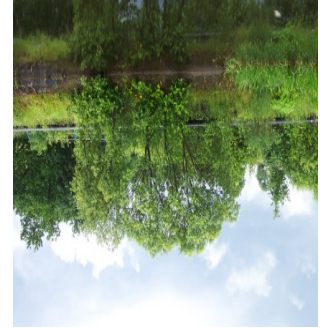




**Greenhill:** one participant asked to be taken on a walk around Greenhill so that they could use their mobile phone to take photographs and video. It was an interesting exercise and we took many photographs of old industrial sites, views, and video of the Stirling and Glasgow trains passing. These were added to the online community to be discussed later. We also went to the library and looked at old maps and books on Bonnybridge, to see what Greenhill once looked like.

**Castlegary Low Wood:** our second walk took us around old industrial pathways and deep wooded areas. A historian came along to talk about the Seabegs area.



**Lochgreen:** as a group we undertook a walk around the Lochgreen area of Greenhill, an area ravaged by nature and abandoned by industry. The local councillor also came along. Digital pedometers were given out, as we decided to twin the walk with the Big Fit Walk 2007, an initiative to encourage residents of Falkirk to walk in their own areas.

# Exploring Greenhill as a Place using Computers and the Internet

Gillian Cowell



test whether community groups, who tend to have less access to such technologies due to funding constraints, could take on such a project. It was also fundamental to see what could be done on a budget of zero, and how participants might view the idea of technologies to capture the essence of their community life.

The main aims, therefore, were to:

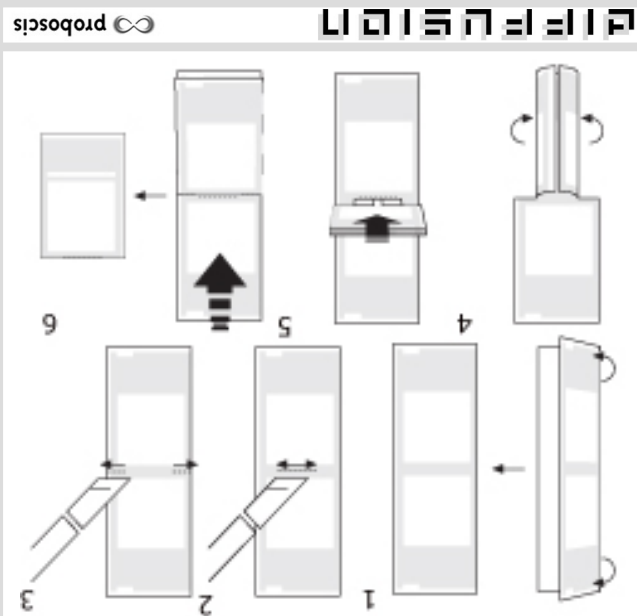
### ***Recruit and retain a small number of Greenhill residents with the aim of:***

**1.** Investigating perceptions, issues, concerns and ideas with regards to community identity and the potential role of IT within this;

**2.** Creating a real and potentially useful online or traditional resource (or set of resources) on Greenhill that might be of use to residents over time.

### **Process**

In order to investigate and document the participant group's attitudes and interests in terms of community, community learning and the



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## **Purpose of Project**

This action research project was mainly concerned with how participants in Greenhill might:

1. Create an identity for where they live.
2. If and how this can be communicated through ICTs versus traditional methods.
3. What form this might take.

Of major importance to the study was how residents saw themselves within their community and how they expressed and developed this through an interactive process with other residents, to form an actual resource or set of resources. It was also interesting to observe whether computers and the Internet were used to create these resources.

## **Background to the Project**

Digital technologies are seen as the new "literacy" for the 21st century. It is considered that unless we engage with such technologies we may find ourselves being left behind. It was important to



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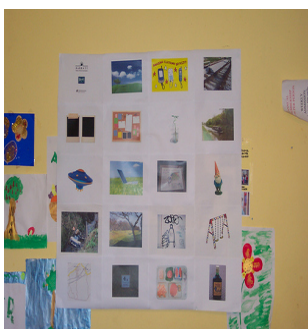
**GILLIAN COWELL, FEBRUARY 2008**

Several spin-off projects are currently being planned by the researcher in the Greenhill area. These consist of a community banner art project, computer club drop-in sessions for beginners and a history group. It is hoped that the ideas arising from The Greenhill Project will help to form activities that the community centre can take forward over the coming months. Perhaps a digital map of Greenhill will evolve over time, if the community think it appropriate.

potential role that ICTs might play in this process, several methods were employed.

**1. Individual Interviews:** four individuals involved in community work and community learning both within Greenhill and the wider Falkirk area were interviewed using a semi-structured in-depth interview style. The resulting themes from these interviews were used to feed into the project plan, involving within this focus groups with potential and actual participants to the project.

## 2. Focus Groups



Additionally, a poster detailing potential pathways for community groups to use IT to capture their community identity was also placed on the wall, to encourage creativity and thought for the eventual project group of residents. It shows



The project group was formed from an initial information evening held at the Greenhill Community Resource Centre at the end of April 2007, which fulfilled the dual role of recruiting as well as informing local residents, two politicians and community learning staff of Falkirk Council what was running in their area. Within this initial meeting, a large poster containing "**Image Prompts**" was tacked to the wall, to encourage debate.

This made joint action very difficult as only groups of two or three were interested in, for example, blogging, photography or walking, and others were not so interested. What we ended up with, therefore, was a series of mini-projects that contributed to a more enhanced sense of what Greenhill means to each participant, captured in different ways.

All in all, traditional methods of capturing information were chosen over IT routes. Possible reasons for this is that it is too soon to introduce the idea of computing or Internet-related tools to such projects. It was considered to be more important to get a group together who would get on personally, find common ground, work out what they wanted to capture and how they would do this. IT could be layered over such projects as a second stage. IT in community development is still a relatively new idea for many community-led projects, however as time goes on it will gain momentum as more funding is directed to this area. The project in no way suffered from being less IT-oriented; in fact the data collected was more rich and person-centred for not relying on IT as much.

different ways that IT is used within communities, e.g. wikis, community online portals, web sites, etc.

Over six weeks on Wednesday nights, a group of seven residents met to explore Greenhill as a community, and the different issues that participants felt were important to them. Of particular value to the research, there was a 50/50 split of traditional, established residents and new residents to the area.

The meetings moved on to capturing information in ways that participants were comfortable with. A written record of every meeting was provided to participants after each meeting.

Email/Telephone Communications:

participants were encouraged to communicate with the researcher outside of meetings, should they have anything they wish to discuss, and some participants did take this up.

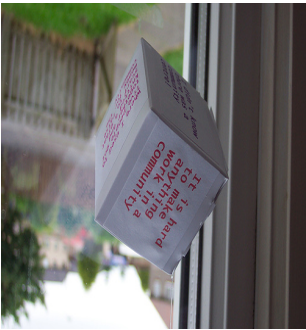
**Joint Activities:** It was important to create some activities that everyone could participate in, in order to generate photography, thoughts and ideas to feed into forming an identity of Greenhill.

**Challenges:** Each participant was very different, and motivated to participate for different reasons. in the group each Wednesday night. written oral storytelling or just talking to others capturing this, whether via photography, poetry, explaining Greenhill and had their own way of something different, a unique and useful way of each fit into the "whole". Each participant brought what Greenhill means to them and where they various elements of their very different lives, project ran, the group really pulled together, from **Positive Outcomes:** For the six weeks that the

Conclusion



After six weeks of discussions, a variety of topics were brought up by participants, falling into seven major themes. The results were formed into a StoryCube mobile, discussed later on.



From the discussions held throughout the weeks, seven main "themes" came up. Participants were particularly keen to discuss the rich history and surrounding countryside of Greenhill as well as why they live here. They were equally interested in wishing to show outsiders what Greenhill has to offer, and it became clear that participants saw themselves as citizens of an area separate from the wider town of Bonnybridge.

Discussion Outcomes: Themes





## StoryCubes

Proboscis' StoryCubes were used to disseminate the results of the meetings held with participants. Each cube represented a particular theme; a string of cubes pulled together these themes to show everyone what conclusions we arrived at together. The cubes were strung together using jewellery elastic and suspended on two coathangers to create a mobile. The mobile was placed in the community centre for each participant to view and comment on.

**Archaeology and Greenhill Soil:** the deep Roman history around here, finding artefacts in back gardens, plants, clay soil, quartz stones.

**Greenhill Community Spirit:** too mixed an area of old and new houses. New residents "aren't from here" and are classed as commuters. Not a great response from new residents to this project. Spirit is lacking, seen by the campaign for the playpark. Greenhill Road divides the community: old houses on one side and new ones on the other, with the playpark also creating division amongst parents as to who should play there. The two sides don't mix, causing imbalance.

**My Ideal Community:** connecting with each other; working together to make Greenhill a place to be proud of; everyone putting back into the community; having a bigger community centre to draw in more people and have more activities for all ages; mutual respect and support.

**Local Knowledge:** caring about Greenhill's history to pass it on to new residents/new generations; keeping stories alive; other residents' viewpoints on local stories; what the future might hold; ways of naming local places.

The following outputs came directly from participants themselves, and reflect the main concern that IT-type projects were considered to

## Outputs

**ICTs in Greenhill:** It's about meeting up, not chatting online; keeping people talking in person and engaging; Internet too isolating; young people could benefit from a web site; a site might be good to show how Greenhill has changed over the years; Greenhill is right in front of us, not on the Internet.

**Greenhill Youth:** nothing around here for young people; too much noise from the playpark at night, which is abused by teenagers; young people upsetting residents; community doesn't reach out to young people.

**History of Greenhill:** linking history to a sense of place and belonging to somewhere special; Roman Wall; we need a living map of the area; communicating stories with new residents; history of Greenhill and its people; capturing the history in some way so it is not forgotten; walking around the history that is all around us.

## Greenhill's Online Social Site

The researcher set up this social site through the provider Ning, in order to test whether participants would register themselves as

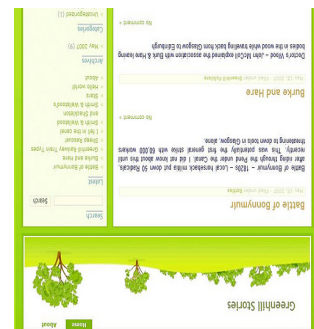
"residents" and use it. It was also important to find another way to communicate to wider

Greenhill residents, outside of the project, to show them what we were doing. All participants registered and answered the pre-set questions.

Some used it more than others, and in the end it wasn't used continuously, unless prompted. A

very interesting test, participants still wanted to meet in person and the online community wasn't

as popular.





### Greenhill Story Blog

Several participants had many entertaining stories on Greenhill, and it was discussed that the best way to share these would be through a blog, or online diary. Participants emailed stories to the researcher, who added them to the blog, which can be found at <http://greenhillstories.wordpress.com>.

be inappropriate for Greenhill at that time. Participants each worked on something themselves, an individual expression of Greenhill to them. A variety of tools were used, and the project became more complex for this as each individual was so different in their motivations and requirements.

### Poetry by Participant 1:

#### Greenhill Fades As Dusk Sets In

Greenhill fades as dusk sets in, Timeless in its infinity. Rocks revealed from the earth below, In the fading light their form appears. Hewn in the furnace beneath the crust, Used in the fires of Man's industry - long gone. In the moulding of nature they came to light, Admired for their texture, form and hue. Arranged before the camera's eye, Shared, revered, a link through time to settlements of stone. Enduring on and on and on...

#### Greenhill Before and After

Here I sit, Greenhill before me, many millennia have past, Folks have come and folks long gone,

### Church Painting

One participant painted the church at Broomhill, saddened by the For Sale sign and wishing to capture the church in paint before it was turned into something else.

used in a future community banner project. that represented the earth. This collage will be tea, people holding hands, and fabrics in colours of images including walking sticks, deer, a cup of to represent Greenhill to her. It involved a series One participant created a fabric and image collage



Picture Collage



Those participants who had lived in the area for longer than others, suggested several potential walks for everyone to go on. Therefore, two walks were created to show new residents the beauty that was on their doorstep.

### Walks

yet the place lingers on.

Sky, Burns, Walls, Homes, Gardens, People, Tracks, Connection, Paths, Community, Roads, Grass, Rain, Trees, Earth, Rocks, Rails, Wind, Rain, Sunshine, Flowers, May they unite and be forever one...