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Committee Regional Sustainability Committee  
Author Matt Velde, Senior Communications Advisor  
Geoff Skene, Manager, Environment Education

## Greentown evaluation

### 1. Purpose

To advise the Committee on the lessons learned and the success or otherwise of the Greentown initiative held in June.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

"Greentown" was a month-long programme of events and activities to help the people of Greytown to live more sustainable lifestyles. It drew on the theme of World Environment Day, '*Kick the Habit, Towards a Low Carbon Economy*' which this year was hosted by the Wellington region.

A cross-divisional team developed the idea with the intention of staging a combination of initiatives and events to encourage people to address all aspects of their personal and household behaviour relating to "carbon". The project was largely funded by the Ministry for the Environment and was supported by a number of local businesses and agencies. Right House, a Meridian Energy company, contributed the material and paid for the sustainability bags which were distributed to all homes and businesses. Other major partners included the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, the Ecostore, Norfolk Road Nursery, and the South Wairarapa District Council.

## 4. Success indicators

Greentown's main objectives were to help residents reduce their carbon footprints, adopt more environmentally friendly lifestyles, and raise awareness of environmental issues such as global warming and climate change. Specific aims were to:

- trim energy use and promote greater energy efficiency
- reduce household emissions from domestic fires
- offset carbon emissions and promote biodiversity through native tree planting
- decrease plastic bags and packaging use
- encourage greater use of public transport
- encourage walking, cycling and participation in recreational activities.

Other desired outcomes included:

- community participation in Greentown events
- increased community goodwill towards Greater Wellington, and
- interest from other communities within and outside of the Wellington region in a Greentown event.

Information on the extent to which Greytown resident's awareness was altered or their behaviour changed as a result of the Greentown initiative is currently being collected by survey. This will be reported to the Committee when completed.

A large number of environmentally friendly products were distributed to the community which, even if only used in part, will make a difference. This included 3,420 eco light bulbs, 1,140 reusable shopping bags, and 2,280 dish and clothes washing products. If all of the eco light bulbs are installed, there is expected to be an annual saving in CO<sub>2</sub> of around 20 tonnes. Over 1,100 trees were handed out and a further 750 planted at events to offset carbon emissions. Three hundred of these were purchased and planted by Greater Wellington to offset some of the emissions from vehicles used throughout the project. Anecdotally, a common response was that while people knew about these environmental issues and the need for change, it was hard to make the required change. Being given a range of products and information to allow people to try options for change was therefore a major boost for the initiative.

The town supermarket and a few other businesses have switched to compostable plastic bags or paper packaging, but there is little evidence at this stage of a significant shift in consumer behaviour towards the use of more environmentally friendly household products.

However, as an exercise in boosting community goodwill Greentown was a success. The vast majority of Greytown residents appreciated the reusable shopping bags and environmentally friendly products and were grateful that

Greater Wellington had chosen Greytown because of its history of environmental action. Groups such as Transition Towns and Forest & Bird also welcomed the opportunity to place stands at the Town Library during the month of Greentown.

The close links with the schools that already existed before the event was reflected in the commitment of the schools to help out with Greater Wellington organised events as well as stage their own. School students and teachers were the main contributors to the Greentown initiative, and the best conduit for getting greater community involvement. This meant that the Greater Wellington planting events – at Papawai Stream and at Greytown Cemetery - were well attended.

Outside of the schools, community participation was limited to the groups with displays at the Town Library and to members of the public who passed through the library during the month. Participation in Greater Wellington's biodiversity evening was disappointing but the wintry storm on the night of the event was probably a contributing factor.

Ministry for the Environment staff who attended the Greentown launch called it the best World Environment Day event they had attended. Subsequently, people from Taupo, Eastbourne and Wainuiomata have expressed interest in holding a Greentown event.

## **5. Issues and opportunities**

### **5.1 Resources and timeframes**

Greentown was contingent on Ministry for the Environment funding and this was only confirmed at the end of April, leaving a little over a month before the event's start date. This put pressure on staffing and production deadlines. A longer lead in time would have given us the opportunity to plan, partner with councils or likeminded groups, sell the Greentown concept to the community, and get more community groups and businesses on board. In addition, greater time would have enabled more input from other Council divisions and allowed us to address more Council sustainability objectives – such as those relating to transport, parks and water conservation.

### **5.2 Bag production**

The production and packing of the bags was staff intensive, and expensive. About 2400 bags were made from billboard material, with just two weeks to produce and pack the bags before the distribution date (including bags for Greater Wellington and Meridian staff which were done at the same time). A longer timeframe may have enabled us to source an environmentally acceptable virgin fabric from within New Zealand, although the recycled origins of the billboard also provided a positive message. If we are to produce bags again, it may be worth considering selling advertising space on them to local businesses.

### **5.3 Business promotion**

The Greentown experience highlighted the importance of getting input from businesses very early on and the need to present them with a concept which they can own. Although the Greytown Business Association had been briefed about Greentown and invited to participate, it took no part in the initiative. Had it been involved it could have acted as a conduit to greater business involvement and business ownership of the 'Buy Local Buy Green' promotion. Again, the late granting of funding from the Ministry for the Environment also acted as a barrier to business involvement. Nevertheless, the businesses that did participate in the campaign were generally very positive about it, seeing it as an opportunity to increase trade (which was one of its aims) as well as help the environment.

### **5.4 Events**

Greytown School and Kuranui College significantly assisted Greater Wellington to promote Greentown. However, we did not have the time or human resources to organise the sequence of events that were originally conceived to get the message across. The promotion of events, through a mail drop prior to the commencement of a Greentown initiative, radio and newspaper advertising and the use of local celebrities is recommended for any possible future Greentown event.

### **5.5 Sustainability displays**

The displays were set up for an entire month in the library. Though there was substantial foot traffic, there were few opportunities for people to interact with the people representing the respective organisations promoting their vision of sustainability. An alternative option would be to hold displays as part of a sustainability fair, where local businesses, schools and community groups display their wares and share their vision, over a single weekend.

### **5.6 Communications**

Greentown attracted significant coverage in the Wairarapa Times Age and Wairarapa News. National media (TV3, TVNZ, Radio NZ) also expressed an interest but only Radio NZ provided coverage. The absence of coverage in the Dominion Post was disappointing. Although the collateral produced was high quality, Greentown's promotion would have been assisted by more information to householders before the event – a pamphlet mail drop to residents at least two weeks prior to the initiative starting, radio advertising, and street banners to boost the event's visibility.

## **5.7 Information for households**

Time pressures also meant that the information for residents on how to switch to more environmentally friendly alternatives, and why they should do so, was not as comprehensive and programmed as is desirable. It would have been better if residents had received this information in advance of receiving their sustainability bags and then followed up with more promotional material throughout the following month.

## **6. Conclusion**

World Environment Day provided an opportunity to test an approach to personal environmental behaviour change that Greater Wellington had not previously explored. With funding from external parties, the cost to the Council was largely in staff time. We have learnt a number of lessons from the exercise which will greatly improve the effectiveness of Greentown if it is done again.

At this stage there is still debate about the Council's future direction in the household sustainability area. Whether or not Greentown is repeated depends on the extent to which household based approaches are adopted by the Council to achieve its aims for a sustainable region, and which issues are best addressed through public behaviour change, as opposed to other approaches. However there would seem to be significant potential for Greentown initiatives to assist the Council to implement its household - and business - sustainability objectives, as well as achieve outcomes under some major strategies currently being developed in the form of the sustainable energy strategy, regional water strategy, and climate change strategies.

Greentown also demonstrated that there are potential and willing partners and funders for this type of initiative in the business sector which in the future, with more lead in time, could make a much bigger contribution. To build on the success of Greentown, future events will need a longer lead in time, greater promotion and more staffing across the organisation – including a dedicated project manager - but much of this could be funded externally. It was very helpful to have the support of South Wairarapa District Council for Greentown and Greater Wellington should always work with a territorial authority in order to maximise resources.

## **7. Communication**

As the purpose of this report is to evaluate the Greentown project, there are no communication opportunities that need to be pursued at this time. An evaluation report has already been supplied to the Ministry for the Environment.

## 8. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. ***Receives the report; and***
2. ***Notes the contents.***

Report prepared by:

**Geoff Skene**  
Manager, Environment  
Education

Report prepared by:

**Matt Velde**  
Senior Communications  
Advisor

Report approved by:

**Nigel Corry**  
Divisional Manager,  
Environment Management