

Greenhill Gardens Impact Report

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1. Introduction



Figures 1 and 2 depicting the Greenhill Gardens opening. Authors own photos.

The Greenhill Gardens opened on a very rainy Saturday, September 20th in Swansea city centre to a crowd of 200+ people with a day filled with music, pizza, and community spirit.

After first visiting the site in July 2025 and learning about the Greenhill Gardens, I decided to include it as a case study in my research on city and town center placemaking initiatives in South Wales. As a PhD student at Swansea University, my work focuses on creative placemaking and urban regeneration in the region. Matt's House and the new Greenhill Gardens have become key case studies within my Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project, *Urban Acupuncture in South Wales: Pinprick Solutions for Urban Regeneration?*

Theoretically, my PhD is exploring the growing concept of urban acupuncture, a placemaking and urban design strategy that aims to foster meaningful change from a systems-led approach. Urban acupuncture focuses on identifying and intervening in the 'pressure points' of a city through small-scale, strategic actions that aim to catalyse broader urban transformation. These interventions, often described as 'pinpricks' in the urban fabric, are thought to stimulate the city's 'nervous system'—acting as hyperlocal treatments that activate place and foster regeneration. As Houghton et al. (2015) describe, it is a "hyper localized healing treatment through place activation to enliven and recreate cities" and can have restorative impacts on the town or city at large.

My wider research examines a range of city and centre place activations across South Wales town and city centres, with a particular focus on Swansea, Newport, and Haverfordwest.

2. Method

The method for this research study was done with a mix of methodologies at this point in time, in particular **survey** and **ethnography** research.

The first method, **survey**, was specifically aimed at those who use Matt's House in any capacity. The survey took around 10- 15 minutes to complete and asks general questions about how participants use the space, their thoughts and feelings regarding the design and impact of the Greenhill Gardens, how the Gardens have impacted their well-being, and lastly if, and how the Matt's House and specifically Greenhill Gardens larger impact on the city centre. The survey lastly looked to investigate participants' perspective if they thought that the initiative had larger impacts that reverberated outward. The survey was published online on the opening day on September 20th, and was shouted out by Thom at the opening ceremony. I realised quite early on that my online survey would not be accessible for some guests. Some of the older volunteers remarked they didn't have a smart phone on the launch day- so I was sure to bring printed out copies of the survey.

The second method, **ethnography**, is all about being in space — talking with people, and exploring in a more informal way how the place impacted them. The researcher went to the Greenhill Gardens on numerous occasions to both hand out the survey, but also to explore how people use the space - first for the Greenhill Gardens Launch Day on September 20th, and then subsequently weekly on Monday or Tuesday lunch time openings. In this time, I got to meet a wide range of volunteers, members of staff, and guests that use the space. Although the volunteers were often busy during the lunch sessions, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many of the guests. While spending time with guests and volunteers outside in the garden, I would more casually ask them about their feelings regarding the Greenhill Gardens.



Figure 3 and 4 : Promotion for the Greenhill Gardens Launch Day and the survey flyer.

3. Preliminary Results and Analysis

Survey Results

The survey for Matt's Place and the Greenhill (as of 23/10/2025) had an online completion rate of 61.1% with 18 starts and 11 submissions. On average, the survey took 10 minutes and 17 minutes to complete. Half of the respondents self-identified as male, and half responded as female — only one preferred not to respond. The age range of the survey participants were:

- 36.4% were in their 30s
- 27.3% were in their 50s
- 36.4% were older 65+

While this survey will be open until the end of December 2025, early analysis finds key findings.

Matt's House at Large

The survey found:

- 72.7% of survey participants came weekly to Matt's House, while the other 27.2% came a few times a year.
- Most of the survey participants were volunteers (72%), but respondents also used Matt's Place for community events (54%), for social meetups (45%), workshops or educational programmes (45%) and getting food at the cafe (36%). One respondent went to church services at the facilities.
- All participants agreed they felt a sense of belonging when participating at Matt's Place, with 72.7% of participants said they feel a great deal, and the other 27.3% found 'quite a bit'
- Likewise, when asked about connection with the local community, all participants felt that Matt's Place helped to create a 'place of connection' with the local community - with 54.6% finding that it has contributed 'a great deal'.
- 90.9% of participants found the atmosphere at Matt's House to be '**very welcoming**' and inclusive

Greenhill Gardens Impact

This next set of questions asked specifically about opinions about the Greenhill Gardens project.

These sets of questions were asked with a 5-point Likert scale:

(Strongly disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree - Strongly Disagree)

The survey found:

- 90.1% of people **agreed** that Greenhill Gardens had positively impacted their **perception of the city centre of Swansea**, with 36.4% of participants **strongly agreeing** to this statement. 9.9% were neutral to this statement.
- 100% of participants **agreed** that Greenhill Gardens has improved the **atmosphere** in its area of town, with 72.7% **strongly agreeing** to this statement
- 100% **agreed** that the Greenhill Gardens **enhanced their knowledge and connection to local heritage**, with 70% **strongly agreeing**
- 100% **agreed** that Greenhill Gardens is situated in a **key location** in the city centre, with 70% **strongly agreeing** to this statement
- 90% of participants agreed that Greenhill Gardens had **improved the overall vibrancy of the area**, with 70% **strongly agreeing**
- When asked about if they thought Greenhill Gardens would influence changes in local property prices, 70% of participants were **neutral** on this question, while 10% agreed, and 20% **strongly agreed**
- 70% **agreed** that the Greenhill Gardens had 're-stimulated the nervous system of the city centre', with 20% **strongly agreeing**. 30% were **neutral** to this statement
- Research participants wrote that they **value most** about the Greenhill Gardens:
 - "The sensitive way that the graveyard has been transformed helps instill a sense of peace and calm."
 - "Its beauty. This area has previously been low on natural beauty and green space. Also the opportunity to sit & think or chat. I also value it as a space to remember people buried there and now to remember poorer people whose lives were previously not marked by grave stones"

- “Swansea has a lot of gorgeous beaches but not that many green spaces so it’s brilliant to have a beautiful green space for the community to enjoy.”
- “The peace and quiet”
- “Community”
- “As it is brand new, it is hard to answer this. The design and planting are lovely; the heritage info on the website is tremendous though I have barely begun to read through it all.”
- “Swansea has a lot of gorgeous beaches but not that many green spaces so it’s brilliant to have a beautiful green space for the community to enjoy.”
- “The green space”
- What I value most about Greenhill Gardens is the transformation it represents – turning a forgotten, overgrown space into a vibrant gift for the community. It’s a blessing to the area, a place where people can meet, connect, and feel proud of their neighbourhood. Many said it couldn’t be done, but we believed in creating a safe, beautiful space to welcome more people, share stories, and enjoy time together with our neighbours.
- All participants attended the Greenhill Gardens described the opening event as improving their mood. For those participants, they described the day with one word:
 - Uplifting (x2)
 - Wonderful
 - Powerful!
 - Togetherness
 - Transformational
 - Joyful

Personal Wellbeing

The next section asked participants specifically about their personal well-being since attending Matt’s House. The survey found:

- All 100% of participants **agreed** that Matt’s Place and the Greenhill Gardens have improved their well-being - with 45% finding it had **‘significantly improved’** their well-being, and the other 55% finding it has ‘slightly improved’ their well-being
- Regarding in which ways the space has impacted their well-being:
 - 81.9% said it increased their social connections
 - 54.6%
 - 63.6% said it gave them a greater sense of purpose
 - 18.2% said it increased their physical well-being
- Regarding the question, “Do you feel that participating in Matt’s House has positively influenced your day-to-day life?”
 - 54.6% answered “Yes, significantly”
 - 36% answered “Yes, somewhat”
 - 9.1% said there was no noticeable impact.

Overall Comments and Suggestions

Overall, participants in the survey found that the Greenhill Gardens and Matt’s Place at large had significant impact on the local area. Using a word analysis, the most used words in the survey responses were:



Figure 5: Most used words in survey open-response questions

- 90.9% of participants found that Matt's House has influenced **social and/or economic changes** in the surrounding area. Getting more into detail, some participants wrote:
 - a. "It has brought the community into a welcoming warm space and provided support, hope and encouragement for vulnerable people."
 - b. "Matt's House has influenced social changes by providing a warm safe inclusive space for everyone. The love and positivity in Matt's House affects all those who visit, and this is carried by our guests out into the surrounding areas. Economically, free hot meals, showers, laundry service and hygiene packs, to name but a few services, help the guests to cope with rising costs. This helps prevent crime as there are less financially desperate situations. Also provided are free professional services such as housing support, job finders and mental health support, giving people hope and positive pathways to explore."
 - c. "It has helped the regeneration of this part of the city adding to that from the Palace Theatre rebuild."
 - d. "Positive – lots of hope"
 - e. "Matthews house has normalised sharing spaces, included those deemed marginalised, offered beauty on an ugly street, provided good quality meals from donations reducing waste and upcycling ingredients and is a place of hope and hospitality. There is a feeling on the site that is very special and warm. I love that people sit together paying what they can for food, people can access showers, find clothing or christmas gifts, be put in touch with appropriate support and get stuck in with meaningful volunteering or community activity like joining the choir."
 - f. Matthew's House has become a cornerstone of hope, connection, and opportunity in Swansea. Since opening in 2017, we've welcomed thousands of people through our doors – serving over 220,000 meals, supporting rough sleepers with showers and laundry, distributing thousands of dignity packs, and walking alongside people in crisis through our Buddy advocacy scheme. Socially, Matthew's House is more than a building, it's a safe, non-judgemental space where people are known by name, find friendship, and rebuild trust. Our community café, choir, and heritage projects have helped break isolation, reduce stigma, and create a sense of belonging for vulnerable individuals. Economically, we intercept tonnes of surplus food every year, reducing waste while providing affordable meals on a pay-as-you-feel basis. We also signpost people to services, helping them access housing, benefits, training, and work. Volunteers gain valuable skills and confidence, with many moving into employment. Matthew's House has become a hub where hospitality and practical support meet, transforming lives and strengthening Swansea's wider community."
 - g. "Matt's House has raised the profile of the vulnerable in our city and has positively influenced social change by engaging the wider community with the project. It is such a warm, welcoming, positive place. It gives people hope and the sense that wonderful

things can happen in this city. It is a powerful force for good and always leads by example."

Survey participants also wrote:

1. "To see hope in someone's eyes when they realise they are valued and respected is so incredibly heart warming"
2. "There is a lot of power in the simple things that can change the course of someone's life. Inclusion, beauty, support, the meeting of basic needs and feeling part of something are all provided by Matthew's House and through that it makes such a powerful difference in their community."
3. "The environment in and around the church is top notch but it remains that the **people are the most powerful aspect of these projects**. Thankyou to all involved"
4. "It would be lovely to see the project continuing to grow, perhaps with additional buildings on the green area outside the back fence. Here it would be great if we could offer training of some sort in practical skills like building, carpentry, plumbing etc."
5. "There is a lot of power in the simple things that can change the course of someone's life. Inclusion, beauty, support, the meeting of basic needs and feeling part of something are all provided by Matthew's House and through that it makes such a powerful difference in their community."
6. "Just so impressed by what has been achieved. Thom's passion has made it such a success by inspiring everyone involved."

Ethnographic Research



Figures 6 and 7: The bug hotel and planted species of the Greenhill Gardens.

During my ethnographic research, I came to Greenhill Gardens on three separate occasions, always during the lunch rush for Matt's Cafe. I used a research journal to pen down my observations after each visit so I could be fully immersed in the place.

The inside of the building was packed with guests at every table eating, socialising, and enjoying themselves, with volunteers pouring tea and coffee, making food, and creating hospitable space and I decided it would be best to talk to people in the Greenhill Gardens, so I usually stood or sat around the Gardens. Outside, there was often a line of guests, waiting for a table at Matt's Cafe, so I often talked to people while they waited.

On my visits, many volunteers and guests alike came outside to sit outside in the Greenhill Gardens, either by themselves or in small groups. One volunteer told me, "I don't think I've ever had my break outside here - I used to just sit inside the whole time." Meanwhile, other guests were using the dog houses to safely secure their pets, when they went inside for Matt's Place. Prior to the Greenhill Gardens, there was nowhere to safely secure their pets.

Another volunteer who worked on the meet and greet team told me,

"It used to be pretty grim, people waiting in queue out here in a cemetery. There wasn't really any open space for people and they were all just crowded along here. There's a lot more space now, especially places that you can duck for cover when there's rain, which really helps"

While talking to guests many were very happy to see the garden. Some said,

"At first, when I found out there were digging up all the graves, I was a bit unsure. I'm quite a superstitious person and it didn't feel right. Now that I see the space now, they've done such a nice job respecting the dead - you can even see their names now and learn about them"

"It's nice to have a bit of breathing space out here - it can get quite stuffy inside with lots of noise and lots going on. I feel more calm out here"

"The ground feels nice and bouncy to walk on"

"Just wait until next summer - I hope there will be butterflies here"

Not everyone was happy about the change. One volunteer responded that he didn't like change and that he was finding it hard to get used to. I was told by other guests that he volunteered often to take care of the graveyard. He did like that there was a specific place for the sorting of waste and recycling, which he volunteered with. A few of the guests and I discussed how the space helped us feel more connected to nature as we tried to identify the different plant species growing there. When we discovered a patch of mint, we sat outside smelling the leaves and chatting about all the ways it could be used in home recipes. I also spoke with several volunteers who had helped transform the old cemetery into the Greenhill Gardens over the summer. One volunteer shared,

"This was a dead space before - literally. I was here from the beginning and I really can't believe how much the space has transformed. It's such a relaxed place to be in now"

4. Conclusion

The Greenhill Gardens project represents a powerful example of how urban greening and urban heritage interventions can bring about meaningful change in a city centre context. Through both survey responses and ethnographic observations, it is evident that the transformation of this once-overgrown and overlooked graveyard into a vibrant, inclusive green space has had tangible social, emotional, and environmental impacts on the community. The data reveals strong perceptions of increased well-being, belonging, and pride among participants, alongside a renewed sense of connection to Swansea's local heritage and city centre.

As a form of "urban acupuncture," the Greenhill Gardens embodies the principles of targeted, hyperlocal regeneration that can ripple outward to influence broader systems of urban life. The findings suggest that even modest interventions—when rooted in care, collaboration, and respect for place—can re-stimulate the "nervous system" of a city, encouraging connection, participation, and hope. More research could be done later on to really see the full impacts of the project once the project has taken root.

Projects like Greenhill Gardens and Matthew's House demonstrate that creative placemaking is not merely about design or aesthetics, but about nurturing the social and emotional fabric of communities. By combining hospitality, heritage, and human connection, these initiatives show how regeneration can emerge from empathy as much as from urban infrastructure. In this way, the Greenhill Gardens stands as a

living case study in the transformative potential of small, strategic acts of urban kindness—pinpricks that heal, connect, and inspire the wider city.



Figures 8, 9, and 10: Photos from the Greenhill Gardens opening

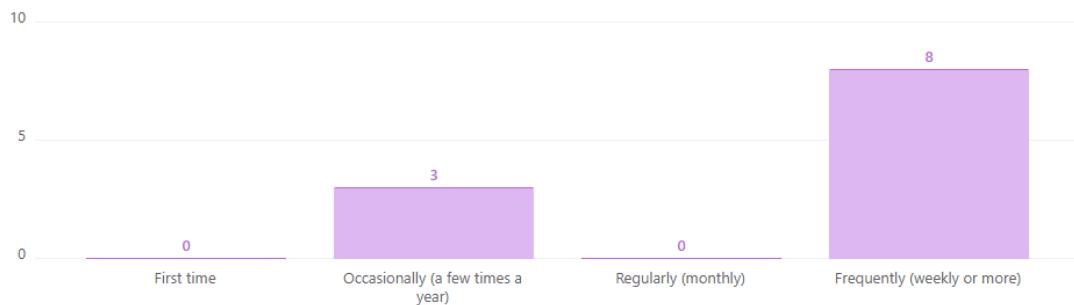
Appendix

The appendix allows you to see the full breakdown of survey answers in graphical form.

 2 How often do you attend or participate in events at Matt's House?

11 out of 11 people answered this question.



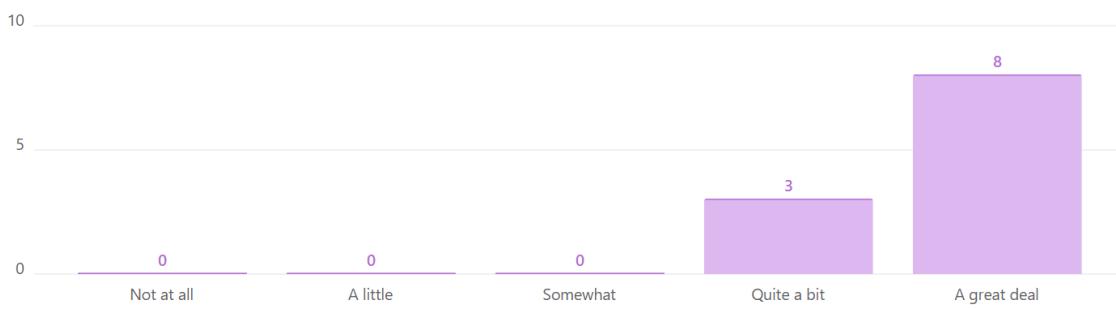
A- 3 What type of activities or events do you engage with at Matt's House? (Select all that apply)

11 out of 11 people answered this question.



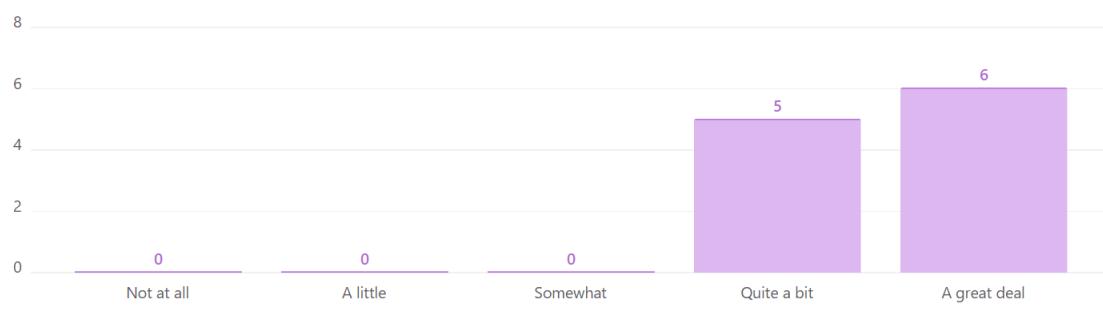
A- 5 To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging when participating in activities at Matt's House?

11 out of 11 people answered this question.



A- 6 To what extent do you feel that Matt's House has positively contributed to your connection with the local community?

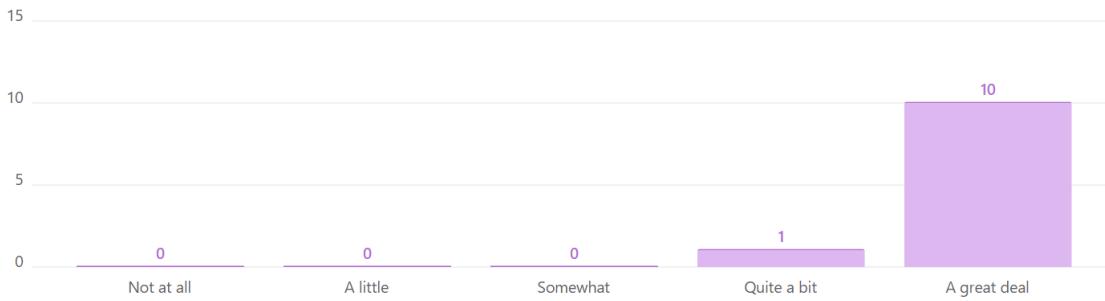
11 out of 11 people answered this question.



A= 7 To what extent do you think the atmosphere at Matt's House is welcoming and inclusive?

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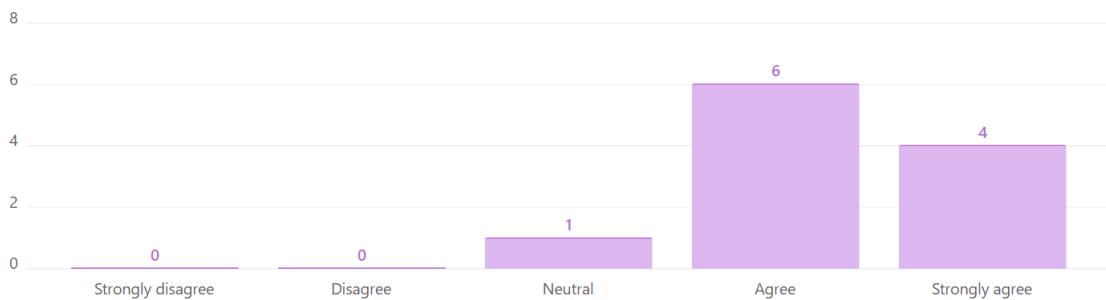
11 out of 11 people answered this question.



A= 10 Greenhill Gardens has positively impacted my perception of the city centre

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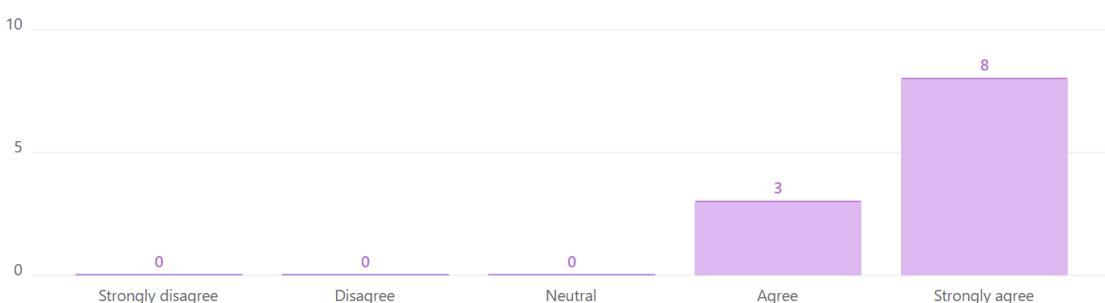
11 out of 11 people answered this question.



A= 11 The presence of Greenhill Gardens has improved the overall atmosphere in this part of town.

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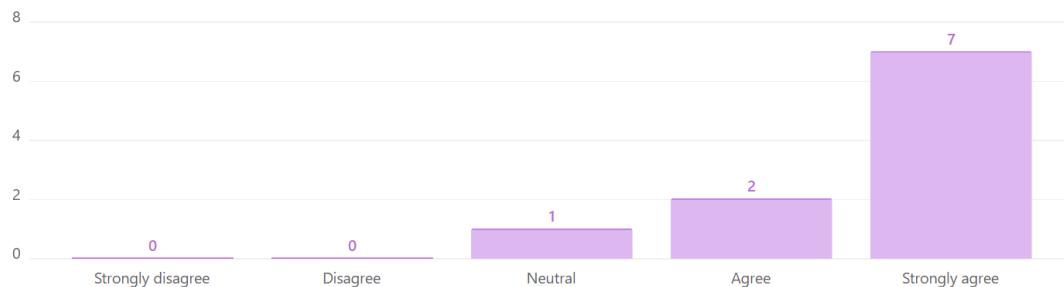
11 out of 11 people answered this question.



 15 Greenhill Gardens has improved the overall vibrancy of the area



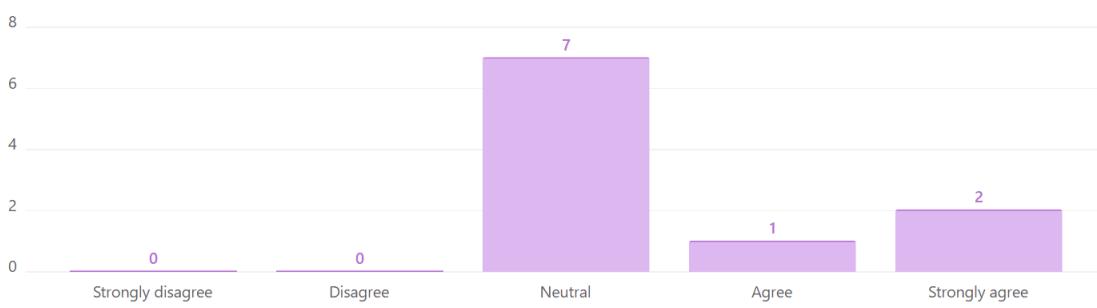
10 out of 11 people answered this question.



 17 Greenhill Gardens has influenced changes in property values in the surrounding area.



10 out of 11 people answered this question.



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