delivery in local places. The extent to which these challenges were identified and experienced varied amongst the sites. Despite these challenges, TFB leaders and volunteers continue their efforts to create and maintain welcoming community spaces, focusing on the well-being and engagement of their communities.

- i) **Demands on TFB Leads:** Balancing the significant need and potential for community engagement with the limited resources and time available to TFB leaders is a challenge for some, especially those in volunteer roles with limited time.

“It's just there's so much need out there. There's so much potential and I suppose at the end of the day, at some times, I've got to see, well, if I don't do this, and it doesn't happen. Does it matter? It does matter. But if it doesn't happen, some things, it just doesn't happen. it's just getting that balance.” (Chester)

“I think it needs a paid worker behind it...the amount of reach then would be massive compared to what I can do as a volunteer... the way forward is for paid worker, to pull the events together.... every time, I pull any kind of event together. It's not just the planning of the event. And the publicising of the event is all the health and safety, all the risk assessments, all of that. And that is a lot for a volunteer. “ Ipswich

“ you absolutely do need somebody who's going to look after the TFB’ Thetford

- ii) **Community Engagement:** In some areas, community engagement has been challenging due to apathy, loss of momentum, and motivation. Lockdowns took a toll on the mental and physical health of some volunteers. Engaging certain groups, especially older people, isolated individuals, or those with health conditions, has presented challenges. Strategies to enhance engagement include connecting with local networks and groups.

“it's been really hard to get people back to where we were pre COVID - engagement has been really difficult.” Kiveton

- iii) **Vandalism and Plant Damage:** Instances of littering, graffiti and plants being damaged or stolen. While some sites have successfully engaged with young people, others have experienced issues with anti-social behaviour, including damage to TFB and plants and littering. Liaison with local police and engagement with those responsible have helped address these challenges.
- iv) **Promotion and Advertising:** Finding the time and effective methods to promote TFB activities can be challenging, as some community members may still be unaware of its existence.
- v) **Resource Constraints/ Securing Funding:** Securing funding for events and activities has been easier for some than others.

- vi) **Engaging with Some National Organisations:** has required effort with little reward for some.
- vii) **Weather-Related Concerns:** As an outdoor space, weather conditions have disrupted some planned activities. Unpredictable UK weather has also had an impact on the planting and maintenance of TFB.

"In August when we had the really hot weather, and now we've had the really cold weather and we're going to have to replant pretty much everything - it's killed it all off." Thetford

"high winds this year have made erecting gazebos by TFB too dangerous"
- viii) **Maintaining TFB:** can be time-consuming, and some struggled to find volunteers to help. Finding the time and people to maintain TFBs has been a recurring challenge. Additionally, maintaining TFBs with expensive materials and replenishing flowers can be costly. Some TFBs accessed grants and funding from local charities to address these costs but access to funding has been a challenge for others: *"Grants often come with a short deadline for use which this year seemed to be in winter months, which is not ideal for outdoor sessions"*.
- ix) **Location specific issues:** The location of some TFBs has posed unique challenges. One TFB placed in the grounds of a Community Centre have faced strained relationships with this centre, particularly regarding the implementation of COVID-19 policies and risk assessments. Time needed to build relationships with some organisations. Excessive 'red tape' and admin required (e.g. for permits, risk assessments for some activities) by landowners in some sites.
- x) **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic posed a number of challenges, such as restrictions on social gatherings, smaller event sizes, and ensuring compliance with COVID-19 safety measures. Some individuals have remained hesitant or fearful about coming out and engaging due to health concerns. Regaining engagement and participation levels seen before COVID-19 has been difficult in some areas.

Addressing challenges:

TFB CIC has taken deliberate action in terms of anticipating and addressing some of these identified challenges, some of which have been out of their control (e.g. Covid pandemic, the weather). Examples of actions taken by TFB CIC to mitigate some of these challenges have included: advice on selecting locations, and factors to consider pre-installation, guidance on the maintenance of TFB, support with promotion locally, provision of information on potential funding sources, advice on risk assessments and insurance.

All partner groups submitted an application and were interviewed. They also sign an agreement prior to installation stating that they had the necessary requirements in place (e.g. easy access to water) and to confirm their commitment to the required maintenance. Partner groups were selected on the basis of a number of factors including: level of need in their community, extent of community consultation, skills and experience in delivering community based projects, suitability

of locations for TFB. References for the partner group leads are obtained as part of the application process.

5j) Enablers for success

The evaluation highlights several key factors which are enablers for the success of the Friendly Bench (TFB). Nine key enablers

- i) **The People and Groups behind TFB:** The staff and volunteers in the groups who lead TFB in each area are seen as central to the success. As well as other local people who commit time in various ways. TFB who were well connected to other key stakeholders and organisations and had wide networks of support. Having a paid staff member as the TFB Lead was seen as important by some. [see also 5:E Connections and partnerships section]

“having somebody like Morag is important in terms of...getting the funding, in making the connections and helping stuff happen really...Having someone who utilises it and basically pushes it towards people” Neil TCV

“[Vicki] gets really involved, at the grassroots level and, brings everybody in, and is just very ambitious in her outreach... she’s worked so closely with different people that have influence within the town...she influences everybody in a positive way because of her ‘can do’ attitude and just her drive to make a positive change where she lives... she can offer so much because of the influence she’s got and she’s very aware of what’s going on locally and I think plays a big part in making [it] a success,” (Derren Kench, Eden Communities).

"I think there needs to be a driving force, whether it be a person or a group of people that that will take ownership or understand what it means"

- ii) **Community Engagement and Buy-In:** The active involvement and commitment of people in the local community play a crucial role in the success of TFB. Gaining buy-in from individuals and organisations is vital to sustaining the initiative.

“I think it’s a buy in...when I talk about community development, you really do have to get a buy in from the people that you’re engaging with...if they can see that there is genuine passion for bringing people and communities together, that’s what sells it...And then, if I want people to engage, I have to be seen to be doing it as well. So when I’m out there with a shovel and the brushes, or we’re putting in new plants, I have to be willing to do the hard labour too. ” Culdrose

*“I think I learned **to not expect to do everything myself**. Because I kind of got it in my head that I ended up doing most of the work around it. And actually, I’ve learned to put a plea and say, we need to do this, can I get some help? And I do every time I get help...., the learning for me is to not think that I have to do at all.”*

- iii) **Regular Activities and Events:** Hosting regular activities, even simple gatherings and drop ins, keeps TFB in people's minds and fosters a sense of community. Consistent events contribute to its success. See also section 5E.

“as far as possible, there’s a regular monthly event, even if it’s only just tea and coffee... it keeps it in the forefront of people’s minds... and because it is used and because of where it is, when something happens, people will see that it’s happening” (Brandon)

- iv) **Location:** The location of TFB, near parks, hospitals, residential housing, community gardens, libraries and next to other community hubs, makes it accessible and inviting. Proximity to other community assets encourages engagement.

“The location feels like it's really important – and proximity to those other resources and community assets is really important in terms of engagement” (Brandon)

“you do get the dog walkers and just people using the park and you also have hospital staff as well, Where it's situated across really makes it more possible for a lot of people to meet a little chat.” (Chester TCV)

“you've got lots of space around it, and this triangle of grass, and there are a couple of trees there... I think that it's in the right place. the area that it's in is the right size for the bench...And I think if we'd have put it anywhere else, it wouldn't have been right.”

“the [location choice] has made it, rather than a place to go to, it's part of people's life. So it's in the flow of what happens rather than having to be a destination. For instance, it's on the route that Mums take their children to primary school, so on their way back, they'll often sit and have a chat, using the friendly bench...that 'being in the flow of life' is really important - rather than having to be organised activities the whole time to get them to come and use it.” Thetford

“where [TFB] is right next to a hospital or a community hall that gets used a lot, there's a natural overflow...but [our location means] there isn't a natural overspill, and you can't go and brew up over there. You know, so it sort of stands on its own a bit and there's not a natural constituency of people to use it, but I know it gets well used, because I see people all the time.” Rugby

- v) **Attractiveness and Design:** The design of TFB, with its U-shaped seating arrangement, creates an inviting and safe space for face-to-face conversations and group gatherings. It encourages interaction and helps foster a sense of connection. Aesthetically pleasing elements, such as colourful flowers and inviting design, draw people to TFB and make it a pleasant place to gather and socialise.

*“the easiest way to describe it is, **you're getting a cuddle...** it's that sort of U shape, isn't it? And ...then once you're in, it opens up to a bit inside. So **it feels like you're being enveloped in.**” (Brandon)*

*“it is just **brilliant as a piece of furniture** before all the other things that it does. So it has a really positive impact. And people just smile when they walk past, and some talk to you, so it sparks interaction, even when there's not an event going on.” (Chester)*

*“it's very interactive - **designed like a horse shoe** - so it's that little enclosed space, if there are only a small group of us there, there's a little bit of privacy..but you've still got the ability to look outside and speak to people as they pass as well.” TCV Chester*

“it has been really cleverly thought out...and it just looks right. It's small enough just for two or three people to sit in there and not feel overwhelmed by the size of it, so it can be cosy. But then you can also get a bigger number people around and it holds people and draws them in.” (Brandon)

“Everybody was drawn to the friendly bench because of the colours...the beauty of the flowers. Yes, they were drawn to it, because that was where we were meeting. But “it was wow, look at that, that's nice”. So appreciative of the planting and the colour.” Halesowen

- vi) **Welcoming, Accessible and Inclusive:** TFB's wheelchair-friendly design and open accessibility make it inclusive to individuals of all abilities. Its ease of use contributes to its value as a community asset.

*“because **it's so easily accessible by anybody**, it's wheelchair friendly, it doesn't matter what your abilities are - I think that that's why it's such an asset to the town ...And **it's there all the time for everybody to use**, you don't have to belong to a group, you don't have to go to any events - it's just there for you to use as an asset for the town.” Brandon*

“It's a welcoming space - people say 'this is a life changer for me – this is great for me'. Its lovely to see that response.” Burbage

***The Name matters!** “Just market it - I think, the fact that it's called a friendly bench is just the biggest thing – that's it isn't it? All wrapped up in one.”*

- vii) **Support from Local Stakeholders:** Support from local councils, mayors, and access to additional funding help sustain TFB and promote its activities. Collaboration with local authorities and other key community organisations can lead to more community-wide promotion.

“the town council and town mayor have definitely been a massive influence because they've been promoting what we do, which means that we've had access to extra funding....and they're trying to link us in with other community garden projects ... so that there's a bit of a collaborative approach to creating greener spaces.” Culdrose

- viii) **Outdoor, Safe Space:** Being an outdoor space is advantageous, especially for some people who are less comfortable meeting indoors. It provides a safe, open space for gatherings. During the pandemic, TFB served as an outdoor meeting point, allowing people to maintain social connections in a safe outdoor setting when indoor venues were not open.

*“it definitely promotes a **safe space to be outdoors..**” (Brandon)*

“it's outdoors and there's a benefit to a bit of fresh air rather than the stuffiness of being indoors and...the world always seems a bit brighter if it's a nicer day, and you can sit there feel that you can feel a bit more expansive than if you were sitting inside.” Thetford

“It's not so scary, is it? It's outside so you're not making the commitment to go in a building. You can change your mind and just walk straight past that, or you could stop for a cake..”

“I think one of the biggest things is that it is a safe space., to use whatever their situation, whatever their need is, in that moment – it's a safe space.” Ipswich

*“TFB was a really good focal point for the community, because people knew where it was, and you weren't asking them to come into church to do anything. So it was **somewhere that wasn't threatening**, and they could stop and talk.” Rev Gary Schofield, Kiveton*

“It's used with some of their clients that need that outside space, rather than being inside and confined , and just need no barriers... some of the subjects that they're being asked to talk about can be really

difficult....debt, poverty and people that are struggling with their mental health... so it's used a lot in that way..." Ipswich

"By bringing us together and giving us a place to talk...[TFB] style and location made it easier to have open conversations – about challenges being faced, and realising we are not alone." (Veteran, Durham)

"[some] people are still quite anxious in some ways [post covid]. So being an outdoor space, people can still meet up even if they're anxious...it's a very handy resource for us as a meeting place." (TCV Chester)

ix) **Open and Informal Use:** TFB's open and informal style allows people to engage without the pressure of attending formal events. It provides a flexible space for interaction.

"it's the enabling, the bringing of people together - the creating of a facility that can be used freely by members of the public.." Halesowen

*"it's an **informal, accessible** place to just stop and chat. And it's not like you have to physically go to an event or a church meeting or community centre, it's just that sort of, 'I'm just passing through, I'll just stop and I can stay if I want, or I can move on'. I think for some people that's really enabling, isn't it? Because they might feel uncomfortable doing some of those other things."*

"it's great just to see the children using it and families picnicking there or older people resting there - it's presence is huge." Chester

"a mum was sat out [at TFB] the other day, the weather was nice so they came into the library, got books for their children, and just sat on the bench reading stories." Burbage

Overall, the success of the Friendly Bench is attributed to a combination of design, location, community engagement, support, and adaptability, making it a valuable asset for fostering social connections and community well-being.

5k) Value of TFB Network

As outlined in section 2 of this report, TFB CIC provides a wide range of support, information and guidance to TFB network members in different ways. Elements of the TFB network support that were valued by some members were:

TFB Facebook page was used as a source of inspiration and to hear what other sites are doing.

“the most useful thing is the Facebook page and looking to see what's been successful elsewhere. and getting ideas from there. That's been most helpful to us.” Boston

“I do keep tabs on the Facebook page, and I look at their ideas and think, oh, I can pinch that I find that really, really useful.”

“we follow the FB page and it's good to see what's bits of best practice and things you do think might that work for us. So pinching ideas” (Halesowen)

The potential for connections and collaboration between TFB leads e.g. to share costs and resources and work on common themes of interest to potentially build initiatives around them collaboratively.

“It's useful to see what others are doing...and the bigger organisations they are linking with. But it can also make us feel they are not doing it 'right' or not doing enough. Because they've not managed to make those links and collaborations.”

“from a community perspective, it's [beneficial] knowing that there's other benches. So ...when I tell them, 'Did you know that the friendly bench in Chester has done this?', or we could do that . So there's been like ideas that we've talked about in our coffee mornings and thought, actually, we could do that. So hopefully, that kind of sharing of their ideas - and I will put the pictures on when we do things so that other others can see that.” Culdrose

“I think it would be quite nice if we could have some sort of connection with all the TFB, even if it was just an online meeting with everyone once a year or something just so that we could meet each other and, and share, share ideas and share challenges and learn from each other.” Boston

TFB Network Events .

Views of the benefits of the TFB Network and levels of engagement were mixed amongst TFB leads. Some members had had little engagement with the network and had low levels of awareness of the support available.

“I found the meetup things are nice because, it's interesting to hear what other people are doing and also quite helpful to make you realise actually is quite appreciated around here ...I thought they were very nice. The guy for the World Music Day was very interesting.”

Barriers to engagement in TFB network include the lack of time to attend Zoom meetings, varying comfort levels with social media and online meetings, and competing demands for time, especially for those running organisations. As each TFB is different (e.g. some focus on more on community building, while others offer advice to passersby) this can make it challenging for network-wide initiatives to appeal to all.

“speaking very honestly, I think the network of friendly benches is a bit of a challenge for us. The others all feel very different to us and the way we run it and the focus and it doesn't feel very inclusive ...a lot of the times of [events] are just totally impractical, if you work or you're at school.... but it doesn't ever feel to have

taken off in a supportive way. ...And it takes time to just take time to build networks and that's difficult when you're all in different parts of the country."

"It's definitely got potential value and potential to grow. Current way is not adding for us."

"I think sometimes, you have to go out of your way a little bit, to think about how you're going to bring some different perspectives in. And that's quite hard and probably from our point of view, if we're being honest, it probably means we've not engaged with the network as much as we could have done because I know it's an uncomfortable situation for her."

Despite these barriers to engagement, members recognised the potential of the TFB network. Some specific suggestions for improvement are summarised in section 6 of this report.

6) Learning & opportunities for the future

The findings of this evaluation present a number of opportunities for TFB lead organisations and TFB CIC.

For TFB Leads

- i. Continue to involve local people in co-producing and co-creating events, as volunteers and having a say in what they want from TFB to help give more community ownership, and reduce the burden on TFB leads.
- ii. Explore opportunities for use of corporate volunteers or other 'gifts in kind' from local businesses to support the work of TFB in local areas. E.g. partnership working with garden centres to help more with provision of planting.
- iii. Social events at TFB can be a means to raise funds towards the upkeep and maintenance.
- iv. Continue to engage with young people and families to help ensure the TFB's relevance and appeal to a wider audience. Involving schools can encourage engagement by children and parents.
- v. Focus on long-term success beyond just hosting events; success is about creating lasting connections and relationships that keep the community engaged and involved.
- vi. Continue to network with other local organisations to help ensure a wider reach and develop new activities. Working in partnership also helps make the best use of community assets and resources.
- vii. Establish links with local NHS and social prescribing services to help ensure they are aware of TFB, explore linked activities and potential funding sources. Local authorities are increasingly recognising that community groups and community activists are the foundation of community lives. Collaborating with local authorities can open up funding opportunities linked to regeneration and social recovery to enable more community activity (e.g. levelling up funding, green health grants).
- viii. Continue to promote and raise awareness of TFB within the broader community to increase engagement and participation.
- ix. Be prepared for unexpected challenges and "what ifs," and adapt as necessary to address them.

For TFB CIC

- i) Ensuring TFB leads have skills in community engagement and event planning is essential and offering training around this could be helpful.
- ii) Having paid staff as TFB lead could help expand reach and improve event planning, and associated admin work.
- iii) Consider the development of a 'Buddy System' for new TFB leads to help build relationships and provide additional support and guidance during the initial stages, adding to support from TFB CIC.
- iv) Continue to explore ways to raise TFB profile and show unity of TFB in all areas e.g. each site doing the same event.
- v) Continue to encourage creativity with the use of TFB to enhance sustainability
- vi) Continue to develop a good social media presence for TFB and local sites.
- vii) Continue to make links with wider National initiatives to increase potential collaborations. Review the activities and resources of TFB network to ensure these meet members' needs.
- viii) Continue to make links to the loneliness agenda and relevant evidence around wellbeing, places and spaces, volunteering, community development

7) Conclusions

The places where we live influence our social connections and sense of wellbeing. They enable the day-to-day interactions which provide a sense of belonging and create the conditions for people to feel connected and do things they enjoy. Research and various government strategies and plans highlight the role of places and community infrastructure in addressing loneliness and social isolation. Community infrastructure projects that change community places and spaces can boost social relations and wellbeing.

This evaluation explored how an innovative community infrastructure project, The Friendly Bench, is used and how people and communities benefit. In addition to reporting against a set of intended outcomes, the evaluation highlights **examples of events held, connections and partnerships made** and some **critical enablers for success and challenges faced by TFB partner groups**. The report also pinpoints some **key learning and opportunities for the future** for both TFB partner groups and TFB CIC.

In terms of evaluation findings, **the report presents clear evidence that:**

TFB is used in various ways in communities and helps connect people to each other, places and nature. TFB has a valuable role in helping to create communities where social connections and opportunities for engagement can develop and thrive.

TFB addresses some physical and financial barriers to engagement by offering a free public space for people and groups to meet, such as a lack of access to good quality green and public spaces and a lack of free groups or activities to join.

TFB utilises approaches known to improve wellbeing, increase social connections and address loneliness, such as social groups/activities, signposting to local groups and services, use of green spaces and health promotion activity (e.g. walking groups), and broader community engagement, encouraging people to engage in activity and volunteer in their local community and learn new skills.

For many local people, **TFB and the partner groups have been key in addressing loneliness and social isolation, improving wellbeing, encouraging engagement and volunteering, and supporting social activity and interaction among community members.**

TFB is seen as a community asset, a positive enhancement and a source of community pride. Other specific benefits of TFB to communities were the improvement of places and spaces, a social hub, access to funding, and the provision of a creative space.

The 15 TFBs across England provide a community infrastructure approach that serves as a **welcoming space for people to meet and connect with others and as a hub for various activities, helping to promote social cohesion and overcome barriers that may prevent some people from participating.**

Changes to neighbourhood design can positively affect a sense of belonging and pride in a community. Community infrastructure projects such as TFB, which utilise approaches likely to

increase social connections and improve wellbeing **are a valuable community tool for creating a sense of belonging in communities and helping address loneliness and social isolation.**



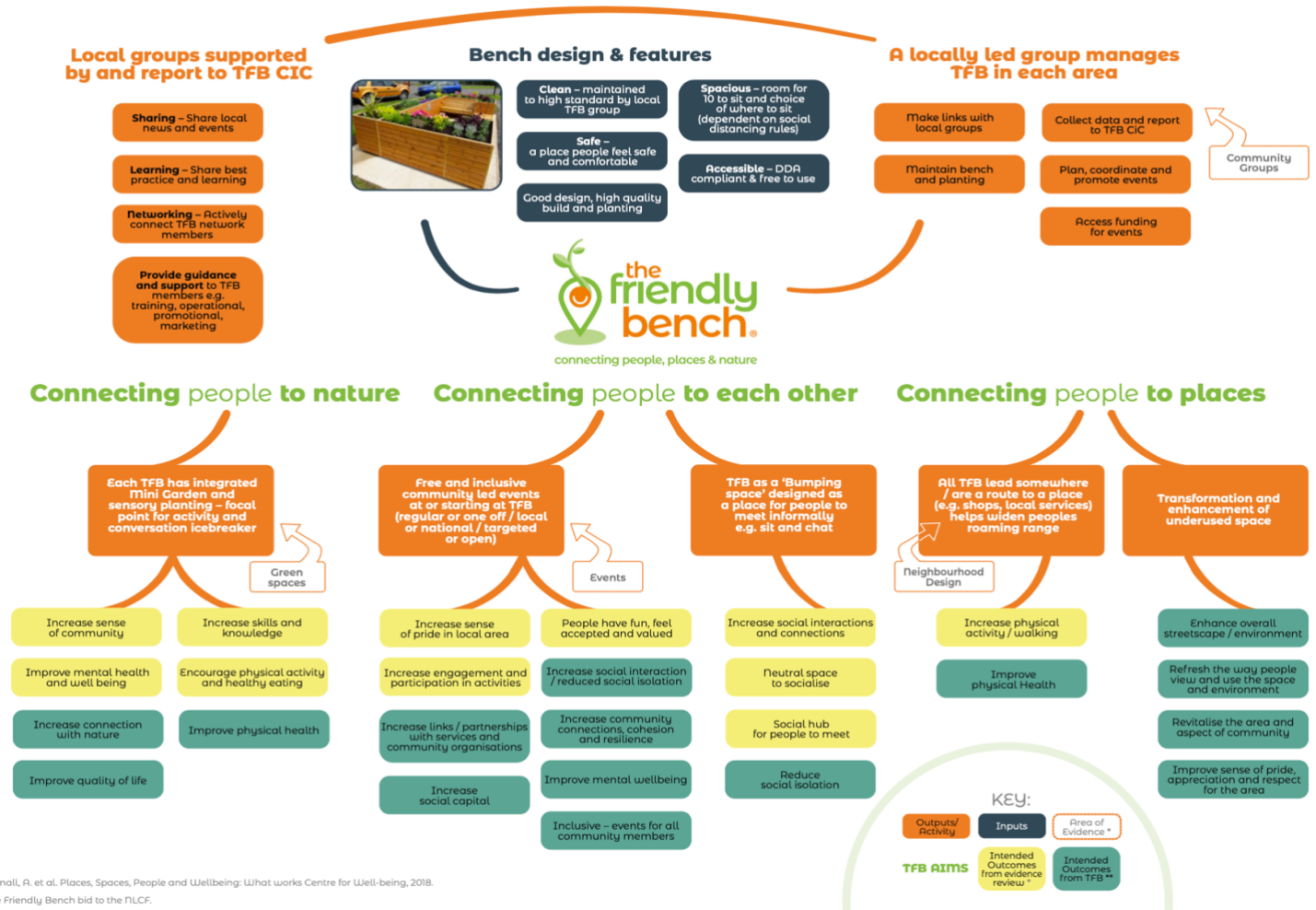
www.thefriendlybench.co.uk



www.sarahefrost.co.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1: Mind Map and Theory of Change



Theory of Change for The Friendly Bench

The Friendly Bench has three main aims, to:

- **Connect people to each other** –open to everyone and not exclusive to any group.
- **Connect people to places** - connect people to places to widen their roaming range – it has to take people somewhere (e.g. local shop, park) not be located down a dead end.
- **Connect people to nature** –the gardening aspect, looks attractive and also serves as an icebreaker for conversations plus the many benefits of green spaces, connecting with nature, and being outside in the elements.

It is hoped that in achieving these 3 main aims, communities will be more connected and individual and community well-being will improve.

Problem / Issues	Outputs / Activities	Milestones - Short Term Outcomes	Mid term outcomes	Longer term outcomes
<p>Levels of loneliness and isolation locally -especially amongst certain groups e.g. older people, young people, people with MH issues</p> <p>Low levels of community cohesion and connection.</p> <p>Low levels of community engagement and volunteering.</p> <p>Lack of places to meet / bumping spaces.</p>	<p>Community led / driven events held at or starting from TFB - providing a 'hub' for people to meet and a neutral space for different groups to socialise and to connect to place-based culture or heritage.</p> <p>TFB is located in an accessible place that seeks to connect people to others in community.</p> <p>TFB uses good design, is accessible and spacious to encourage individuals and groups to feel safe and come together.</p> <p>TFB is located in underused, vacant or uncared for communal space</p>	<p>Number and type of events held at TFB.</p> <p>Number of people participating / attending events linked to TFB.</p> <p>People report increased social relations and interaction e.g. new friendships and social connections, access to new groups or activities, increased interaction with neighbours</p> <p>TFB enhances the overall streetscape and environment.</p>	<p>Local people have increased social interaction and reduced social isolation and loneliness</p> <p>People have increased sense of pride in their local area</p> <p>People increase their engagement in civic activity / volunteering / community participation.</p> <p>People have increased sense of belonging in their community.</p> <p>Local people co-ordinate and participate in regular meetings and activities.</p>	<p>communities are more connected</p> <p>improved community well-being</p> <p>Strengthened networks and trust. Community successfully works together towards shared goals and objectives</p>

Poor mental well-being (low levels of self esteem and confidence) resulting from wide range of factors e.g. ill health, bereavement, poverty, abuse, unemployment etc	Community led / driven events held at or starting from TFB - providing a 'hub' for people to meet and a neutral space for different groups to socialise and to connect to place-based culture or heritage.	Participants report increased wellbeing e.g. improved self-esteem, improved confidence ONS well-being questions?	a) Local people have improved mental wellbeing (improved self-esteem, confidence)	improved individual well-being and quality of life
Poor physical health due to lack of exercise, poor diet, lack of green space, etc	Physical activities e.g. exercise sessions, walks from / to TFB. TFB is located to connect people to a place e.g. shops and local services –to widen their roaming range. TFB is located outdoors and has a garden element.	Participants engage in outdoor activities and with nature / green spaces. Participants report increased physical activity e.g. levels of physical activity improve, more mobile, getting out more, participation in physical activities, walk for longer. Participants with limited mobility take longer walking journeys.	Local people are more physically active and have improved physical health.	Improved individual and community health
Low levels of community participation	Installation of bench and changes to neighbourhood design. TFB serves to revitalise the area and aspect of community. TFB refreshed how people use and view the space and environment. Accessible for all people, including those with special needs. TFB is free for all to use.	Number of new social / activity groups established. Increased engagement / participation in community activities Increased connections between networks and groups e.g. between harder to reach groups. Volunteers / participants have increased sense of belonging to wider community and TFB network Increased levels of reported trust and safety e.g. Community members report feeling safer.	Increased community cohesion Increased community resilience Local people perceptions about the attractiveness of the area. Local people have improved sense of pride, appreciation and respect for the area. Improvement to local areas through transforming underused, vacant or uncared for space.	

		Increase social cohesion by bringing together people from different ages and social backgrounds.		
Lack of awareness / knowledge about nature / the outdoors. Fear of going outdoors. Nowhere to access green spaces.	Mini gardens and planting at TFB. Events held at TFB. Groups using TFB to deliver activity / messages.	Number of new social / activity groups established linked to nature / the outdoors People involved in outdoor / nature activities. TFB Garden maintenance roles	b) Local people have increased connection with nature / the outdoors	Community gardens increased the <i>sense of community and positive social interactions</i>
People not being connected with services / activities that could support them. Lack of service provision.	Partnership working with other organisations and projects. Signposting to other organisations.	People accessing more support and services Signposting to activities / services	c) Local people have increased connection with local services	Good links with local groups, services and organisations

Appendix 2: List of events held at TFB

Location	Event name and brief description
Ipswich	Ipswich Friendly Bench Opening – supported by Suffolk Community Foundation, who opened the event.
Ipswich	Meeting with Ipswich Oddfellows - Friendship Month
Ipswich	Halloween display at TFB
Ipswich	Remembrance display at TFB
Ipswich	Bulb planting at TFB
Ipswich	Christmas decorations at TFB - by local school children
Ipswich	Valentines competition – online due to restrictions. Winners creations were displayed at the FB
Ipswich	Rainbows Helpers Badge
Ipswich	OneLife Suffolk for meeting TFB community walks & reducing isolation
Ipswich	Halloween display competition at TFB for local school children
Ipswich	Remembrance display at TFB made by local community members
Ipswich	Christmas carol fundraiser for the Children's Appeal /Ipswich Hospital.
Ipswich	Christmas decorations at TFB - by local community incl Inspiring Angels
Ipswich	World Book Day event at TFB supported by Morrisons and Asda
Ipswich	Spring tidy up with local volunteers
Ipswich	Easter decorations by local school children plus Easter egg hunt
Ipswich	Support Ukraine event at TFB- Sunflower seeds and donations
Ipswich	Plant and seed swap event at TFB
Ipswich	Highfields Nursery Random Acts of Kindness gifts at TFB over summer
Ipswich	Jubilee decorations from Ipswich Brownies, Rainbows
Ipswich	Carwashing fundraiser at TFB for Ipswich Scouts
Ipswich	Gardening Club at TFB
Ipswich	Cuppa and chat at TFB
Ipswich	Thursday gardening club every week throughout summer
Ipswich	Community Get Together / Active Suffolk
Ipswich	Community Get Together / PCSO's x 2
Ipswich	Random Acts of Kindness / Book gifting
Ipswich	Community Get Together / Communities Together / East of England COOP
Ipswich	Community Get Together / Therapy Dog / East of England COOP
Ipswich	Macmillan coffee morning / Combat2Coffee/ Unity Centre / East of England COOP
Ipswich	Litter pick / Whitton Wombles / Rubbish Walks/ Ipswich Councillors / Ipswich Borough Council
Ipswich	Remembrance display at TFB made by local community members
Ipswich	Inspiring Angels display at TFB appeal
Ipswich	Inspiring Angels display at TFB / Castle Hill Rainbows / Brownies / guides / Castle Hill school /Morrisons Community Champion
Ipswich	Christmas Carols / Ipswich Hospital A&E Staff / Gang show fundraising event for Blossom Appeal
Ipswich	Donation of bulbs for TFB from Morrisons / RAK at TFB

Ipswich	Litter pick / Whitton Wombles / Rubbish Walks/ Ipswich Councillors / Ipswich Borough Council / Keep Britain Tidy
Ipswich	Coronation decorations at TFB / 2nd Westgate Rainbows / Brownies
Ipswich	Coronation Tea Party at TFB / St Pancras School
Ipswich	Gardening Club at TFB
Ipswich	Pebble Painting event at TFB
Ipswich	Pentecostal church Ipswich visit to TFB
Ipswich	Nature Walk at TFB / Ipswich Borough Council Park Rangers
Ipswich	Bugs, Beasts, Bins event at TFB / Rubbish Walks / Ipswich Borough Council /NW Ipswich Community Garden / Adventures in Outreach
Ipswich	Picnic at TFB / Highfields Childrens Centre
Chester	Active in the Park
Chester	Ramblers Wellbeing Walks
Chester	Nordic Walking
Chester	Forest Fun
Chester	Official handover of TFB Chester
Chester	Informal cup of tea meet up at TFB Chester
Chester	Christmas Food and Gift collection. Despite appalling weather, people turned up and donated generously.
Chester	Active in the Park with addt visitors from Vivo Care Choices
Chester	Informal cup of tea meet up at TFB Chester
Chester	Active in the Park - TFB maintenance
Chester	Active in the Park - Vivo Care Choices - grass seed sowing/weeding
Chester	Free Nordic Walking at TFB
Chester	Bat walk at TFB
Chester	Silver Sunday event with music by Matt Baker at TFB - special guest, Ainsley Harriot
Chester	Photograph competition at TFB
Chester	Re-oil of The Friendly Bench
Chester	Veterans Sunday - SSAFA, RBL, Frontline Fitness, Upton Police & music
Chester	Mini habitats building and bug safari
Chester	Christmas collection at TFB for Blacon Beacon & Soul Kitchen Chester
Chester	Mindful Walking Trail with Mindfulness
Chester	Mosaic Coaster workshop x2
Chester	Mersey Trees & TCV Merseyside / Lord Lieutenant / Sheriff of Chester
Chester	Wildlife Walk Brilliant Bird with Chester West Vol Action/Chester RECORD
Chester	Mindful Walking Trail with Mindfulness
Chester	Free Art Workshop at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Willow Heart Bird Feeder workshop at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Free Community Mosaic Art Event at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Chester Wetland Centre Public Consultation at The Friendly Bench
Chester	The Friendly Bench Friday Social
Chester	5 ways to wellbeing - with TCV at TFB making bird boxes
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	5 ways to wellbeing - topping up and tidying TFB

Chester	5 ways to wellbeing - wildflower walk
Chester	Mindful Walking Trail with Mindfulness
Chester	Free Art Workshop at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Chester Cycling Without Age at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Celebration of winning Land Trust's Best of Friends award at TFB
Chester	BioBlitz at The Friendly Bench with Chester RECORD & Chester Zoo
Chester	Chester Cycling Without Age at The Friendly Bench
Chester	The Friendly Bench Friday Social
Chester	Ramblers Wellbeing Walks
Chester	TCV dead hedging at TFB
Chester	TFB Friday Social
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Installation of 'Leaf' mosaic at TFB, start of the new Sensory Trail at CoCCP
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Remembrance event with TCV Merseyside / SAFFA and All Saints Church
Chester	Christmas Carols at TFB
Chester	Art in the Park - Embossed Valentines Garland / Helen Jones at TFB
Chester	Lego TFB at Chester Market as part of Chester in Lego exhibit
Chester	Community Bulb Planting at TFB
Chester	The Parent Plod - meet up for young families at The Friendly Bench
Chester	Cycling Without Age meet up / trike ride to The Friendly Bench
Chester	Art in the Park - Spring Wire Wreath making session / Helen Jones at TFB
Chester	Bug Hunt / Plaque Rubbing - City Nature Challenge / TCV
Chester	Tree of Life Memorial Mosaic unveiling event near TFB
Chester	Botanical Art Tile Workshop at TFB
Chester	Forest Fun at TFB / Chester West Communities Together / TCV
Chester	Yoga in the Park at TFB
Chester	Art in the Park - Posca Pen Workshop / Helen Jones at TFB
Chester	Botanical Art Tile Workshop at TFB
Chester	Art in the Park - Sunflower Painting Workshop / Helen Jones at TFB
Chester	Art in the Park - Watercolour Paint Workshop at TFB
Chester	Green Flag Award Ceremony at TFB
Chester	Yoga in the Park at TFB
Culdrose	Acceptance coffee morning
Culdrose	Play outside day
Culdrose	Patchwork Community Garden
Culdrose	Journey Home (final session postponed due to covid)
Culdrose	Christmas Fair
Culdrose	Easter egg decorations and hunt at TFB with Aggie's Weston
Culdrose	Planting in TFB Culdrose

Culdrose	Re-staining of TFB
Culdrose	Jubilee decorations and celebrations at TFB
Culdrose	Painted pebbles at TFB
Culdrose	Easter egg hunt at TFB
Culdrose	Replanting at TFB with story telling and book swap
Brandon	Launch party
Brandon	"Butterflies for Freedom" The friendly bench was decorated with crocheted butterfly bunting. Over 100 Butterfly RAOK (Random Acts of kindness) gifts were left at the bench
Brandon	BBC Radio Suffolk Matt Marvel visits the bench and broadcasts live
Brandon	The Bench cleaning/ repainting/ Winter planting
Brandon	Coffee & Cake - Silver Sunday event
Brandon	RHS Visits for photos for the RHS Roots magazine
Brandon	Halloween in BOO! (The Witches Lair!)
Brandon	Remembrance - The local yarn group decorated the bench with knitted and crocheted poppies.
Brandon	Time to talk at The Friendly Bench supported by Coop
Brandon	Easter at The Friendly Bench, Easter hunt. Sunflowers for Ukraine, seed swap
Brandon	Time for a cuppa at The Friendly Bench event
Brandon	World Record Pom Pom attempt - craft session at The Friendly Bench
Brandon	TFB decorated with blue/yellow pom poms to show support Ukraine
Brandon	Replanting of The Friendly Bench for RHS judges visit
Brandon	Children's painted rocks set in ground around TFB
Brandon	Bishop Mike of St Peters Church at The Friendly Bench
Brandon	RHS Judging plus singing at The Friendly Bench
Brandon	RHS Award for The Friendly Bench, Best garden for special needs
Brandon	Rock painting at The Friendly Bench / Forest Academy
Brandon	Halloween at The Friendly Bench / fundraising event, craft a pom pom wreath
Brandon	Remembrance - Brandon Suffolk Yard Bombing group decorated the bench with knitted and crocheted poppies / fundraising for RBL
Brandon	Inspiring angels / Forest Academy / Brandon Happy to Sing Choir / Rev Coburn/BS Yarn Bombing / Brandon Rocks
Brandon	Time To Talk at The Friendly Bench supported by Lakenheath Coop
Brandon	Valentines Decorations at TFB
Brandon	Painted rock path at The Friendly Bench unveiled
Brandon	Easter at The Friendly Bench / Forest Academy / Glade School decorations
Brandon	Kings Coronation - decs at The Friendly Bench
Brandon	BBC The One Show filming at The Friendly Bench
Brandon	Replanting of The Friendly Bench for RHS judges visit
Brandon	Brandon Suffolk Yarn Bombing group display at TFB
Brandon	RHS Judging and event at TFB with Anglia in Bloom / Brandon Heritage Centre / Brandon Happy to Sing
Brandon	Craft event at The Friendly Bench
Kiveton	Kiveton Friendly Bench Opening – official opening of the Bench by Cllr Dominic Beck and Alexander Stafford MP
Kiveton	Meet my Mask – Opportunity to highlight the importance of the sunflower lanyard scheme for hidden disabilities and the relevance to wearing masks.

Kiveton	Kindness in the Community Week – the Bench was used as a focal point for the activities during the week, with people just dropping by to reflect or leaving surprise gifts (e.g., a gift-wrapped tea bag to spend some chill time). The Bench was also decorated with knitted flowers (created in the community) and positive quotes
Kiveton	Friendly Friday – drop-in session for a chat and a clean up
Kiveton	Friendly Bench Donation Station- Event for people to drop items for a local charity that support families who have suffered domestic violence and items for harvest festival at church for the local food bank.
Kiveton	Christmas care box drop off - event for local residents to drop off care boxes for the local nursing home.
Kiveton	Charity Cookbook Click & Collect – event to collect copies of Alana’s Charity cook book
Kiveton	Christingle Collection – event to collect Christingle kits so families could create a Christingle at home during the service on Christmas Eve
Kiveton	Christmas decorations at TFB - tree donation after Christmas
Kiveton	Food Bank Donation Station – event for the village to donate items for the newly created village food bank.
Kiveton	Added new display of knitted flowers
Kiveton	Mothering Sunday Family Service – the service was led from the bench to a virtual audience.
Kiveton	Plant donations and planting
Kiveton	Easter celebration with knitted crosses and eggs hunt.
Kiveton	Spring Clean with Greencore
Kiveton	Kiveton knitting and crochet group made a knitted display updated with knitted hearts at TFB
Kiveton	Strawberry picking – we planted strawberries at the bench and the community had a great couple of weeks picking and eating strawberries.
Kiveton	MP – Street Surgery. Alexander Stafford MP held his street surgery at The Friendly Bench
Kiveton	The Big Bee Challenge at TFB
Kiveton	Kindness in community - Big Clean up with Greencore
Kiveton	Kiveton Park Infant School Parliament
Kiveton	Kiveton Knitting and crochet group knitted pumpkins at TFB for Halloween
Kiveton	Remembrance decorations and event at TFB
Kiveton	Knitted Christmas Tree at TFB unveiling and storytelling
Kiveton	Knitted sunflowers for Ukraine at TFB
Kiveton	11th Rotherham Scout group making poms poms for TFB
Kiveton	Artist painted 'Please dont be a litter bug' sign for TFB
Kiveton	TFB re-oil and replant with Greencore, Alex Stafford MP and friends
Kiveton	Kiveton knitting & crochet group, knitted flowers at TFB
Kiveton	Litter pick, replanting, weeding TFB and new Jubilee knitted decs for TFB
Kiveton	Jubilee cuppa and cake, craft stalls, cake stall, music & magic at TFB event
Kiveton	Alana's Caring Kids event at TFB
Kiveton	Alana's Caring Kids event at TFB
Kiveton	Replanting of TFB / display to comemorate passing of Queen Elizabeth
Kiveton	Litter pick at TFB
Kiveton	September clean up at TFB
Kiveton	Coop Local Causes award for Alana's Caring Cakes to support events at TFB
Kiveton	Knitted poppy display for Remembrance at TFB / Kiveton Knitting and Crocheting Group
Kiveton	Gardening / maintenance at TFB
Kiveton	Knitted Easter decorations at TFB / Kiveton Knitting and Crocheting Group
Kiveton	Knitted decorations for Pride at TFB / Kiveton Knitting and Crocheting Group

Kiveton	Knitted decorations for bollards at TFB
Halesowen	Official opening of TFB Halesowen with Mayor of Dudley
Halesowen	Halas Home clients visiting TFB Halesowen
Halesowen	Playlist for Life at TFB Halesowen 2nd Friday of every month
Halesowen	Visit from West Midlands Mayor Andy Street to TFB
Halesowen	Re-oil of TFB Halesowen
Halesowen	BID planting up the The Friendly Bench
Halesowen	Community Remembrance decorations at TFB Halesowen
Halesowen	Life Central Church at TFB Halesowen for Xmas lights switch on
Halesowen	RBL Exec team visit and meeting at TFB Halesowen
Halesowen	RBL Halesowen at TFB for Falklands 40 commemoration
Halesowen	Loneliness Week Day 1 Playlist for Life, Halesowen Ladies Friendship Group, Hawne WI.
Halesowen	Loneliness Week Day 2 with Darren Eden Project Communities
Halesowen	Loneliness Week Day 3 - The Black Country Busketeers at TFB
Halesowen	Loneliness Week Day 4 - Home Instead advising on senior care support, Tom Stanton music & Life Central Church at TFB
Halesowen	Playlist for Life at TFB Halesowen 3rd Thursday of every month
Halesowen	Playlist for Life at TFB Halesowen - (monthly events over 1 year)
Halesowen	Home Instead Stourbridge - Dementia Action Week at TFB event
Halesowen	Shenstone Singers at TFB for National Playlist Day
Halesowen	Remembrance Display at TFB / Halesowen Ladies Friendship Group
Halesowen	Eden Project Communities 'Say Hello' event at TFB
Halesowen	In Bloom planting at TFB / RHS In Bloom judging at TFB
Burbage	Official handover of TFB Burbage
Burbage	Official handover of TFB Burbage, Radio Leics and scarecrow festival
Burbage	Spooky Halloween storytime at TFB Burbage
Burbage	Remembrance Sunday event at TFB, decorations by local school children & refreshments
Burbage	Christmas Fair and Burbage community choir at TFB
Burbage	Spring clean at TFB Burbage
Burbage	Spring maintenance at TFB Burbage
Burbage	Easter story time and activities at TFB Burbage
Burbage	Comedy Espresso at TFB every week 19 May - 23 June with Rural Communities Council and Bright Sparks Arts
Burbage	Knit and Natter at TFB every Saturday from 21 May 2022
Burbage	Coffee morning for Royal British Legion at The Friendly Bench Burbage
Burbage	Comedy Espresso at TFB every week 11 Aug - 8th Sept with RCC and Bright Sparks Arts
Burbage	Knit and Natter at TFB every Saturday - Aug/Sept/Oct
Burbage	Autumn Get Together / Ukrainian families at TFB
Burbage	Comedy Espresso at TFB with Rural Communities Council and Bright Sparks Arts
Burbage	Christmas Knit and Natter party at TFB
Burbage	Plant Sale / Scarecrow at TFB
Burbage	Coronation decorations at TFB
Burbage	Coronation party at TFB

Burbage	Home Instead Wear it Green - Bake sale /raffle - fundraiser for The Mental Health Foundation and Burbage Library
Burbage	Comedy Wellbeing Event at TFB with RCC and Bright Sparks
Burbage	Burbage Community Arts Festival / Yarn bombing at TFB
Boston	Offiical launch of TFB Boston, BBC Radio Lincs, Housing 21, Singing for fun, Boston Big Local,
Boston	Naturehood event with LincsWT, planting wildflower meadow, building bug boxes & bird houses
Boston	Woolly Jubilee knitted decorations for TFB
Boston	Men's Shed meet up at TFB - making bird houses
Boston	Ice cream and chat at TFB
Boston	Jubilee party and fancy dress at TFB Boston, Singing for Fun, Housing 21
Boston	Seed exchange station donated by Men's Shed Boston to TFB
Boston	Singingalong at TFB Boston with Rev Ogden, Boston Centenary Church
Boston	Therapy dog visit to TFB Boston with Curo CIC and Boston College
Boston	Naturehood event plus mosaic making with Boston School of Mosaic
Boston	Litterpick at TFB Boston / Wyberton Wombles
Boston	Evening games and fish and chips at TFB
Boston	Zen Garden Making at TFB with Anglian Water
Boston	Remembrance Poppy Making at TFB with RBL
Boston	BBC Radio Lincolnshire Pirate Gold visit to TFB
Boston	Christmas Carols at TFB with Singing for Fun
Boston	Garden Birdwatch / RSPB - building bird box / bird feeder
Boston	Litterpick at TFB Boston / Wyberton Wombles
Boston	Marie Curie Fundraising event at TFB, Yellow bring and buy sale / Mens Sheds/ Boston College
Boston	Pebble painting with Ancaster Court, Age Concern, BEAM cafe, Boston in Bloom, Boston College Adult learners, Castle Street Cubs, Carlton Road Academy, Memory Lane Group, Old Leake Primary Academy, Seedlings Nursery, Singing for Fun, Scott House, Thistle's
Boston	Coronation Party at TFB - Local Schools and Singing for Fun
Boston	Naturehood event / Boston Dementia Alliance / Alzheimer Society
Boston	BBC Radio Lincolnshire interview with TFB leads
Boston	History talk at TFB with local Historian Jane Keightley
Boston	RSPB Frampton Marsh and LincsWT - Nature on our doorstep event at TFB
Boston	Mosaic making session at TFB Boston with artist Jane Kay
Boston	Mosaic making session at TFB Boston with artist Jane Kay - second session due to high demand
Boston	Evening games at TFB
Thetford	Thetford in Bloom competition - 2nd place
Thetford	Official handover of TFB Thetford
Thetford	Official opening of TFB Thetford with Mayor of Thetford and Norfolk Libraries
Thetford	Mini donk / Legacy Clydesdale / petting zoo closed event for children and adults with complex and special needs. It was free and all 120 slots were taken in 3 days
Thetford	Treasure trail for whole comunity around CBC, clue at TFB
Thetford	Thetford U3A walking group
Thetford	Inspiring Angels - decorate TFB
Thetford	Norfolk Libraries storytelling as part of 'Read and Feed' programme
Thetford	Anglia in Bloom award for TFB - CBC received 'certificate of recognition' for TFB

Durham	The Friendly bench will host a visit by the Lord Lieutenant Snowdon of Durham, she will be visiting Veterans and their families and planting a tree.
Durham	11 November 2022- A service will be held around the Friendly bench to pay tribute to Armistice
Durham	We have had small gatherings including attendees on beekeeping course, and veterans volunteering in the main garden.
Durham	Armed Force Veteran gatherings – Lunch breaks and planning for gardening activities
Durham	Counselling – A local Armed Forces counsellor holds regular 1:1 sessions.
Durham	Army Benevolent Fund visit to Finchale Group.
	Friendly Bench - partnership working with the RBL
Rugby	Spooky Halloween display as part of the local Pumpkin Trail. Volunteers decorated The Friendly Bench and dressed up and had themed music playing for four hours each time on two evenings. Families visited and had selfies at The Friendly Bench as they walked around Hillmorton to follow the Pumpkin Trail.
Rugby	Remembrance Day display. Volunteers decorated TFB with a remembrance flag, and local children and residents painted stones and displayed them over a week.
Rugby	Christmas lights at The Friendly Bench. TFB was lit up at the same time as the community Christmas tree. A local singer sang and live-streamed Christmas songs from nearby TFB.
Rugby	Valentine's Love letters and poems at The Friendly Bench. Residents of all ages including school children and older people from a care home as well as people from around the country and overseas wrote love letters and poems which were displayed at TFB. Volunteers from the local WI and a local knitting group and other local residents made fabric and wool hearts and flowers displayed at TFB. Volunteer actors and voice artists recorded a selection of poems and letters which were hosted on the community group website and were accessible at TFB to listen to via a QR code.
Rugby	Easter displays and virtual Easter egg hunt. Volunteers decorated TFB and made it part of a virtual Easter egg hunt for local children. Children had to walk around the local area, collect the letters displayed at different locations and made a word. When they discovered the word, they could go to a local sweet shop and collect their Easter egg.
Rugby	National Fish and Chip day – Overslade Care home visit
Rugby	Litterpick at TFB
Rugby	Storytelling Tuesday afternoons in school holidays
Rugby	Halloween spooky stories and Halloween display
Rugby	Hillmorton Rainbows and their leaders decorated TFB for Valentine's Day
Rugby	Easter display
Rugby	Decorated TFB for Jubilee
Rugby	Spooky Halloween decorations and story telling at TFB with soup afterwards
Bury	Handover of The Friendly Bench Bury
Bury	Halloween Fancy Dress event with refreshments at TFB Bury
Bury	Easter Egg Hunt event
Bury	HealthWatch Bury Bench Surgery event at TFB
Bury	New footpath installation to TFB Bury
Bury	Nightlight alternative to Bonfire night
Bury	HealthWatch Bury Bench Surgery event at TFB with MensShed/Incredible edibles/Radcliffe litter pickers
Bury	Halloween Fancy Dress event / pumpkin competition, music with refreshments at TFB
Bury	Kings Coronation Street party at TFB
Bury	Big Plant Sale and Get Together
Bury	Children's storytime at TFB

Appendix 3: List of connections

Site	Organisation	Type of connection
Boston	Singing for Fun, Non profit, over 50's club	Providing a new venue and audience for Singing for Fun to perform at and to share the benefits of singing together. Opportunities for growing SFF membership
Boston	Ancaster Court (Housing 21)	A group of Ancaster Ct residents are now on TFB Boston Committee, also help run and take care of TFB. TFB Boston provide entertainment for residents, with support from Ancaster Court
Boston	Royal British Legion	Members of RBL Boston Branch are on TFB Boston committee. Help organise and run events.
Boston	Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust	Naturehood event with Lincs WT. Working with Lincs WT and LCVS, expanding their Naturehood project to an area of Boston which had not previously been served
Boston	Boston Men's Sheds	Joint event with Boston Mens Shed, linking two groups together and encouraging ppl to engage with nature
Boston	Ancaster Court (Housing 21), Royal British Legion, Singing for Fun	Jubilee celebrations, supported by Ancaster Court, Royal British Legion, Singing for Fun
Boston	Rev Ogden / Boston Centenary Church	Music event linking Boston Centenary Church with TFB Boston
Boston	Curo-Lincs Community Farm	Therapy Dog / Nature event
Boston	Boston College	Students with special educational needs attend TFB Boston events as part of their curriculum
Boston	Boston School of Mosaic	Event to take part in Boston wide art project
Boston	Wyberton Wombles	Partnership with Wyberton Wombles, litter picking in previously underserved part of town. Those who took part have since joined main Wombles team.
Boston	BBC Radio Lincs	Help spread awareness of the bench and the events that go on
Boston	Anglian Water	Hosts nature/garden themed events (zen garden)
Boston	RSPB(Frampton Marsh)	Hosts nature/garden themed events
Boston	Age Concern	Encourage older people to gather in social events to prevent loneliness
Boston	Boston in Bloom	Run events with a horticulture and gardening theme to encourage people to be in nature
Boston	Memory Lane Group	Group interested in showing the mental health and memory benefits of being in nature and socialising at events
Boston	Boston Dementia Alliance	Group interested in showing the mental health and memory benefits of being in nature and socialising at events
Boston	Alzheimer Society	Group interested in showing the mental health and memory benefits of being in nature and socialising at events
Brandon	Coop	Time to talk events supported by COOP Lakenheath
Brandon	Brandon Suffolk Yarn Bombing	Decorating and supporting events at TFB Brandon
Brandon	RBL Brandon Branch	Remembrance - decorating TFB in poppies / fundraising
Brandon	Lakenheath and Feltwell in Bloom groups	Representatives attend Time to Talk event in 2022

Brandon	Brandon Happy to Sing Choir	Providing a new venue and audience for Brandon Happy to Sing choir to perform at and to share the benefits of singing together.
Brandon	Forest Academy School	Art Class children created Inspiring Angels for display at TFB Brandon
Brandon	Brandon Rocks	Community group created painted rocks to display at TFB Brandon
Brandon	Bishop Mike / St Peters Church	Easter at The Friendly Bench, Easter hunt. Sunflowers for Ukraine, seed swap
Brandon	RHS Anglia in Bloom	RHS In Bloom visit / judging of TFB
Brandon	BBC Radio Suffolk	Help spread awareness of TFB and the events that go on
Brandon	BBC The One Show	Help spread awareness of TFB and the events that go on
Brandon	Local Communities	Take part in events and help with things like knitting and decorating for events
Burbage	Rural Communities Council	The Friendly Bench was the location for several Comedy Espresso events
Burbage	Burbage Heritage Group –	Will give talks and also provide archived information they may have for events.
Burbage	Royal British Legion-	Regarding Falklands Anniversary, plus coffee morning.
Burbage	Two local ladies	Knit and natter (Macrame lady) and Pat
Burbage	Ukrainian families	Ukrainian Families and their hosts to join with Burbage families for an Autumn Get-together on Saturday 15th October
Burbage	BBC Radio Leics	Good contacts who regularly help promote and spread awareness of TFB and the events that go on
Burbage	Burbage community choir	Partnership to sing carols at the Christmas fair at TFB
Burbage	Bright Sparks Arts - mental health group	Partnership with RCC to run comedy espresso events at TFB
Bury	Six Town Housing	Partner on a host of events
Bury	Woodies Mens Shed	Partner on a host of events
Bury	Health watch	Using TFB as a place to meet and connect with people
Bury	Incredible Edible Radcliffe	As part of Healthwatch Bury event at TFB
Bury	Recycle for Greater Manchester	As part of Healthwatch Bury event at TFB
Bury	Radcliffe Litter Pickers	As part of Healthwatch Bury event at TFB
Bury	Local Police	As part of Healthwatch Bury event at TFB and ongoing relationship
Chester	<u>Passion for Learning</u>	Another new connection is Passion for Learning who would like to bring children from deprived circumstances to the park and to use TFB.
Chester	<u>Cheshire West Communities Together</u>	We have made an amazing new connection with Cheshire West Communities Together who in turn are introducing us to other community groups.
Chester	Vivo	A group of adults with learning difficulties from an organisation called Vivo have taken on the responsibility of weeding and watering TFB. They struggled being at home so much over lockdowns and now love to get out to the park and look after the planting. Their results have been great I admired.
Chester	Local PHAB Group	
Chester	Local food poverty Groups	Christmas food & gift donations

Chester	Local Macmillan Support and Information Centre	signposting clients to TFB sessions
Chester	Local GP social prescriber -	signposting clients to TFB sessions
Chester	Local Councillors -	Funding for TFB from Councillors Budget Scheme
Chester	Local MP	backed application and gives continuing support
Chester	Coop Members Fund	Funding for TFB
Chester	Sense	
Chester	Sanctuary Housing	Funding for TFB and related events
Chester	Cheshire West and Chester Council	Payment for Forest Fun and Back to Nature sessions
Chester	The Westminster Foundation	Funding for Forest Fun Sessions
Chester	Welcome Network	funding for lunches for Forest Fun and other food related events
Chester	Sport England	Grant Funding for a variety of Active sessions starting from TFB Frontline : Fitness Bootcamp sessions Funded via Ramblers Health Walks Training Nordic Walking UK - Training via Sports England Grant
Chester	Eco Communities and Postcode Gardener	Forest Fun Sessions and outreach work
Chester	Vivo Care Choices	Grant to fund Green Gym sessions
Chester	Blacon Together	Collaboration for Forest Fun Sessions, including producing lunches
Chester	Ungerer -	Funding for TFB
Chester	Chester Bluecoat Charity	Funding for TFB
Chester	Record	local wildlife recording organisation who have used TFB as a base for some of their activities.
Chester	local artists and musicians	to deliver activities / performances
Chester	Local school children	Singing Christmas carols at TFB
Chester	Helen Jones	Art in the Park events over several weeks at TFB (Embossed Valentine's Hearts / Wire wreath / Botanical Art Tile/ Posca Pen workshop)
Chester	Chester Market	TFB in Lego as part of Chester In Lego exhibit in Chester Market
Chester	TCV	Community bulb planting event
Chester	Rachele Smith	Partnership with Rachele Smith (Mindfulness Professional) to run sessions at TFB
Chester	Chester West & Chester Council	Partnership to run wellbeing walks starting at TFB
Chester	Hilary - Yoga Practitioner	Partnership with local Yoga practitioner, Hilary, to run regular free yoga sessions at TFB
Chester	Local Artist	Partnership to run Watercolour Paint workshop at TFB
Chester	City Nature Challenge	Partnership to run Bug hunt with RECORD/Natural History Museum/Chester National Park City / California Academy of Science
Chester	Cycling Without Age	Partnership to give free trike rides to elder residents of local care home to TFB for regular Friday Social get togethers at TFB
Chester	Parent Plod	Partnership with local Parents to run 'Parent Plod' from TFB every Friday
Culdrose	Bee lines nationwide project	have given advice
Culdrose	Helston Footprints	have given advice
Culdrose	the MOD and the environmental officer	There has also been interest from the MOD and the environmental officer has supported and directed to funding sources for next year.

Culdrose	Helston Edible	The project so far has seen relationships develop with other organisations and supported the green spaces development in Helston.
Culdrose	Aggies Charity	Partnership to run childrens activities at TFB including Easter Egg hunt
Durham	The Royal British Legion	attended a meeting at Finchale to discuss partnership working with the overall aim to set up their own friendly bench.
Durham	An Armed Forces Counsellor	has utilised the Friendly bench to carry out 1:1 counselling sessions.
Durham	Finchale wellbeing coaches	Our wellbeing coaches are expanding their connections in the community, and they are aware of the offer of The Friendly Bench – and we hope this will help us to connect to more people and provide more opportunities for use of TFB
Halesowen	Playlist for Life Halesowen	Host twice-monthly Playlist for Life event at The Friendly Bench
Halesowen	Hales Homes	A specialist organisation for people with learning disabilities. A group of local people, including parents and persons with learning disabilities, regularly use the bench also to meet and enjoy a local outing to the town.
Halesowen	Lifecentral Church are a Elim Pentecostal Church	Lifecentral Church are a Elim Pentecostal Church who are based in the Halesowen BID area. They are a very modern, friendly and helpful group, who invite people from Christian and non-Christian backgrounds to go along and experience a service with them, with their aim being that it will be helpful, practical and inspirational. During our Christmas lights event, some members of the church used the bench to promote themselves and reach out to the community.
Halesowen	Halesowen Ladies Friendship Group	We have also recently acquired a new group who have offered to maintain the bench during the summer months. They are called the Halesowen Ladies Group, who get together on a regular basis. They are planning on adding sensory plants to the bench and adding some jubilee themed bunting closer to the time.
Halesowen	Shenstone Singers	Local wellbeing choir which has and continue to use The Friendly Bench as a location for singing/connecting with members of the public
Halesowen	West Midlands Police	West Midlands Police also use the bench as a meeting place for talking to vulnerable members of the public , on a regular basis
Halesowen	Royal British Legion	Have hosted several awareness / fundraising events at The Friendly Bench
Halesowen	Homeinstead Stourbrige	Partnership with Homeinstead organisation to host event to raise awarenss of dementia during Dementia Action Week
Halesowen	Eden Project Communitis	Partnership to host 'say hello' event at TFB and raise awareness of Eden Project Communities Network
Ipswich	local Morrisons Community Champions	Introduced our local Morrisons Community Champions to see the FB and discuss ideas for the future
Ipswich	Local bakery business	
Ipswich	Highfield Nursery	Randon Acts of Kindness and regular visits to TFB
Ipswich	Suffolk Community Foundation	
Ipswich	St Marys church	
Ipswich	The Odd Fellows	Met with the local branch of the Odd Fellows

Ipswich	Local Councillor	
Ipswich	2 more councillors	Introduced 2 more councillors to the FB and invited them to get involved
Ipswich	Local hospital	Ipswich and Chester Hospital Christmas singalong fundraiser for Blossom Appeal
Ipswich	Castle Hill Brownies	Decorating TFB throughout year
Ipswich	Castle Hill Rainbows/Guides	Decorating TFB throughout year
Ipswich	Castle Hill Primary School	Forest schools group - decorating TFB for Inspiring Angels
Ipswich	Ipswich Scouts	Fundraising car wash at TFB
Ipswich	Jason Alexander / Rubbish Walks	Partnering with Rubbish Walks to hold litter picks from TFB and around local community
Ipswich	Whitton & Whitehouse Wombles	Partnering with Whitton & Whitehouse Wombles to hold litter picks from TFB and around local community
Ipswich	Ipswich Borough Council	Partnering with Ipswich Borough Council to hold litter picks from TFB and around local community
Ipswich	Sainsbury's	Sainsbury's donated bulbs which were used at TFB and random acts of kindness across community
Ipswich	Combat to Coffee	Partnership to support local resident's Macmillan Coffee Morning at TFB
Ipswich	East of England Coop	Partnership to run tea and chat community get together at TFB
Ipswich	Communités Together East Anglia	Partnership to run tea and chat community get together at TFB
Ipswich	Ipswich Police	Partnership to run tea and chat community get together at TFB
Ipswich	Active Suffolk	Partnership to run tea and chat community get together at TFB
Ipswich	The Unity Centre	Partnership to run tea and chat community get together at TFB
Ipswich	Keep Britain Tidy	Partnership with Whitton Wombles etc to hold litter pick from TFB and around local community
Ipswich	2nd Westgate Rainbows & Brownies	Collaboration to create Inspiring angels decorations for TFB
Ipswich	St Pancras School	Partnership with school to host Coronation Tea Party at TFB
Ipswich	Local families	Pebble painting session for local families
Ipswich	Ipswich BC Park Rangers	Nature Walk event starting and ending at TFB
Ipswich	Ipswich Pentecostal Church	Partnership for future events
Ipswich	Adventures in Outreach CIC	Partnership with Jason Alexander/Rubbish Walks, Ipswich BC to host Bugs, Bees and Bins event at TFB
Ipswich	Highfields Children's Centre	Partnership to host picnic at TFB
Kiveton	New library team	
Kiveton	Local businesses	.
Kiveton	Police	built strong relationships with the local police. We have agreed protocols for requesting access to the CCTV. The police have visited several people in relation to littering, removing plants and damage. The police also created signage for the bench to explain the principles of The Friendly Bench and Alana's role.
Kiveton	Wales Parish Church	this relationship has strengthened, and the local vicar often does Facebook live events from the Bench
Kiveton	Library Service	The library has been refurbished to become a community hub. It will open on 12 April we have already had great discussions on working with them and using the space.
Kiveton	Kiveton Knitting and Crochet group	Partnership creating knitted displays at TFB
Kiveton	Local Food Bank	Already working with them to run donation stations.

Kiveton	Community Orchard	a new project that we are exploring joint working with.
Kiveton	Local Co-op Community Fund	Voted & supported by local customers - funding to support activities at The Friendly Bench
Kiveton	Greencore	Partnership where Greencore staff volunteer to stain / re-oil The Friendly Bench
Kiveton	Alexander Stafford MP	Ongoing support and attendance at events, including TFB maintenance
Rugby	Pete Boyce storyteller	Pete Boyce storyteller has been central to our sessions – and he is now looking to set up a storytelling group in Rugby in 2022.
Rugby	Eastlands Primary School and Paddox Primary School	both asked their pupils to write love letters or poems for display at TFB. One of the pupils was pictured in the local Rugby Observer and appeared on BBC CWR radio reading her poem. Eastlands School is also working with HEaRT Community Group on other initiatives such as a community garden.
Rugby	Rugby School	Rugby School creative writing group and their English teacher contributed poems for the Valentine's event. Since then the English teacher has joined with HEaRT Community Group and Rugby Theatre to also look to put on young poetry writers' event.
Rugby	Hillmorton Rainbows	Partnership to decorate TFB for special occasions, Jubilee, Valentines
Rugby	Overslade House care home	Overslade House care home residents wrote poems for the Valentine's event, one resident appeared on BBC CWR and read her poem. The residents also made decorations for TFB. Overslade House residents planned a trip to TFB on 4 June to celebrate national fish and chip day. They also wish to work with HEaRT Community Group to put on seated exercise classes over the coming months
Rugby	Local knitting group	Partnership to decorate TFB for special occasions, Jubilee, Valentines
Thetford	Thetford U3A	Walking group started and end their walk at TFB, had tea/cake in community centre afterwards.
Thetford	Mini Donks charity, Legacy Clydesdale and a Petting Farm	Closed event for children and adults with complex and special needs. It was free and all 120 slots were taken in 3 days
Thetford	Local schools	Partnership to create Inspiring Angels display for TFB
Thetford	Anglia in Bloom	TFB awarded a certificate of recognition