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Cleansweep team celebrates

A £300,000 plus project to tackle litter, fly-tipping and graffiti in Hillfields is celebrating its first year with a huge thank you from residents.

Whitefriars Housing Group, in partnership with Coventry City Council, launched the two-man Cleansweep team in early 2005 following a plea by residents to brighten the area.

Since they set to work, Neville Ingram and Darren Wilkins have cleared 77 tonnes of rubbish from the area's streets.

Unruly shrubbery, overgrown land, communal areas and litter are just some of the things the pair has tackled. The money for the project has come from the European Regional Development fund.

In addition to getting their hands dirty, in its quest to tackle fly-tipping trouble, the duo has teamed-up with a number of community groups including Hillfields Gala Day, the Watch initiative in Winchester Street, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the Hillfields Early Learning Centre.

Their hard work has seen them earn the respect of local schools, community groups and residents, more than 12 of whom have written to Whitefriars congratulating the Cleansweep team on its work.

One of those who felt moved enough to put pen to pen, is Joan Haywood, manager at St Peter's Community Centre, Charles Street, Hillfields.

She said: "I really wanted to thank the team for the wonderful job that is being done to keep the Hillfields area clean and tidy.

"We at the centre really appreciate how difficult it is to maintain cleanliness in an area such as Hillfields, but we have certainly noticed a difference. Some 26,000 people accessed the St Peter's Community Centre in 2005, and it is really important to us that they gain a good impression of the area. The team's work is really great."

The Hillfields Partnership Board, a team of dedicated residents who work with local councillors and others, chose Whitefriars as the preferred partner for Coventry City Council to put together a plan and a team to deal with notorious litter problems in the area.

Shelia Martin, of Singer Residents' Group, said the residents were not regretting their choice.

Shelia, who has lived in Hillfields for around 25 years, said: "The physical environment around you is very important which is why we are absolutely delighted about this project.

"You can see really see the physical difference the Cleansweep team has made. They not only clean-up the streets, but also encourage education and prevention which is what will really make the difference in the long-term.

"We have worked with them on a number of occasions. Recently we gained funding for a project to install flowerbeds in two streets. They were really helpful and supported us by clearing things away. They get on really well with the community."

Whitefriars, a not-for-profit organisation, has been awarded the cleaning contract until 2008. In addition to clearing areas it has also pledged to educate the community to stop the problems for good.

Tom Herbert, services manager - estate maintenance at Whitefriars, said: "Whitefriars has a wider role to play in Coventry's communities than just housing. Residents said they wanted us to tackle persistent fly-tippers, so this is what we have set about to do.

"The volume of complimentary letters we have received about the improvement to the area is testament to the hard work of our two staff. Their dedication, and that of the local community groups, will ensure Hillfields has a cleaner future."

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