

# BEN

Black Environment Network



## Ethnic Communities and Green Spaces

Guidance for green space managers

	Green Space	Location	Type of space	Theme	Focus	Use	Improve	Create
1	Abbeyfield Park	Sheffield	Urban park	Multi-cultural festival in the park	Park dept promoting use by ethnic communities		/	
2	Abney Park Cemetery	London	Local Nature Reserve	Ecology, architecture and recreation	Biodiversity awareness raising in mixed use space	/		
3	Al Hilal	Manchester	Community centre garden	Improving the built environment	Cultural and religious identity embodied in design			/
4	Calthorpe Project	London	Multi-use green space	Multi-functional inner city project	Good design brings harmony among diverse users			/
5	Cashel Forest	Sterling	Woodland (mixed)	Commemorative forest of near-native ecology	Refugee volunteers plant /tend commemorative trees		/	
6	Chelsea Physic Garden	S. London	Botanic garden	Medicinal plants from around the world	Pleasure visit/study facility with cultural links	/		
7	Chinese Hillside RBGE	Edinburgh	Botanic garden	Simulated Chinese ecological landscape	Living collection/ecological experiment	/		
8	Chumleigh Gardens	S. London	Multicultural gardens	Park gardens recognising local ethnic presence	Public park created garden reflecting different cultures			/
9	Clovelly Centre	Southampton	Community centre garden	Outdoor recreation space for older people	Culturally sensitive garden design			/
10	Concrete to Coriander	Birmingham	Community garden	Expansion of park activities for food growing	Safe access to land for Asian women			/
11	Confused Spaces	Birmingham	Incidental spaces	Inner city neighbourhood renewal	Local management of environmental services		/	
12	Cottingley Springs	Leeds	Gypsy site	Improving the area near accommodation	Gypsies tackle multiple issues near home		/	
13	Discover Story Garden	E. London	Play garden	Under 7s semi-structured imaginative play	Wide consultation with multi-cultural groups	/		/
14	George's Park	Birmingham	Local park	Community action, social cohesion	Women and children lead on refurbishment		/	
15	Hidden Garden	Glasgow	Sacred garden	Multifaith sacred space	Arts and cultural events celebrating diversity			/
16	Kafel Centre	Swansea	Community centre space	Consultation on creation of public garden	Led by Muslims for wider community			/
17	Khalsa Wood	Nottingham	Woodland (deciduous)	Commemorative sacred grove	Created by Sikhs for wider community	/	/	/
18	London Wetlands Centre	W. London	Created wetlands	World wetlands and wildside areas	Wildlife habitat creation/public access	/		
19	Lower Spen	Ravensthorpe	Local Nature Reserve	Engaging local ethnic communities through art	Using natural materials to create seasonal artifacts		/	
20	Medicine Wheel	Milton Keynes	Sacred space	Native American sacred space	Created by Native Americans for wider community			/
21	Mile End	E. London	Urban park	Contested space	Diverse users in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, ability	/		
22	Minet Country Park	London	Country Park	Restoration ecology and regeneration	Faith groups / social / environmental justice		/	
23	Moat and Tower	Birmingham	Historic space	Heritage conservation	Intergenerational archaeology project		/	
24	Mughal Garden	Bradford	Paradise garden	Islamic 'paradise' garden in local park	Reflects cultural heritage of local communities		/	
25	Pumpkins for the People	Exeter	Allotment / food growing	Raising awareness of local /global food issues	Chinese individual inspires homeless support	/		
26	Reading International Solidarity Centre	Reading	Edible roof garden	Innovative sustainable development resource	Permaculture learning resource			/
27	River Lea	London	River/riverside	Engaging with nature through sport and art	Ethnic Jewish children's outdoor activities	/		
28	Roots and Shoots	S. London	Training centre	Multi-use wildlife/horticulture space	Education, training and community mixed use	/	/	/
29	Rose Hill Quarry	Swansea	Green corridor	Wildlife habitat meets human recreation	Involving Bangladeshis in outdoor activities	/		
30	Ryton Organic Gardens	Coventry	Demonstration gardens	Organic gardening	Organic Food for All training	/		
31	St Agnes Park	Bristol	Urban park	African-Caribbean led regeneration	Warden / Friends tackle safety issues			/
32	St Gemma's Hospice	Leeds	Hospice garden	Holistic palliative care	Improving inclusiveness in health care setting		/	
33	Surrey Docks Farm	E. London	City Farm	Urban contact with plants and animals	Used by urban ethnic communities	/		
34	Three Sisters - Good Road	Newcastle	Community garden	Native American horticulture resource	Raises awareness diverse cultures/methods			/
35	Twigs	Swindon	Therapeutic garden	Mental health resource	Outreach to small Asian community	/		
36	Viewfinder	Sheffield	Various spaces	First impressions of novelty and nostalgia	Photographic research of refugees experiences.	/		
	<b>Views</b>							
	A range of views from ethnic communities							
F1	Al Hilal Mosque and community centre	Manchester						
F2	Focus Group at Balsall Heath Forum	Birmingham						
F3	Focus group at Barnhill Childcare Centre	Manchester						
F4	BEM Network Conference	Liverpool						
F5	Focus group at Concrete to Coriander group	Birmingham						
F6	Cottingley Springs Gypsy site	Leeds						
F7	Informal survey and focus group at Green Pepys Fair	London						
F8	Focus group with Nottingham Sikh Ladies Group	Nottingham						
	<b>Useful Information and Further Reading</b>							

**Abbeyfield Park  
Sheffield**

**Contact: Panni Poh Yoke Loh**  
**e: [panni@greencityaction.co.uk](mailto:panni@greencityaction.co.uk)**

Green City Action was set up in 1993. It is an environmental company based in Burngreave, Sheffield. Engaging people of diverse cultures in environmental issues is at the heart of its work.

The Abbeyfield Park Multicultural Festival was initiated and organised by Panni Poh Yoke Loh of Green City Action as a way of celebrating and connecting people of diverse cultural backgrounds with the environment.



**Planning**

Panni decided to take the practical approach and simply talked to members of the community to see what they wanted for their space. In the past there had been events in the park, but on a smaller scale. The result of the consultation with the local community resulted in the festival.

In April 1991 the management committee gave the go ahead for the Festival. It was planned for July of that year. Although this did not leave much time for the community groups to prepare, 17 very motivated people from different groups got to work immediately and ended up organising a really successful event. Since then the event has grown from year to year.



**Funding**

Funding came from the SRB Budget.

Five of the main aims of the festival are:

- To celebrate the rich diversity of the Burngreave Area raising its positive profile and creating greater community harmony.
- To provide greater multicultural involvement in environmental issues.



- To bring people of all ethnic backgrounds together in a way that is relevant and appropriate to them respecting their culture.
- To provide an opportunity for celebrating in Abbeyfield Park enabling people to enjoy its simple pleasures.
- To increase awareness of the activities and resources provided by Green City Action



### Future Plans

Green City Action hopes that in the future besides the festival they will use it as a focus to also organise programmes of activities leading up to it.

A few photographs showing some of the activities at the Festival



### Further Information

You can log onto the BBC website for more information and photos from the festival  
[www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/features/abbeyfield-park/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/features/abbeyfield-park/index.shtml)

## **Abney Park Cemetery London**

**Contact: Kirsty Peterkin**  
**t: 0207 7275 7557**  
**e: [abney-park@geo2.poptel.org.uk](mailto:abney-park@geo2.poptel.org.uk)**

Abney Park Cemetery in London's East End is remarkable in that it is at once a nature reserve and a recreational facility for Hackney's incredibly diverse communities – at the last count 224 languages were spoken in the borough.

One of only two non-conformist cemeteries in London and one of the oldest garden cemeteries in the capital, Abney Park is Hackney's first Local Nature Reserve, consisting of 13 hectares of woodland, important for its ecology and its architecture. It is also classified as a nature reserve of metropolitan importance and as such figures highly in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

High profile events attract visitors from many of the ethnic communities in the neighbourhood, and culturally relevant activities are helping to secure the engagement of two significant local communities – the Orthodox Jewish and Turkish communities.

When Abney Park Cemetery was first established in Victorian times, two and a half thousand new trees were planted, including many from the late, great Lodiges arboretum of Mare Street. Over the years it has become a home and vital habitat to numerous species of butterflies, bats and other mammals.

Back then, attitudes to death were more accommodating, of necessity since death was very much a part of life in a way it's hard for us to imagine now. Families would come to picnic at their loved-ones' gravesides.

These days the cemetery is 'open access', and is treated by the council as a park, with the gates opening each morning and closing at dusk. As well as being a place for families to come - regularly or intermittently - to tend graves, it also attracts workers in their lunch-break, occasional street drinkers, walkers and various tourists. Abney Park is part of the Capital Ring of cemeteries and as such is used extensively by Ramblers. Health walks have also been organised here for users of the Stamford Hill Health Centre. There have been problems at times, with walkers and other users feeling unsafe or unhappy due to the usual issues of loitering, cruising, litter, dogs and so on, but some of these have been gently displaced by positive activities in recent times.

The cemetery is managed by Abney Park Cemetery Trust, established in 1991, who delegate to a small staff team, including Kirsty Peterkin, who is employed by English Nature as a Community Liaison Officer for Hackney's Wildspace! Scheme. Kirsty has a background in arts and crafts, and used to come to Abney Park Cemetery to enjoy the peace and quiet and to draw. She has worked for most of the museums in Hackney so she has a good feel for the heritage element of the work. It also means she is used to having to do lots of fundraising!

### **Summer Fun**

The highlight of the year at Abney Park Cemetery, and the main way people can get involved, is the annual Open Day, which usually takes place towards the end of the school summer holidays. Kirsty spends the whole of each summer working with children to create banners and sculptures to decorate the space. In the run-up to the event, she spends six months fundraising, and often does not know until the last minute whether or not her grant applications have been successful. They always lose money on open events, but Kirsty insists it's worth it to get 3,500 people through. Previous open day themes have included the Queen's Jubilee, when they planted golden trees and plants; celebrating 10 years as a nature reserve; and last year the event had a heritage theme – it was a Victorian Day. Environmental organisations run stalls and take advantage of the opportunity to reach out to the many ethnic communities who get involved. Workshops run throughout the day in the children's garden and environment centre, covering nature discovery, ugly bugs craft workshop, and green woodworking skills for all ages.

A vast array of multicultural talent is displayed during Open Day, including: a Djembe group; Klezmer Klub; Hackney Singers; St Paul's Steiner School instrumental group; Beskydy Balkany Band; Bengali singing, harmonium and tabla with Akash Sultan and Raju; Alan Wilkinson and the Headstones marching band; Rushmore school steel band; a Ceilidh; Chinese songs in Cantonese and Mandarin; Turkish Saz group; a

Vietnamese music trio; London Jewish Male Voice Choir; a Samba Band; a puppet show and an assortment of buskers.

Specialist guides offer walks around the cemetery on themes such as the natural history of Abney Park, wildflowers and herbs and – picture this – the British Music Hall Society costume and song guided tour. Many well known music hall artistes are buried here, among a number of notables from the Jewish community, such as xxx physician to Queen Victoria. Of course the real value in these events is revealed in chance encounters between cultures, such as the moment when the Orthodox Jewish community groups spontaneously joined in with the music hall repertoire which has been remembered and passed down through the generations in their families. Walks have also been organised with a Turkish interpreter, highlighting features relevant to the substantial Turkish community of Hackney. The group have planted a Turkey Oak and it is hoped that they will return regularly to tend it.

Kirsty is building up a social history of Abney Park from the stories told by her many visitors, and there are plans to publish these in the form of a colourful booklet. The cemetery has a host of international connections. One of my favourite stories concerns a group of teenagers from a Welsh village, brought to Hackney by Monsignor Bruce Kent to tend the grave of their compatriot, the great peacemaker Henry Richard.



### **Activities for everyone**

Abney Park Education Service offers a programme of activities for primary and secondary groups across science, geography, history, citizenship and art. Schools groups are monitored for ethnicity and the majority of children are non-white (rendering the idea of 'ethnic minorities' problematic in this context).

The on-site classroom is available for use by family and community groups as well as schools. Tailored sessions can be shaped for different ages, abilities and needs, and nature trails around the site address themes such as literacy, navigation skills, using the five senses, and discovery treasure hunts. There is an after school environment club for local children, with the Wildlife Trust. Training courses for working skills in horticulture, woodworking, conservation and recycling, including women-only courses and pupil referrals, aim to lead students into work placements, for instance as park rangers.

Volunteer Days during the winter focus on conservation. Action has been co-ordinated by Friends of Abney Park Cemetery since the early 1980s to clear and restore footpaths, rebuild the front wall using donated bricks, and to clear the bog garden. Although the events, education and volunteering activities are well attended, recruiting people to serve as trustees is always a challenge.



### **Plans for the Future**

There are existing plans afoot to restore the wonderful gothic chapel, which stands at the heart of the cemetery, and the boundary wall. The project would take four years, entailing teaching traditional stone masonry skills to local people. The building would become a flexible space, probably including toilets, a workshop and possibly a café, in order to help Abney Park move towards being self-financing. The improvements would be environmentally sustainable, using solar panels on the high pitched roof. The Trustees are busy drawing up detailed plans and hope that the Heritage Lottery Fund will support them.

For further information feel free to drop in at the Visitor Centre on Stoke Newington High Street at any time during the week.



**Al Hilal  
Manchester**

**Contact: Sandra Wong  
t: 0161 205 6662  
e: sandranaeem@yahoo.co.uk**



In the heart of 'sunny' Manchester, palm trees line the street and small children play safely in a paradise garden. At the Cheetham Al Hilal Community Project, the whole Muslim community has participated in an innovative project to improve the built and natural environment in a way which reflects the cultural diversity of the area. Female and male, young and old, everyone has contributed something to change this tiny plot from a waste ground into a rich resource for outdoor activities. Islamic elements of garden design lend the whole project a sense of integrity and make a powerful statement of presence to the wider world.



The Cheetham Al Hilal Community Project has been active since 1978 providing support to Muslim / Asian (predominantly Pakistani) people in the area and engaging in anti-racist and interfaith work. After a long struggle to establish themselves and secure funding, they moved to their current premises in 1982.

The centre now caters for all ages with activities such as the adult and toddler group, women's and men's groups, youth clubs for both girls and boys, supplementary education and mother tongue classes in English, Urdu and Arabic, training courses, recreation and leisure facilities, charity and cultural events, activities for



disabled and elderly people, specialist and general advice and support. Although the centre now has a team of paid staff, many of the activities are still volunteer led.

The centre itself is in two parts, the original building and a newer, purpose built structure housing recreation and leisure facilities. In the heart of 'sunny' Manchester, very near to BEN's office in Cheetham Hill, the Al Hilal Centre, occupies a very prominent location at a fork in the road. A narrow triangle of land in front of the old building was formerly used as short cut by passers-by. According to a case study by Groundwork Manchester Salford and Trafford (MST), "the garden was previously neglected, overgrown and full of broken glass and rubbish. This created a danger to local people, portrayed a poor visual impression of the area, and did little to enhance the appearance of the well-maintained building."



But with help from BEN, Groundwork (MST), and the multi-agency Environment Working Group in Cheetham, Al Hilal have been able to completely transform this postage stamp of land from an eyesore into an attractive feature and a useful facility for the community.

The first phase of the project began to tackle the front garden in January 2003.

Sandra Wong facilitates the Al Hilal Adult and Toddler group which meets here twice a week. This group is linked with the Sure Start programme and has among its aims the provision of quality learning environments to promote early learning and enjoyable play for babies and children up to the age of 4. Sandra met me to show me the new garden, of which the community are justifiably proud. She explained that being situated right on the main road, there was no safe outdoor space in which the children could play. So the first priority was to create a fenced off area, using funding from Voluntary Action Manchester, Community Chest, Manchester City Council Cas:h (Clean and Safe), Viridor Community Fund distributed by Red Rose Forest, Living Spaces and Cheetham and Broughton Single Regeneration Budget.

The whole community has been involved in contributing ideas for the different elements of site improvements. With consultation from the groups, one of Groundwork (MST)'s landscape architects designed the fencing. The pattern of the railings reflects an Islamic theme which complements the shape of the plot and ties in well with the style of the buildings. An iron/steel worker will hold workshops with the boys club in January and February to design and weld seating to match the fencing, for use by young and old. The girls club installed a wall, decorated with mosaic designs illustrating their wishes for peace and harmony and made using tiles donated by B&Q. Throughout the project, the Al Hilal user group has been consulted about each phase of development. New flower beds have been made and plants and shrubs have been planted. Most significantly, at the tip of this pointed garden, a stand of palm trees makes a powerful statement about the cultural diversity of the area.

When the garden was first opened, Sandra was clearly filled with delight to describe the sight of 100 little children out in the sunshine for first time. Boys aged 5-16 years from the supplementary school will volunteer to water the new garden regularly, using a hose pipe run through window. (At first, when they thought this duty would involve lifting heavy watering cans they seemed daunted, but the hose pipe makes this responsibility into an enjoyable activity to look forward to.)

The next steps include improvements to the community centre car park. Al Hilal has to accommodate lots of cars during the daily school run between 4.30-6.30pm. Al Hilal are really starting to think about how to make their project more environmentally sustainable. For instance, they already participate in a Muslim 'clothes for charity' scheme and have clothes banks outside the community centre. Sandra suggested that in order to address the litter problem they might consider installing some drinks can recycling bins.

In the longer term, a range of building improvements and extensions are envisaged. An additional row of palm trees has been put in along the side of the building and there are plans for more palm trees to be added at the back. Planting palm trees was initially suggested by BEN Development Worker Saleem Oppal. These are the first of a kind to appear in Manchester, and now other mosques and community groups are inspired and want to follow suit.



**Resources available:**

*BEN can help with an information sheet about what kinds of palm trees grow in the British climate.*

**Useful Contacts**

Claire Robinson  
Community Link Officer  
North Manchester

Groundwork Manchester, Salford and Trafford  
Phoenix House  
61 Spear Street  
Manchester  
M1 1DF  
0162 237 5656 (phone)  
0161 237 3939 (fax)  
[www.groundwork.org.uk](http://www.groundwork.org.uk)



**Calthorpe Project  
Kings Cross, London**

**Contact Louise Gates**

**t: 020 7837 8019**

**e: calthorpe@green-fingers.co.uk**

The Calthorpe Project is a unique building integrally linked to a small, multi-use green space on the Grays Inn Road in London's King's Cross. The site was initially established in 1984 after local people fought to save it from development. The purpose built community centre and meeting venue was constructed using highly innovative building techniques about 13 years ago. It now caters for a very diverse range of regular users and occasional visitors. Good definition of space allows for a wide variety of functions and helps to maintain a harmonious atmosphere between the different groups.



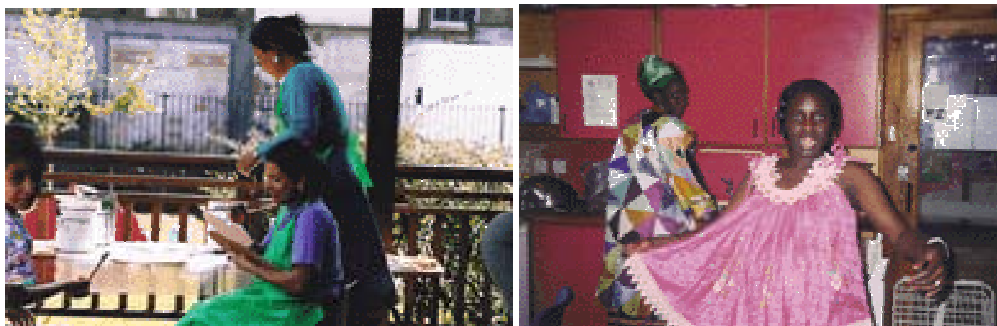
**Diverse visitors**

The Calthorpe project caters to a phenomenal diversity of users. In a typical year they can expect to attract as many as 30,000 visitors, which is remarkable for this tiny 1.2 acre space. According to a recent annual report "the majority are local residents who are attending classes, using the under 8's drop in or just enjoying the open space. Many are visiting Eastman's Dental Hospital next door and drop in to relax before or after an appointment. Students from Westminster Kingsway College sit in the garden during a sunny lunchtime alongside staff from the many offices along Grays Inn Road. Some of our visitors travel many miles, such as the Scottish Community diet Project, which was researching growing food in the city. Our children's plot recently featured in an article in 'The Guardian' about the resurgence of community allotments in London. We had a group from Finland, from the Deaconess Institute of Helsinki, finding out about the work we do with children and families. The editor of 'The Ghana Times' wanted to compare community gardens in his country with those in London."

Louise Gates, the project co-ordinator, told me that Calthorpe's users originate from all the countries of Africa, Latin America and Europe. This is truly a community green space in that it gives people a chance to meet one another who are neighbours, but might otherwise remain isolated in their flats. I have it on good authority that counted among the many visitors are occasional courting couples.

**Consulting communities**

The project has strong links with other community organizations and makes a point of consulting widely and monitoring the needs of users in order to ensure that they are offering the kind of services local people really want. With so many different groups using the space, Calthorpe Gardens has to try to be all things to all people. There have been territorial disputes in the past, but architect Robert Bishop has put some thought into sharpening the definition of spaces within the garden in order to accommodate multiple functions. Permanent features include attractive gates, a stone bridge over a sunken garden, flower beds and trees, including a rather special Ginkgo tree, a wild garden, the greenhouse, a community classroom, raised beds and vegetable plots, a small adventure play area, an outdoor gathering space, picnic area, sports pitches, and a decking patio linking the main building to the outdoors. These elements are connected by a network of beautiful mosaic and gravel paths.



### **Lots for everyone to do**

Throughout its history, Calthorpe has been working with local young people, watching them grow up and have children of their own. A range of activities is offered, including sports, arts, crafts, board games and discussions. More recently there has been an increase in the number of environmental workshops taking place, including an opera about genetically modified foods and their effects on humans and the countryside. A favourite activity with the girls' group is pond dipping. The girls have also made a banner 'Our World' which is on display in the foyer of the main building

Other regular activities include: women's coffee mornings, taken in the open air – weather permitting – once a week; women's fitness evening classes; a community composting scheme; a women's gardening club; kitchen ritual\* natural cookery group; an under 8s and families group; a shoppers' crèche; English and Arabic language classes; sewing, embroidery, arts, crafts and music groups; the Bengali music group; Indian classical dance club and Raised Voices choir, who focus on protest songs.

Many varied events take place at the gardens throughout the year, aimed mainly at local people, such as the Spring into Summer festival; International Food Fair; Mexican Day and International Women's Day celebrations. In 2002 an African Festival saw the gardens operating at capacity. It was perhaps too successful attracting as many as 2000 people. Similarly the Bengali festival, which had its home here for two consecutive years, has now moved to nearby Coram Fields where there is more space. Calthorpe based community groups also participate in a number of external events, such as Bangladesh Mela, Kings Cross Show, the festival of city farms and community gardens; coach trips to the seaside, farm and museum, picnics for homeless families. Raices Latinas Latin American dance classes offer dances from all over Latin America to women and children of all nationalities and the dancers perform at events across London throughout the calendar



### **Food Growing Groups**

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There is a sizeable Bengali community in King's Cross and the Bengali women's gardening group comes once a week (except in the winter) to grow their own herbs and vegetables. They meet on a day of the week when the gardens are not open to the public so they can relax and let the children run around safely without fear of harassment. They first got together when it was recognized that Bengali women were not participating in the keep fit classes. When these women said they were more keen on gardening as a form of healthy exercise, funds were raised to employ a worker. The group visited Spitalfields City Farm where they were very inspired to see what the Coriander Club Bengali women's gardening group had achieved (see web links below)

Another very popular session is the special needs gardening group run by a tutor at Calthorpe for students of Westminster Kingsway College. This multi-cultural group, which gives members a chance to learn gardening over a two year period, has been running now for 10 years, and continues to receive lots of enquiries from organizations working with people with learning difficulties and mental health problems.





### **Volunteers and Management**

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An appeal for volunteers goes out in the quarterly newsletter, which is distributed to all households in the area. Dozens of volunteers pass through Calthorpe each year, including school children planting bulbs, groups of employees from local firms engaged on task days and individuals running jumble sales. But not many BME volunteers come forward, for some reason.

Calthorpe's management committee is made up of users, local residents and ex-volunteers who meet eight times per year. Most of the various user groups are represented on the management committee, but in spite of Louise's encouragement, it is difficult to entice people from ethnic communities to participate in running the project - not because of cultural or language barriers, simply because it is rather official and always will be. It can't be avoided. However, an informal sub-group meeting takes place once a month with tea and biscuits, where users can get together to discuss any issues.

### **Celebrated building**

Calthorpe participated in London Open House in September 2000, bringing many visitors to look at the building, which is of special architectural interest being constructed using the Walter Segal Self Build method. The following description of the building is taken from the Walter Segal website.

*"The building incorporates an under-fives nursery, meeting room, office, kitchen and large verandahs leading into the landscaped garden area, and was designed in close consultation with the local community, who also helped design and construct the little play building which now adorns the nursery playground."*

*"The Project is used by many local people, providing a meeting venue for groups and individuals, a day centre for children, café facilities, toy library, a training venue for horticulture, building maintenance and special needs courses, sports facilities, a drop-in centre for parents and children and a venue for community festivals and fairs."*

*"A local contractor, specialists in site carpentry work, constructed the 260 square metre building in 20 weeks. It boasts high levels of insulation, a wildflower roof, and a tall entrance hall with wonderful clerestory daylighting. Completed in 1992, the Calthorpe Centre is an essential asset for the local community, and sits comfortably within the beautiful community gardens in the heart of the inner city."*

*"The project was awarded the Gulbenkian Community Building Award by Prince Charles in 1992"*



Construction: O'Shea Construction Ltd  
Developer: London Wildlife Trust  
Architect: Architype  
<http://www.segalsselfbuild.co.uk/projects/calthorpe.html>

### **The next phase**

The Calthorpe Project now has funding from SureStart for an extension to the building for under 5's. The plan incorporates small windows to the road side to keep down noise and large sliding windows out onto an enclosed garden. It will be built by trainees from Work Directions, a private company who are government funded to provide work for long term unemployed people, who in turn gain a certificate in sustainable construction. The project, which is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal fund, offers NVQs in Construction in the first year to four trainees on a six month placement. Next year there will be NVQs in Horticulture. At the end of the two-year period the project must become self-sustaining. Ian O'Toole, the construction skills tutor, and Gaven Duffy, the horticulture tutor, will help the trainees to find further contracts.

The building will be a show project, using recycled materials to construct gabion walls using a wire mesh frame filled with rubble, like the sides of motorway. They hope to get the concrete rubble cheap or free from Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, part of which is being demolished. The project's architect, Robert Bishop, lives opposite the hospital and hopes to negotiate with them to recycle some of the rubble, would otherwise cost money to dump in a landfill site. The building will then have soil piled up against the sides, for growing plants – a bit like a turf roof but more accessible. The roof itself will be made from Macrolon, a strong, light form of Perspex, which has been used before at Calthorpe for construction of an innovative greenhouse. They are keen on promoting the product, in the hope of getting discount in exchange. Water run-off from the roof will be used for watering the garden. There will also be solar panels on the roof to supply the buildings electricity needs. There was mention too of compost toilets – London's first?

Other future plans include a funding bid to employ a community recycling worker to organize an organic vegetable scheme, with people bring their own bags to cut down on packaging waste. Another idea is to have an electric milk float to collect compost materials and to help with the construction work. So there really is a lot to be proud of and a lot look forward to at the Calthorpe Project.

\* Kitchen Ritual is dedicated to personal and planetary well-being and offers sessions to small groups in plant-based cooking, ritual, and improvisation with artist-cuisiniere Miche Fabre Lewin whose kitchen passion draws on international gourmet, healing and nutritional cuisines of Europe, Africa and Asia.

For more details call Miche on 01865 511058 or 0773 404 9407 or visit

<http://www.civiccentre.org/SPEAKERS/Artists/M.Lewin.html>

[http://www.lgihome.co.uk/v\\_and\\_a3.htm](http://www.lgihome.co.uk/v_and_a3.htm)

You can find out more about minority ethnic women's food growing at Spitalfields City Farm and other projects at [http://www.wen.org.uk/local\\_food/local\\_food.htm](http://www.wen.org.uk/local_food/local_food.htm)

London Parks and Garden's Trust, Open Garden Squares weekend

<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/london.gardens/squares/home.html>

**Cashel - Forest for a Thousand Years  
Glasgow**

**Contact: Ross Galbraith**  
**t: 0141 955 1504, m: 0776 465 5637**  
**e: r.galbraith@btcv.org.uk**

**Or Kenneth 'Monty' Montgomery**  
**t: 0141 956 6816, m: 07885 962614**

Refugees and asylum seekers from the rough estates of Glasgow have been actively engaged in improving the Scottish landscape by planting trees – a universal symbol of hope – on a mountain overlooking Loch Lomond. Cashel Forest is one of many Millennium Forest for Scotland projects, with the ambitious collective aim to restore something of the unique ecology of the Caledonian Forest. It is also the setting for an exciting partnership project, involving BEN, BTCV and the Scottish Refugee Council, which aims to give excluded people a chance to use their skills, as volunteers, to contribute to the conservation and sustainable development of the environment in Scotland, and thereby to aid social integration. We find that this approach benefits not only the volunteers themselves, but also the people in local communities with whom they come into contact.



**Setting the stage for reforestation**

Trees are the lungs of the planet producing vital oxygen to sustain life on earth. Across the globe, forests are home to an astonishing diversity of life-forms. Yet in many countries, industry threatens these essential ecologies. Vast areas of precious forest habitat are destroyed every day.

"Think globally, act locally" we say. There are some very successful campaigns to save our forests world-wide. I am very inspired when I learn about the non-violent direct action of women in India, hugging trees in defiance of loggers come to cut them down; or in Ghana, where women farmers are re-planting trees to prevent soil erosion, all the while singing "if we look after the earth, the earth will look after us".

Here in the UK, it is sometimes harder to know what we can do to contribute to this global effort. In prehistoric times most of the British Isles were covered in virgin forest. Trees For Life, the Scottish-based forest conservation organisation tell us that,

"The Caledonian Forest originally covered 1.5m hectares in the Highlands of Scotland, and it is characterised primarily by Scots pines, although it also contains a variety of broad leaved trees. Scots pine is the most widely distributed conifer in the world, ranging from Scotland to eastern Siberia, and from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean. However, within that, the Caledonian forest is unique, because there are no other conifers growing in it."

Ancient Celtic tribes, the revered ancestors of many contemporary, indigenous Scots, began a process of deforestation four to five thousand years ago, to support their emerging lifestyle as sedentary farmers. Successive waves of incoming ethnic groups which characterise British cultural heritage, have continued to alter the landscape.



"After centuries of exploitation only 1% of the forest survives today, as isolated fragments consisting of old trees nearing the end of their life spans. Gone with the forest are most of Scotland's larger mammal species, such as the beaver, lynx and brown bear, and the ecosystem is now so degraded and out of balance that grazing by excessive numbers of deer and introduced sheep have prevented the growth of any new trees for the last 150 years."

Now, Trees For Life, Cashel Forest and many other projects like them are forming a growing movement which seeks to re-establish the old forests. Again, I am inspired by the contribution of diverse cultures to this shaping of the local environment.

### **One strand in a web of natural regeneration**

Cashel Forest is one of 77 Millennium Forests For Scotland, supported by the Millennium Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage. Each project is a partnership involving government, local authorities, voluntary organisations and community groups.

Netty works as a Forester with Border Consultants who manage forests over a wide area of Northern Europe. She is responsible for a large number of woodlands in Scotland, Cashel being one. Netty met me at Stirling train station and from there we drove for about 45 minutes through beautiful Scottish landscapes to Cashel. It is a similar distance from Glasgow, on a hillside overlooking Loch Lomond and the Scots often leave the cities at weekends to flock to the countryside. But does everyone in Scotland have an equal chance to benefit from contact with nature in this way?

BEN works with disadvantaged ethnic communities who often live in poor housing in run-down inner-city areas. In 1999, BEN Development Worker Elaine Gibb, working with the Refugee Council in Glasgow, recognised that refugees and asylum seekers, fleeing persecution, torture and conflict in their own countries, and subject to UK dispersal policies, often face extreme deprivation being housed on estates where no-one would choose to live.

Together, BEN, BTCV and the Refugee Council created the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Environmental Conservation Programme to address the need of refugees and asylum seekers for opportunities for social integration and the chance to make a meaningful contribution to Scottish natural heritage. They developed a programme of taster activities, which encompassed both urban and rural conservation volunteering opportunities. BEN co-ordinated the project, the Refugee Council recruited the volunteers and BTCV, building on their existing volunteering programme for the mainstream community, provided the on-site supervision.

The first visit to Cashel took place in January, involving workers from the three partner organisations along with a handful of refugees and asylum seekers who really enjoyed a good day out, helping to plant trees donated to BTCV by various sponsors. They were met by conservation volunteer organiser, Kenneth 'Monty' Montgomery, who takes up the story:

"The refugees spend most of their time in the city so this is a rare opportunity for them to get out to see some of Scotland's finest scenery. We are organising monthly projects to give the refugees a mix of practical and educational experiences including tree planting, charcoal making and traditional woodland crafts. By working with local volunteers we hope these activities will be confidence builders and provide the refugees with a doorway to other opportunities to integrate within the community. If the scheme is successful we hope to extend this type of work to include other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, for instance people with learning disabilities."

[www.btcv.org/scotland/clan/clan2000.htm](http://www.btcv.org/scotland/clan/clan2000.htm)

Four years later, on a very cold winter's day, as Netty and I drove towards Cashel, the cloud got thicker and lower until by the time we arrived the hillside was engulfed in heavy rain. Still we were able to pull on our waterproof clothing in the barn and, after a quick look at the farm buildings, we enjoyed a bracing walk on a high level footpath in the young forest. Netty told me more about the background to the site. Cashel belongs to the Royal Scottish Forest Society (RSFS – try saying that quickly!) a group of people interested in debating forestry issues and influencing policy. Although in existence for many years, they had never before owned their own land, so they were delighted when Cashel came on the market.

A stunning location on the bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond, Cashel was a sheep farm for about a century before RSFS bought it. As with so many parts of Scotland, the land had been intensively grazed so no trees could grow there. On a clear day you would see stunning views over Loch Lomond, like the one in this picture by local photographer, Mary Bates.

### **Why, where and how**

The aim of Cashel, and a vision which Netty shares, is “to recreate a near-natural sequence of woodland types, ranging from oak wood near the Loch shore through pine-birch wood on the slopes to open sub-montane scrub on the highest ground.” This will be a viable commercial forest, managed in a sustainable way, combining timber production with environmental conservation and public amenity. Specific objectives include encouraging conservation, amenity and recreation, enhancing the landscape, using the woodland as a demonstration of good forestry practice, creating access for walkers, making the woodland available for education and research and involving the community. The total cost of the project is estimated at £2m of which £800,000 has been funded by Millennium Forest for Scotland.

Cashel is situated in Scotland’s first National Park and there is a visitor centre at nearby village of Balmaha. You can find a map on the website – address below. Local attractions such as Cashel may not advertise their presence by road signs as the Park authorities don’t want to encourage big coaches down here, and there is no public transport, so visiting groups have to come by minibus.

Volunteers come from BTCV and other groups and help with planting trees and other tasks. Whilst Netty acknowledges the importance of raising public consciousness about forest ecology, she is also concerned to ensure that trees are planted well and other tasks performed effectively – it is quite skilled work, and she does not have much time for supervising volunteers. That is where Monty comes in. He recalls how the second party of refugees and asylum seekers he greeted included 8 or 9 people. Soon, monthly outings were established and as news of them spread by word of mouth, numbers of participating volunteers increased from a minibus load to 40 people – surplus volunteers had to be sent by train to the nearest station where the minibus ferried them the last bit of the way.

Netty pointed out a slate standing stone with a beautiful inscription, and a memorial stone bearing a poem about the uses and beauty of trees. Usually when a donor pays for the cost of a tree for Cashel, they are given a certificate saying where their tree is planted, and perhaps including a dedication to a loved one or some such. These volunteers however were given free certificates in exchange for their commitment to return and look after their trees or help develop the Cashel Forest in other ways. According to informal feedback, Monty told me that while some people came on return visits to plant further trees or to look after those they had originally planted, others preferred not to keep coming back, but to allow new refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to benefit from the excursions.

So all in all, the project has seen quite a high throughput of volunteers. Participants have included refugees and asylum seekers from Colombia, Sudan, Albania, Kosovo, Asia and the Middle East. Many dedicated their tree to people or places they had lost or had to leave behind, but many more made forward-looking dedications to their new found country or the global environment. Monty pointed out that the symbolism of tree planting is universal and transcends language barriers.

### **The Environment and Ecology at Cashel**

The site at Cashel has been designed to allow relatively easy access for leisure visits, but also for volunteers to monitor the progress of the trees that have been planted, and the wildlife as it returns to the area. There is a track suitable for a 4x4 vehicle and footpaths, although I would not say the site was wheelchair accessible, except perhaps for the more athletic wheelchair user.

It is a fairly steeply sloping hillside, with some level areas and some crags and mounds, with areas of acid bog. It is a very wet site, criss-crossed with streams, and the tracks and foot-paths have to be carefully constructed to avoid erosion by flowing water.

These wet conditions are likely to affect the developing ecology, and Netty is particularly interested to study the relationships between landscape, plant and animal life where such water systems are present.

There are already signs of regeneration of grassland among the trees, and at the fringes of the forest, the birches, and at the higher levels rowan trees are spreading by natural seeding. The idea of trying to re-establish near-natural forest is a new one, and there is little information about what to expect, so it has an experimental feel to it.

The part of the forest where we walked in January was mainly planted up with Scots pine. The trees were about three years old and beginning to establish themselves, although they had been struck by a fungal disease which can make them drop their needles. The fungus is airborne, and spreads easily among new plantings of this type. This is a forester's nightmare – of course because they care deeply for the wellbeing of the trees, but also because the funding for these plantings will only be delivered for 'successful' trees ie those which are still growing after 10 years. This is one reason why the monitoring and care of the site is so important.



## Issues in Forestry

A Scottish woman, trained in USA, Netty explained to me how forestry methods here differ from other countries. UK is unique in a number of ways – the type of trees grown, the methods used to cultivate them, and the culture of the people and organisations who are stakeholders in forest management.

Most commercial forests are – trees, which grow here like weeds, given the right conditions. Whereas in other countries, the ground is prepared by ploughing in rows, here a method is employed, making mounds of soil to support the sapling and inhibit growth of competing plants. This does have a drawback for humans, making it hard going underfoot. You really need stout boots to support your ankles if you go ‘off-road’ into the forest.

(Incidentally, for anyone considering a career in forestry, Netty told me that her career development was influenced to an extent by sexism, and she noted that contrary to her expectations, racism was as much a problem in certain parts of America as it is over here.)

## Bird life in the forest

A special plot was selected for this project, which participants named the Eagle plot, since the eagle is a bird with an important niche in the forest ecology of Scotland, but who is recognised by people in most countries of the world. There were 200 trees planted there at the last count, and the group had to begin planting other areas once that plot was filled.

Netty also pointed out to me, near the shore of the Loch, places where chestnut palings had been attached to tops of the high wire fencing. The fences protect the trees from being eaten by deer – a major challenge for those trying to re-establish woodland in Scotland. But the chestnut paling is added to make it more visible to low flying birds, including the endangered Capercaillie, a uniquely beautiful Scottish turkey which lives, in small numbers, in safety on the tiny islands in the Loch. I did not see any Capercaillie but I did see three grouse take off from a clump of juniper.

## Engaging in activities

As well as tree planting, volunteers have tried their hand at a range of activities, including falconry, to which Netty confessed her ambivalence, but also woodland and traditional Scottish farming skills. Each year Cashel holds an open day, and one year, a group of refugees helped to repair the shieling (a kind of summer house used by shepherds) and to prepare ‘lazy beds’ (an old fashioned method for growing wheat for whisky). A Somali man recognised the hack (a traditional Scottish tool like a fork but with the tines at right angles to the haft, for loosening soil) as being very similar to farming implements used in his country.

Monty told me that it had been a real eye-opener for him to work with this project. He benefited from the training and support of the Refugee Council, and was surprised to realise how diverse people can be. He spoke proudly of the positive feedback this project has received, with people expressing genuine appreciation for being treated **as people** for the day, rather than being labelled and interrogated about their origins, which is part of their daily experience. Monty also said he was heartened to see how pro-actively welcoming and helpful the local community could be, coming forward to get involved in skills sharing. This shows that it is not only the migrant communities who benefit from projects of this kind, but also local people who gain from contact with new people, bringing knowledge and skills into the area from the wider world.

One of the aims of this project was to create an avenue in to conservation volunteering for otherwise excluded groups. As such, the take-up has been relatively small, with only a handful of people going on to further volunteering. But one story which delighted me told of a man who, having gained refugee status, immediately got a job, bought himself a cheap motor car and, inspired by the beauty of Cashel, set off to explore the Scottish countryside, hunting for castles and the like.

## Future Plans and opportunities

The farm buildings, which I mentioned earlier, are in the traditional style, arranged around a courtyard. Low stables and stalls for lambing and sheering, no doubt, sport wonderfully rustic sagging slate roofs, but are in desperate need of repair to prevent the buildings from falling into dereliction. The RSFS want to restore the farm buildings, maybe for use as an educational resource.

Meanwhile, as BTCVs Environments for All project continues to widen access to Cashel Forest and a range of other urban and rural conservation opportunities throughout the UK, many different ethnic communities in Glasgow are joining in the movement to enjoy and improve this special green space. In April 2002 a group celebrated the Iranian New Year here. There have been visits by a Chinese youth group, an African-Caribbean women's group and a Bangladeshi community group. Some days people pitch in with the work and at other times they may prefer to take a relaxed ramble to the loch and share their picnic lunch together on the shore. That's the beauty of Cashel – people from every community can feel part of it in their own way.

***Other useful contacts:***

[www.cashel.org](http://www.cashel.org)

[www.bordercons.demon.co.uk/cashel](http://www.bordercons.demon.co.uk/cashel)

[netty@bordercons.demon.co.uk](mailto:netty@bordercons.demon.co.uk) 01786 480190

[www.millenniumforest.com](http://www.millenniumforest.com) 0141 229 2001

[www.treesforlife.org.uk](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk)

*Trees for Life, The Park, Findhorn Bay, Forres, Scotland, IV36 3TZ*

forest regeneration project who produce a beautiful and informative calendar.

Mary Bates, photographer 01360 440203

Scottish Refugee Council

5 Cadogan Square

Glasgow

G2 7PH

0141 248 9799

## **Chelsea Physic Garden London**

**Contact: Education Dept**  
**t: 020 7352 5646 ext 4**  
**e: [cpged@cpgarden.demon.co.uk](mailto:cpged@cpgarden.demon.co.uk)**

Chelsea Physic Garden is a special green space, a wonderful place to walk and rest in, with healing plants laid out beautifully and, according to the time of year, many different kinds of mesmerising scent. Above all it enables ethnic groups to see for themselves the many plants from their countries of origin which have contributed to the healing arts for centuries.

On the day I visited, I learned various snippets of interesting knowledge. For instance, did you know that Zulus mainly take their medicine in the form of snuff, including a preparation made by grinding the roots and stems of lobelia (the small purple-blue edging plant so common in the borders of British gardens) as a remedy for colds?

The Chelsea Physic Garden goes beyond having a unique collection of plants - among which are plants from almost any country you can name! Their educational services will assist people to find out how to grow them, sometimes giving you or selling you plants, and if appropriate, will assist a community group, for example, to identify a space to grow herbs and other medicinal plants, perhaps as part of a community garden or play area.

### **Chelsea Physic Garden today**

Chelsea Physic Garden was founded in 1673 by the Society of Apothecaries. It is one of Europe's oldest botanical gardens. 'Physic' is the old fashioned name for the healing arts, and apothecaries were the ancient masters of those arts in Europe, in times gone by. The cures they offered were mostly plant-based remedies. This wonderful garden was established to teach students of medicine about the healing properties of plants.

Today Chelsea Physic Garden is a registered charity, open to the public, showing countless examples of medicinal plants gathered from all over the world. Carefully planned and labelled beds illustrate the history of how our knowledge of plant cures has been shared among the many peoples from all corners of the globe.

### **Archives of ancestral wisdom**

Cultural Botany is one of the special subjects staff at Chelsea Physic Gardens can help bring to life. Exploring the links between people and plants can be fascinating. The Physic Garden is more than just a museum of plants. Dawn Sanders describes people from the ethnic community groups she work with, rather poetically as 'walking archives of ancestral wisdom'.

Previous projects have helped to capture this wisdom. The Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre project aimed to record and present older Moroccan women's botanical knowledge, in order to raise their self-esteem and strengthen bonds with young women in the community. Dawn explains:

"We feel that traditional knowledge amongst urban cultural communities needs to be recorded and presented, in order to rebuild personal self-esteem and communal social fabrics, severely compromised by radical geographical and cultural changes in people's lives. The preservation of this knowledge we hope will encourage the reinforcement of previous connections with plants and the wider landscape, and change perceptions of the botanic garden to a place where many tongues are spoken.

In naming the plants (in poster, exhibition and CD ROM format) we have used four labels: Arabic, Berber, Common English and scientific (Latin). As the project's main role is to encourage access and the sharing of knowledge, the use of appropriate languages is important in the work that we produce, to enable participation and empowerment as much as possible. "

The Development Education Journal,  
Volume 5% Number 2 February 1999 p21-22

Since the success of this project, the women are now hoping to obtain a grant, through North Kensington Arts, for planting in the famous Meanwhile Gardens.

Aylesbury Turkish Women' Project: Partnership work with Chumleigh Gardens and Chelsea Physic Garden a report by Aziza Khamlichi Walworth Triangle Forum, Southwark.

The project was run in partnership with Chumleigh Gardens and Chelsea Physic Garden.

I organised several meetings with the project co-ordinator, worker and users, which culminated in an assessment of their needs. I also organised workshops to explain about the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), New Deal for Communities (NDC) and encouraged them to participate and become involved. I worked closely with Groundwork Southwark to create and launch the Mediterranean Garden.

The garden helped the women:

- To improve the environment and provide a relaxing space which will encourage more women on the estate to use the centre.
- To enable the women to become involved in a community project, which allows them to demonstrate they are willing and able to solve certain problems and fulfil certain local needs for themselves.
- Building self esteem and new skills for the users, for example gardening and networking with the Moroccan Cultural Botany Project at Al-Hasaniya and The Chelsea Physic Garden
- To visit each other's projects and exchange their expertise on the medicinal purposes and using herbs in cooking Mediterranean dishes.
- To support the elderly women share their knowledge of plants to the younger generation
- To enable the women to grow exotic plants and vegetables Chelsea Physic Garden donated a mini greenhouse and continues to offer advice and work on a joint project

Amongst other activities Walworth Triangle Forum organised:

- A picnic at The Chelsea Physic Garden
- A visit to Chumleigh Garden, which also support the Turkish women's' garden

### **Ideal growing conditions**

The climate is milder in Britain's cities than in the countryside, and particularly sheltered spots like this walled garden, near the river, will support tender plants not usually seen in this country in the wild. The greenhouses at Chelsea contain still more delicate specimens. There are ferns; tropical plants like bananas, papayas, ginger and sugar cane; cacti; and even carnivorous (insect eating) plants!

Ethnic community groups can visit as members of the public during the summer - check website for opening times. For a small fee you can become a Friend of the garden. Friends may visit free of charge at any time, and will receive a Spring and Autumn newsletter, detailing events. The gardens are open on Sunday 2nd and Sunday 9th February 2003 for viewing the Snowdrops, then from April to October on certain days.

You can also talk to Dawn about doing a project together. There is a classroom with art and science equipment. Facilities are available to primary and secondary school and child-minder groups. Visits can be tailored around a wide range of topics, to meet your group's needs. In-service training sessions can also be arranged.

Dawn Sanders has also been conducting outreach work. The Pockets of Paradise project, in partnership with Toynbee Housing Association, aims to cultivate methods of encouraging resident participation in the design of landscapes near their homes. By listening to people's stories about cultural relationships with plants and animals, the project will not only support creation of 'wildlife corridors' in the urban setting, but will also help to strengthen people's links to nature and to one another. This project is mentioned in the new England Biodiversity Plan.

If you want to know more about the social basis of this work, Dawn Sanders will give an academic presentation at the Centre for Environmental Education, Bath University on 12th December. See Newsflash for details.

### **Resources**

You can read more about the multicultural background and contemporary practice of growing and using medicinal plants generally, in a beautifully written and illustrated book called The Healing Garden: Natural Haven



for Physical and Emotional Wellbeing, by Sue Minter, curator of the Chelsea Physic Garden, published by Headline Books, London 1993.

You can find more information about Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre at <http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/a-z/a-z.asp?OrgId=39>

**Chinese Hillside, Royal Botanic Gardens  
Edinburgh**

**Contact: David Paterson**

**t: 0131 552 7171**

**e: [d.paterson@rbge.org.uk](mailto:d.paterson@rbge.org.uk)**

Botanic gardens are green spaces for everyone's pleasure, but they have special meaning for ethnic communities because they hold examples of plants from all over the world with which they have cultural associations. It is a place to see "old friends" (plants) from one's country of origin, or for those who are born here to make some discoveries.



Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Gardens has the largest collection of Chinese plants in the world outside China. It is therefore a special resource for interested groups from the Chinese community. But, plants do not have "nationalities". Many of these plants will be familiar to people from the same geographical region. There are many Chinese plants throughout this botanic garden, but here we are highlighting a special project - the Chinese Hillside.

A brave experiment is underway at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. A Living Collection of plants from Yulong Xue Shan, the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains in South Western China, is growing on a 'Chinese Hillside'. Because the plants are allowed to grow together in a natural way, you can experience what it must be like to wander on a wild mountainside in China, and see how these plants interact in the wild to create ecological zones at different altitudes. Everyone is welcome to explore, and Scotland's Chinese communities may enjoy recognising some well-known medicinal plants, or identifying familiar trees and shrubs remembered from back home. And with a new grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, there will soon be opportunities to volunteer on an environmental interpretation project, to improve public information about the gardens.

**Scotland and China linked through history**

The original purpose of establishing the Royal Botanic Gardens of Scotland, in 1670, was for the cultivation and study of medicinal plants (just like Chelsea Physic Garden – see relevant Green Space article). Intrepid European plant hunters like George Forrest collected thousands of plants from all around the world.

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) has strong links with as many as twenty countries going back over a great many years. By far the strongest relationship is with China. RBGE is twinned with Kunming Institute of Botany in Yunnan Province, South Western China. Links between China and the Botanic Garden date back to 1904, and there are plans to celebrate a century of co-operation in 2004.

Throughout the gardens you can see a wide variety of plants from China, many of which are now familiar in British gardens, such as rhododendrons, cotoneaster and berberis. RBGE has more Chinese plants than any other collection outside of China! Up to 40,000 species are kept in four botanic gardens across southern Scotland, where the climate is broadly similar to parts of China. Some plants grow better in Argyle where it's wetter, Logan in South West Scotland where the gulf stream provides a more temperate climate, or within the shelter of a wooded hillside at Dawyck. The Inverleith site in Edinburgh is less ideal for growing plants, in terms of the underlying geology and soil type; but it has been improved by years of cultivation, and is well situated for city dwellers to visit.



### **Welcome to the Chinese Hillside**

One really exciting reason to visit RBGE is the Chinese Hillside. A single hectare, overlooking splendid Edinburgh scenery, this is not a garden in the formal sense. It is more like a mini ecosystem. Around 16,000 different plants have been collected from Yulong Xue Shan, the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains in Yunnan province of South Western China, near the border with Tibet, and here they are allowed to drift, with minimal intervention, creating an environment very like their original habitat. On the day I visited, I was greeted by David Paterson, Deputy Director of Horticulture, in Chinese. David has been collecting plants in Yunnan province for 15 years, and his passion for botany has inspired him to learn the language. This has helped him to engage better with local people on his visits. It also means that whenever he meets Chinese people in Edinburgh, he is able to welcome them to the Botanic Gardens and talk with them about the Chinese Hillside.

### **Plant Diversity in context**

I am told that there are 800 species of 'native' plants in Scotland ie plants thought to have reached Britain unaided since the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago. (With 220 staff at RBGE, that would be 4 plants each to conserve!) In China there are about 32-34,000 species of plants, representing about 12% of the world's plant biodiversity.

Since 1959 hundreds of Chinese botanists have been working to record this richness in a vast book called *Flora Reipublicae Popularis Sinicae* which should be published within the next 5 years. And since the 1980s a Sino-American project has been working to create an English language version.

Lijiang Botanic Garden and Field Station opened 25th Sept 2002 in the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains of Yunnan Province, near the Tibetan border. Ian Edwards of RBGE visited for the opening. He described the beautiful, traditional style building, which serves as base camp for expeditions into the mountains.

The mountains comprise four ecological bands, in ascending order:

- Deciduous (oak) with dense herbaceous undergrowth
- Coniferous (pine) with diverse trees including rare metasequoia
- Shrub (rhododendron, cotoneaster, berberis etc)

- Sub-alpine (meadow) including rare snow lotus etc

David Paterson described climbing the hillside and seeing the flowering rhododendrons coming into view “like a white brush stroke across the hillside”.

### **Cultural Diversity, Conservation and Sustainability**

Western science has for a long time been interested in obtaining plant knowledge for its own sake, and hence the need to protect species threatened in wild. The focus of RBGE's interests over the years has been on what David Paterson would call the 3 Cs: classification; cultivation; and conservation. Since the relative decline of medical herbalism in the west, there has been less research into the practical uses of plants.

But in the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains people know of many medicinal uses for wild plants and for centuries they have nurtured the rich flora as a sustainable source of timber, human and animal food, medicine, as well as spiritual and artistic inspiration. However, development in the region threatens to undermine these age-old traditions. That is why the emphasis of modern field research is on sustainability through collaboration between Scottish and Chinese botanists working together with ordinary people on the ground.

Declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO, this ethnically diverse province is populated mainly by Naxi (pronounced Nashee) and Yi peoples, each with their own distinctive local culture, language and customs. Local people in rural Yunnan have no electricity or piped water, yet they participate in conservation work by sharing knowledge of plant identification and usage.

For example, Martyn Dickson, Senior Horticulturist at RBGE, described being taught a great many unusual local recipes, including one for bracken shoots, ordinarily considered poisonous, but apparently edible if carefully boiled and strained a number of times. It makes sense when you think that bracken is, after all, the most common plant in the world.

As we explored the Chinese Hillside in Edinburgh, I could really imagine I was in the Jade Dragon Snow Mountains. I wandered among wild-looking Chinese brambles by the lakeside, past swathes of schisandra, which I know as a tasty herbal tonic, and noticed many plants I had never seen before.

David Paterson is clearly passionate about studying and conserving the rich diversity of plant life in Yunnan, both for its own sake and for the uses it can offer to humans. He told me, “People rely on the mountain for everything.” And we have so much to learn from them.

Chinese medicine, for instance, has a 2500 year history. But as habitats give way to industrialisation, so rare plants become endangered. David explained that while it's OK for local people to take part of a plant home to Granny if she's not feeling well, international trade in herbs which means threatened species turning up in Chinese apothecaries in Europe, is just not sustainable.

There were existing laws in place preventing people from cutting down trees for timber. David was able to convince each household to sign with a thumb print to agree not to take any plants from the hillside. Instead, plants are preserved in a Living Collection at Lijiang botanical gardens, where the growing conditions are ideal. Samples are also removed to Edinburgh to be studied, recorded and conserved.

## **Collecting, identifying and cultivating plants**

The same system of classification is used in China as in Europe, but using the Chinese names for plants, rather than Latin. Plants gathered by the Lijiang project will be labeled in English, Mandarin, Latin and Naxie or Yi languages.

Naxi common names, which are shown in pictograms rather than characters, might typically describe the plant family, something about its appearance and also its uses.

David evoked the rich ecology of Yunnan Province vividly when he described taking a compass bearing on a tree then hacking his way through dense undergrowth, including vicious barbed brambles, to reach the tree and collect some seed.

In the past, when plant collectors returned from abroad with specimens of plant material or seeds, horticulturists like Martyn would have to go on hearsay about the best growing conditions. Now, Martyn is able to visit and observe plants in their original habitat, he can far more easily reproduce those conditions in Scotland. That is what the Chinese Hillside is about - reflecting the spectacular beauty of the region.

Martyn Dickson, said that in a way it's a bit like a zoo: species of plants threatened with extinction in their natural habitat can be reintroduced into the wild. In 1996, RBGE returned 200 species of rhododendron China, to form the nucleus of conservation collections.

He pointed out some of the plants, and how they are adapting as ecological relationships are established on the Chinese Hillside. One plant I recognised, known commonly in English as elephants' ear, is currently purple to protect itself from the light, but once the hillside ecology is better established and a tree canopy has grown up to shade it, the plant will revert to its normal colour, green.

Another purpose to the Hillside is for exchange training programmes. RBGE plays host to many Chinese students of botany, as well official visitors including the Vice President, no less.

RBGE have made some efforts to connect with the Chinese communities living in Scotland, and there is much scope to develop these relationships. Ian Edwards told me about his walk with a group of Chinese elders on the Hillside, and the pleasure he experienced seeing people recognise plants they knew from back home many years ago, and hearing stories about their uses and their meaning in people's lives. There have also been projects in the past involving school Chinese children.

Ian mentioned some of the barriers to engaging with the Chinese communities: there is not one but many distinct cultural groups, from Tai Wan, Hong Kong and Vietnam, who may speak Cantonese or Mandarin, and with no direct link to the specific region of South Western China where this plant collection originates.

However, it is hoped that there will be opportunities to make connections through a new heritage interpretation project. Two new posts have been created, with the aim of bringing understanding about the meaning of plants in the Living Collection closer to the public. Perhaps Chinese people living in Scotland will be interested to come and share their insights, to bring the Chinese Hillside alive for the benefit of their own communities and the wider population? For more information, check their website on:

[www.rbge.org.uk/rbge/web/news/jsp?item=24&year=2003](http://www.rbge.org.uk/rbge/web/news/jsp?item=24&year=2003)

Information sheets are available in Chinese and English, covering Scotland's national botanic garden, the flora of China, the Chinese Hillside, and rhododendron conservation.

You can read more about the Lijiang research station in China Review Autumn/Winter 2001



## **Chumleigh Multicultural Gardens London**

**Contact: Stella Hillier, Gardens Officer  
t: 020 7525 1078**

Chumleigh Multicultural Gardens are like an oasis in the green desert of South London's Burgess Park. The Oriental, Mediterranean, African and Caribbean, Islamic and English gardens each contain a wealth of plants and design elements reminiscent of the regions and cultures they represent. But their real relevance is revealed through projects and events which encourage communities to participate in interpreting plantings from their own cultural perspectives. The gardens are open to the public during daylight hours.



### **History and context**

In Chumleigh Garden's café I spotted, mounted on the wall, a line from a poem by Maya Angelou which reads "The need for change bulldozed a road through the centre of my mind." This powerful image describes very well the impression Burgess Park makes.

Amidst an area of high density housing, an urban open space has been created by a gradual programme, over several decades, of slum clearance, clearing war time bomb damage and reclaiming land where disused canals once ran. In 1973 Southwark Council named the park after Councilor Jessie Burgess, Camberwell's first woman Mayor. The original idea was to give 'lungs' to the city, although my initial feeling was more of a green desert, redeemed to an extent by quite recent plantings of avenues of hopeful saplings.

In the middle of this 54 hectare expanse of otherwise forlorn grass stands a group of Victorian buildings - Chumleigh Almshouses - formerly home to the Friendly Female Asylum for elderly and frail ladies, and since 1978 Southwark's Park Management depot.

In 1993, an article in *Landscape Design* pointed out that "the site is in need of an overall identity and sense of purpose". In an effort to restore the earlier vision, BEN had input into consultations with local communities, who expressed interest in the idea for a multicultural garden as a central focus for the park.

A feasibility study was conducted by European Community Heritage Campus Project students, with the support of Reading University. For more information, see the article in *Landscape Research* journal (vol 26 No4 pages 351-556) called 'Ethnic Minority Groups and the Design of Public Open Space: an inclusive landscape?' by BEN network member Clare Risbeth.

In 1996 a new post was created within the Park Ranger Service in the Environment and Leisure Department of Southwark Council. The role of rangers, rather than wardens, forms a vital link between the gardens and the communities they serve.

Chris Wildhaber is the Ranger. She sees her New Zealand heritage and awareness of Maori culture as the inspiration for her study of 'ethnobotany' which underpins her work in one of the most ethnically diverse London Boroughs. She told me that "Many urban parks feature plants from around the world. What makes Chumleigh unique is its involvement with local communities."

As well as creating and managing the multicultural gardens, Chris is responsible for supporting a number of horticultural projects with community groups, involving mainly elders from the Asian, Irish, Afro-Caribbean and Vietnamese/Chinese communities. Tucked away behind the public access areas of the garden, groups of 'Heart Gardeners', referred by their GPs, use raised beds and polytunnels for growing organic food, herbs

and medicinal plants. This summer the Growing for Healthy Living groups celebrated with an open day which they called World Village Festival.



### **Chumleigh Gardens in 2002**

The approach to the gardens is not as encouraging as it might be, since you have to walk past the car park and vehicle depot - but do note the attractive exhibition, created by Art in the Park, explaining how the council's fleet of electric cars contribute to environmental conservation. Look to your left and you will see a sign written in many community languages welcoming you to Chumleigh. Passing through the courtyard between the Alms Houses, past the café, you come to a gateway opening into a walled garden.

The first area you encounter is the Oriental Garden. Here a calm, still pond and rock garden contrasts with swaying bamboo-like foliage, and you can see tea bushes from the mountains of India.

In the African and Caribbean garden big leaved plants with a tropical feel can be found, as well as cacti and succulents from drier regions.

The Islamic garden is more geometric. You can see pictured here the wonderful mosaic, lily pond and jelly palm which forms the centre piece of this enclosed fragment of paradise. The local branch of MIND found this to be an ideal setting to stage a confidence building event for people with mental health problems. The Asian Elders' group are shown here meeting beneath a palm tree.

Mediterranean gardens need to create shade and conserve water, so here we find vines climbing pergolas, and herb beds of grey leafed, drought resistant plants. I was there on a bright but chilly Autumn day and some of the more tender plants were lovingly wrapped in fleece to protect them from the northern climate.

### **Community Activities**

The gardens were very quiet the day I was there. But they will come to life on Sunday 17th November when people of all ages are invited to learn how to make their own bird feeder to help the birds survive the winter. And December sees a return of the popular, seasonal workshop making a wreath or table decoration for Christmas.

Previous workshops have focused on seasonal themes like Spring houseplant arrangements, willow weaving, making hanging baskets and window boxes; in Summer making painted pots and leaf sculptures; and an Autumn seed collecting walk in the park. These activities prove very useful to local people who often have only small gardens or balconies, but are none the less keen gardeners –especially when it comes to growing plants which link them to their roots, long ago and far away.

- Black History Month - previous events involving local communities have included
- Storytelling about plants from the Caribbean
- Plants, people and health
- Botanic drawing classes with Anita - Moghul miniatures, and banners on themes from Asia and India, with school children
- Sugar and Spice - history of tea, coffee and sugar cultivation



### **The Future of Chumleigh Gardens**

A development plan exists for Burgess Park. Ideas for the future include perimeter boundaries, safety features and increased staffing, but these depend on financial constraints. Chumleigh itself is also constrained by limited money, and the Ranger service is kept extremely active. Still, Chris has various projects in the pipeline.

Volunteers are welcome to input ideas about making the approach to Chumleigh Multicultural Gardens more accessible.

Although the gardens are very beautiful just to look at, Chris told me that she tries to get beyond the visual aesthetic of plants, to get at the meanings they hold for people. Hence the idea of inviting ethnic communities to contribute to a series of temporary labelled trails. Chris would welcome support with fundraising to make this project happen.

A video or CD Rom will shortly be produced, of old fashioned varieties of food, herb and medicinal plant growing - in different languages - available in 2003. BEN supported an application for funding for this project from the SEED programme (lottery partners) via RSNC (Royal Society for Nature Conservation).

### **Conclusion**

Chumleigh Multicultural Gardens visitor's book is full of positive remarks from many different people, who come from far and wide to enjoy this little known beauty spot in South London. Comments in English, Welsh, French, Portuguese - and children's drawings - can be seen among the autographs of celebrities and dignitaries. But the entry which most moved me spoke of "great memories of my own environment in another time, another place". This captures beautifully the ethos of the garden, which Park Ranger Chris Wildhaber has worked so hard to cultivate.

**The Clovelly Centre Garden,  
Southampton**

**Contact: Plincke Landscape Ltd. (London & South-East)**  
**t: 020 7631 5324**



**Understanding the multi-cultural use of space**

The common perception of Hampshire is one of a prosperous county, with a largely middle-class, white population. This ignores the evidence that it has within its urban centres such as Southampton; considerable number of people living in economically and socially deprived communities. This also includes those from different ethnic backgrounds. In 1997 the Southampton Environment Centre established The Shannon project, as a way of bringing the message of sustainable development and social justice to individuals at a community level. Small scale, grassroots projects help to promote environmental awareness, encouraging local communities to enhance and take pride in their outdoor surroundings, thus improving the quality of their lives. The success of these small projects lies in the ease with which local people can manage them, thereby realising a sense of ownership, without the bureaucratic intervention often unavoidable with larger schemes.

One such project was achieved at The Clovelly Centre, a focal point for local Asian people close to the centre of Southampton. The city's historic Central parks are nearby, but they are not much frequented by members of the Asian community, the cultural ethos, for women in particular, being that they prefer to remain close to the intimacy of their homes, rather than negotiate busy roads and subways to visit the parks. The Clovelly Centre is situated in a high-density area of Victorian terraced houses many of which are visibly in need of repair and restoration. The Centre's location, created from a bomb-site, which opened up a gap in the dense grid of housing, was an uninspiring one: mown grass and concrete so often the only landscape to be found in urban areas.

Help with the creation of a garden was sought from Hampshire Gardens Trust, a voluntary organisation and educational charity, which look for opportunities to create new community gardens in urban areas. In consultation with local people, the Trust produced a design for the garden that grew out of cultural references; in particular inspiration was drawn from the flowing and colourful saris of traditional Asian dress, which so brightly contrasts with the Victorian houses. This colour and movement was translated into brightly planted borders for the south-facing street front of the Centre. At the rear, features include a seating and barbecue area, with a play space for toddlers, and a woven willow tunnel to encourage exploration and contact with wildlife. A pergola provides shade from the sun and a mosaic is proposed when funds permit. Workers from the `probation Service carried out much of the garden construction, such as paving and raised beds.

A second phase of the garden is under construction that will connect the space to an adjacent area managed by Age Concern. The enlarged space will engage all ages of the community. Again the design has been based upon cultural references. These include a screen fence of woven copper strips which represent the creation of the sacred River Ganges. Of equal importance is the subtle delineation of separate 'rooms' within the gardens. This has been achieved through the use of pergolas and built structures as well as planting. This enables a subtle segregation of the sexes: still an important consideration among Asian groups especially those dealing with the elderly.

The completed garden will act as an important local focus for events and activities. Such a venue enables for cultural expression that helps to build a strong sense of community through collective experiences.

Hampshire Gardens Trust was able to arrange for members of The Clovelly Centre to visit the Hillier Gardens and Arboretum, less than half an hour away. Their guide took them on an exciting tour of plants from the Asian continent, inspiring new ideas about plants to use in the garden. It is also hoped that the trip also raised a curiosity to explore the region beyond the city centre.

The Hampshire Gardens Trust and the Single Regeneration Programme have funded the project. The landscape designer was Plincke Landscape Ltd., Winchester. In spite of its context within a deprived, urban area, the scheme has suffered little from vandalism.



## **Concrete to Coriander Project Small Heath Park, Birmingham**

**Contact: Irene Iwegbu**  
**t: 0121 328 3400**

The Small Heath Park Community Garden in Birmingham is part of the Concrete and Coriander project. As you enter the front gates of the Park you will find the entrance to the garden on your right. The women meet on Monday at 10am whatever the weather.

This is not a beautifully planted garden, but a well worked and loved piece of land. It is more of an allotment which the 25 members plant for their pleasure and their own consumption. The aim of the project is to enable members of the Bangladesh community to engage with the environment. If you look closer into the project you will discover the far reaching benefits not only to the women but also to the community. The project touches and changes the everyday life's of these women.



### **About the Garden**

The Community garden is headed by the enthusiastic project worker Irene Iwegbe who works for CSV Environment. The women's group was established before they actually acquired the land. Before they had the garden, the women were so eager to do something that they would meet weekly and use plant pots to garden, when they did get the garden, putting them wherever they could. To begin with it was not a garden but an empty space within Small Heath Park which in the past had been used for a range of things over the years. With the help of Peter Short, the Head of Parks in East Birmingham the garden was developed. The garden was also expanded at the end of 2002. Irene said that Peter was of tremendous help and support throughout the project and continues to be.

The women plant vegetables and herbs on raised beds for their families' kitchen table. The women are very supportive of each other. Most of the ladies are from Bangladesh, and if members of the group are away for long periods of time, the remaining members look after their patch until their return.

The group has also got an allotment in the Yardley Leisure Centre, their main crop being garlic, potatoes and Coriander. Irene also supports two other gardens in local primary schools.

### **Aims of Small Heath Park Community Garden**

CSV Environment is part of the national charity Community Service Volunteers. They specialise in working with members of the community who have little or no environmental experience. CSV tackle social exclusion and encourage active citizenship by providing opportunities for people of all ages and background to volunteer.

The Concrete and Coriander project works with residents, especially with Asian women from inner city Birmingham to bring derelict and unused gardens back into productive or recreational use. The project is there to support local people with tools, materials and practical advice. In the case of many Asian women, who come from a rural background, it is the emotional support rather than the gardening knowledge that is needed.

The underlying hope is that in the future their skills and knowledge will filter down to other members of the community, giving these gardening projects ownership by the local community with the ability to enable participation independently, without the aid of charities like CSV Environment.

The group's aims have expanded in the directions of Health and Education. The NHS Primary Care Trust have taken an interest in the project with regard to healthy eating and cooking. The women's group goes walking and once a year they attend a garden show and organise events together around cooking traditional dishes.



### **Future Plans**

The project is funded by a range of organisations the Community Fund, Shell Better Britain and Britain in Bloom. The project is looking for funding as they are coming to the end of their current support in November 2002.

Sustainability is very important for this group as CSV will not always be able to support them and Irene is constantly working towards nurturing a range of skill so that in the future, the women may manage the garden for themselves

## **Confused Spaces**

### **Balsall Heath, Birmingham**

**Contact :Tayear Mahmood**  
**t: 0121 446 6183**  
**e: tayear1@yahoo.com**

Balsall Heath, 2 miles South of Birmingham City Centre, has become home to a succession of immigrant communities including Irish, Pakistani and the African-Caribbean community. At one time Balsall Heath had a bad reputation but efforts at community regeneration have gone a long way to turning around the fortunes of the area. Local people are pulling together to tackle crime, promote health, address women's issues and to improve the environment – all of which are seen holistically, as inter-linking concerns.

Confused Spaces are little pockets of council land that nobody seems to care for. In the past, disillusioned residents have used them as a dumping ground for waste. Balsall Heath Forum Environment Team have convinced the City Council, who own many but not all of the spaces, to let them use and improve these small corners, to clear up the rubbish and replace it with cheerful flowers and trees. They are trying to find ways of involving local people in taking an interest in these spaces, taking care of them and making them more pleasant and attractive for everyone. Open air activities such as cultural celebrations, arts and sports events have enticed people to come and see what is happening, and already communities are showing their willingness to support campaigns to protect and enhance their green spaces.

The Environment Team includes paid workers, trainees and volunteers recruited from within Balsall Heath, so they reflect the ethnic profile of the community. At first people viewed their work as low status, with few prospects; but as its impact becomes increasingly visible, the team are optimistic that career routes will open up and they will be recognised as role models, pioneering new areas of education and employment for ethnic communities within the environment sector.



*Balsall Heath Forum Premises*

It was a sunny Spring morning when I arrived at the Balsall Heath Forum premises – an interesting timber framed building set in the grounds of the old tree nursery on St Paul's Road. The first thing that greeted me as I entered the building was a sign on the wall reminding us that 10 years ago in Balsall Heath,

- people were likely to die 9 years earlier than in the rest of Birmingham
- unemployment was 3 times higher than the Birmingham average
- chronic heart disease was twice as high
- level of overcrowding in housing was four times higher
- you were more likely to be a victim of crime – street crime has risen significantly
- educational achievement was lower in Balsall Heath than other parts of Birmingham

In total contrast, on the opposite wall I saw a newspaper cutting showing Prince Charles paying a visit to Balsall Heath, in his capacity as Patron of Business in the Community, in the year 2000. The Prince has taken a personal interest in the area, which he sees as a role model for neighbourhood renewal. The Dutch are also learning lessons from this model. Balsall Heath Forum has hosted a visit from Dutch regeneration experts, and they sent delegates to Holland last year to give a presentation about their achievements. A return trip is planned for April 2003.

### **Setting the Scene**

Balsall Heath is an area of Birmingham which falls mostly in Sparkbrook ward, and also takes in parts of the three wards of Moseley, Sparkbrook and Edgbaston. Balsall Heath Forum recognizes this area as a 'natural neighbourhood' as identified by the residents themselves; and the Boundary Commission has responded with redrawn boundaries.

Community confidence took a knock in the 1950s when a drastic decline in manufacturing industries threw many people out of work. Planners demolished a third of the housing, many of the original inhabitants moved away, and according to the Neighbourhood Development Plan for 2001 - 2004,

*“only immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, who had little choice, were prepared to repopulate the area in any numbers. At first they had few possessions and did not know their neighbourhoods. The area hit rock bottom. It had no confidence and very low self-esteem”*

From that time, Balsall Heath had developed a dreadful reputation for crime, drugs and prostitution. Dealers and pimps would come into the area from all over the UK, making the place feel unsafe for local residents. However since the 1990s, Balsall Heath Forum has played a key role in improving the profile of the area. It has taken a supreme effort to challenge negative images and replace them with a vision of civic pride. Central to this shift in perspective is the Confused Spaces project

### **Environment at the Heart of Regeneration**

Tayear Mahmood, the Forum's Environment Team manager, told me that many Asian people can remember how, back home there are open, green fields with familiar foods growing, colourful village markets, and a stronger sense of community. Coming to Birmingham, they see the place as one big concrete car park, and they feel like pigeons, cooped up in rows of small brick houses or unsightly blocks of flats. The next generation lacks even the memory of those roots, finding it hard to connect with the open spaces here, which seem so neglected.

This is an urban community with limited opportunity to access green space. There is no overall vision for land use in the area, no grand plan to improve the environment or create better urban green spaces for local people to enjoy. There is no one site that could be developed as a big park. Between the densely packed residential areas are little bits of land that have become derelict. Although many are owned by the City Council, it is often unclear which department is responsible for these small patches of land. In other cases private landlords have moved away and forgotten they are responsible for the land.

Confused Spaces are often no more than narrow verges, small triangles of grass on street corners, traffic islands or sometimes slightly larger areas – plots where buildings have been demolished, and the ground is simply grassed over and forgotten. At one time the City Council would do no more than come and mow them occasionally.

Now the Environment Team is very much working in partnership with the Council and has persuaded it to let them use these odd plots, just for the time being. Rather than try to sort out complicated, long-term leases, there is a less formal licensing arrangement, whereby the Environment Team can do as they please with certain snippets of land - so long as nobody builds on them - until the Council decide they want to develop them. In other cases the team has convinced the Council's Parks Manager to take on maintenance. It is a win : win situation. Parks Department budgets can be better focussed on designated green spaces; and the remaining 'confused spaces' get looked after in a far better way than the Council could ever achieve. This is possible because Balsall Heath Forum has a more street level view of the issues, being based on this patch, rather in some remote civic centre. The Environment Team meets with residents daily, on the spot, and they respond quickly to feedback. So local residents get to have a direct influence on local decisions and to see and appreciate cleaner streets and more greenery dotted around their locality.



I wondered if this temporary arrangement made people feel insecure, that there is no point investing energy to beautify the area if the land may be taken away at any time. But apparently not. It seems many people are beginning to realise that it is worth taking steps to improve the appearance of Balsall Heath, even if some of these initiatives may only last for a short while. It's a way of making the best of an imperfect situation, taking a piece of otherwise blighted land and making it less unsightly, more lovely for today and perhaps for the future. In this way, Confused Spaces points the way towards a greener, healthier future for Balsall Heath. For not only does this approach produce an immediate sense of well-being for everyone who lives here or visits the area; the hope is that as local people begin to engage with these small spaces, they will learn to love and care for them, and in time will want to fight to preserve them.



*Filling planters with soil*



### **A splash of colour, a hint of perfume**

Tayear showed me several examples of the work of the Confused Spaces project. In front of the mosque on Jakeman Street is a small flower border. At first, when the Environment Team put plants in they did not thrive. The soil was too shallow, and children ran across the corner, trampling the plants. So the team returned and put up a simple wire fence to create an ad hoc barrier, and behind it they planted berberis – an attractive hedging plant with purplish coloured leaves and little spikes. In time this will grow up to form a natural perimeter to this tiny garden. Then they planted two beautiful young trees, a cherry and a eucalyptus, to bring some blossom and perfume to the street scene. They added bulbs in planters for an extra splash of colour, and already the approach to the mosque looks so much more welcoming. Tayear, who has been working with Balsall Heath Forum for 3 years says, “I genuinely enjoy planting things because it gives me pride in the area”.

Planters – containers full of flowers and plants - are much in evidence on residential street corners throughout the area. Some are of a 1960s concrete design and have needed to be completely re-planted, having become overgrown with weeds. In Edward Road I also saw several terracotta coloured plastic planters gaily sporting displays of yellow and mauve pansies. They looked very jolly alongside the freshly painted bollards, litterbins and finger posts outside the Islamic Resource Centre. It was hard to believe this bustling cross-roads had been a seedy front-line not so long ago. Now, the Environment Team are gradually encouraging shopkeepers to take responsibility for watering the flowers, and perhaps in time they will adopt the planters and revive an interest in horticulture in the community. There has been a problem with vandalism on some sites, so the next initiative is to build some heavier, wooden planters that will look great and yet be more sturdy than their plastic counterparts.

Balsall Heath Forum has pledged to plant two tons of bulbs by the year 2004, and they are already well on the way to meeting this target. Perhaps this is why they recently took a Gold award in the Britain in Bloom competition, and they are soon to appear on Gardeners World! Formerly associated with quaint rural settings, these two most British of institutions are beginning to recognize the innovative nature of urban initiatives like Confused Spaces.



*The Green Team planting bulbs in the park*

Pickwick Park was already ablaze with golden daffodils and clumps of vivid purple crocuses when I visited in March 2003. We met Muzammel Hussain, the Environment Team's Park Warden, in his Salwar Kamise, wearing a traditional Muslim bushy beard and transplanting multi-coloured polyanthus in the sunshine. Tayear joked with him about stereotypes of Islam and terrorism; and I realized then what a powerful image his active presence in the park conveys to us all, and especially to the ethnic communities who use these spaces.

### **Trees breath life back into the city**

An area in front of the tree nursery had become overgrown with a tangle of sycamore saplings, which had been allowed to grow too tall, too closely together. Rather than remove and destroy them, the Environment Team decided to try and transplant them to parts of town which had few trees. The idea is to create a tree-lined boulevard in Edward Street, and a number of shady groves among the houses, as free play spaces for children. It was obviously quite a major task to move such large young trees, and it remains to be seen whether the operation will prove successful. If they do take root in their new home, the trees will help the city to breath. For another sad fact is that asthma is a big problem for residents in an area where air quality is poor due to high levels of traffic congestion.

When you remove rubbish and replace it with colourful flowers, the visual impact is instant and obvious. Since air pollution is not really visible, it may take longer for people to begin to recognise the links between traffic, air quality and health, and to understand the role of trees in absorbing toxic fumes and producing vital oxygen. Meanwhile another project is also tackling this problem - Balsall Heath Jungle is a tree-planting project with links to the local nursery school and other community organisations.

### **Community Participation**

Balsall Heath Forum works with a wide range of local community groups and organizations. There are four mosques, two Sikh temples and eight churches, a host of voluntary organizations and various housing associations in the vicinity, as well as a number of new and converted buildings, four parks, a community newsletter and an annual carnival. Tayear told me that sometimes they can get everyone working all together but it's not always easy. Different residents have competing views about how the spaces should be used – as play spaces or quiet areas, for example. The Environment Team tries to consult with residents about what they want to see in their green spaces and includes their points of view when making plans. What usually happens is that people show initial concern for a particular issues eg street lighting, and if they see that their contributions are taken seriously, this leads them on to other ideas. In this way the Environment Team hope that eventually people will want to adopt a corner of Confused Space.

The 22 residents groups which make up Balsall Heath Forum put on a day event to encourage members to join in planting flowers in Confused Spaces, and it was attended by a few volunteers, but they are trying to think how to involve greater numbers in future. Other activities with volunteers have included painting railings around the little non-conformist church; removing graffiti and painting the walls of the skateboard park near Nelson Mandela School; and a Christian group turns out one Saturday per month, to do a litter pick and planting on a small patch of land. In order to get lots of people really interested in participating in Confused Spaces, the Environment Team takes part in community events such as the Carnival, which has been going since the 1970s.

Last year they put on a fireworks party and barbecue, linking the cultural festivals of Divali, Eid, Guy Fawks. The event included DJs, a martial arts competition, football competition, Yemeni dancing, Bhangra, and the Environment Team selling plants from the back of their van. This helped to attract people into the park who might otherwise not have shown an interest. The event was partly a celebration of pride in the local area but also to send out an SOS, to encourage people to get interested in their local green spaces and to support a protest to save the park from development of a new college building. Working from architect plans, volunteers marked out with pegs in the ground the area the building would cover, to show people how much open space it would take away. When people saw this, they signed a petition objecting to planning permission.

Balsall Heath boasts Birmingham's first example of a Neighbourhood Management Project. This means that all residents are able to input to the management of local services, and this applies equally to environmental services. Previously, environmental solutions which may work in the suburbs have not been so successful in this area. The hope now is that by listening to the input from the Neighbourhood Management Project, Balsall Heath Forum will be able to develop a tailor-made service, better suited to meet the specific needs of this densely populated neighbourhood. The Forum is looking to reshape some of the council services, for example now that there is a road sweeping machine, beat sweepers will become more proactive, introducing improvements to street hygiene. At the request of residents, there are plans to introduce regular enforcement sessions with neighbourhood wardens and environmental health officers, to tackle problems of abandoned cars and fly tipping.



*A wide range of activities to meet diverse needs*

### **Opportunities for volunteering, training and employment in the environment**

The Environment Team comprises two supervisors; a number of New Deal trainees aged 18-24 years; plus various volunteers. Employees are representative of the ethnic profile of the area. Confused Spaces is just one aspect of their work. The Team also takes on gardening contracts with local housing associations, to help generate some income to support their work; and they help elderly and disabled residents maintain their gardens, inviting a small contribution to cover their costs.

Their role includes unglamorous jobs like picking up rubbish and sorting out recycling, as well as fencing, painting, and planting flowers and trees. Litter pickers are based at the Forum rather than at the council tip, so that they can be more responsive to local need, dealing with fly tipping, graffiti or vandalism as soon as it occurs. And the latest development is the new road sweeping machine which is proving something of a novelty with the kids, who are trying to ride on the back! This clean-up operation is very necessary to tackle Balsall Heath's rat problem. People do have a care for wildlife: they put out food intended for birds, but the trouble is it only encourages rats. So one suggestion is to put up bird tables for people to use.



*The team clean up the recycling facilities*

### **Focus on green Space**

In 2002 BEN ran a focus group with members of the Forum's Environment Team, to find out what ethnic communities thought about the green spaces in their area. One person said, *"Green Spaces are used more and more by the community as they see us cleaning up the area, and we have talked to them about why we are doing it."*

Attitudes are gradually changing, and people are venturing out more often to do a range of activities in the open spaces near their homes. But many still need further encouragement to feel safe to go out into the parks. The reasons why people feel unsafe include fear of abuse, drugs, dumping, rats, mud, poor lighting, and lack of space for organising their own activities. *"The biggest barrier was the feeling that no one cared about the parks and so they were not safe places to go. This is changing with the work we are doing and people are more interested."*

Another team member commented, *"We have planted flowers and trees on some of the bits of land nobody wanted. People asked us why and we told them. Now they are coming to us to ask if we can do the same for them"*.

We asked what would encourage people to get more involved in green spaces and the ideas mentioned included personal and social factors such as links to health and fitness issues, education and employment opportunities, civic pride, and plants and flowers representative of the culture of people living locally. In terms of facilities, the team identified the need for more park furniture – ideally built locally. And in terms of knowledge, resources and support, they felt that people would get involved if someone provided a starting point. “Park wardens and community wardens have made the place feel safer so people are coming out and using the park and green spaces.”

The Focus Group Report concludes that the work of the Environment Team, and all those who have contributed to the Confused Spaces project, needs to be recognised by outside bodies such as the council, and resources need to be made available for the work to continue and expand.

### **Plans for the Future**

The Environment Team plans to set up a garden centre at the old tree nursery in order to draw people in. As the area becomes greener, more and more people are beginning to show an interest in improving their own garden, creating a window box or taking responsibility for a planter on their street corner. And of course the Environment Team will benefit from a bit more income. Already there is a polytunnel on site where Joe the gardener sows seeds of vegetables and bedding plants, and dispenses free advice to keen amateur horticulturists. The wood is in place to produce a quantity of planters. Another idea is to make bird boxes to encourage wildlife to inhabit the newly planted trees. Balsall Heath Forum will continue to make regular contributions to The Heathan community newsletter, promoting awareness of environmental issues among local people.

One very exciting project in the pipeline entails a plan to erect a stone circle on the main route in to the locality with a message “welcome to Balsall Heath”. This will signal clearly that Balsall Heath has become a community proud of its identity and the environment it has created for itself, for all to share.

## **Cottingley Springs Gypsy and Traveller site Leeds**

**Contact: Gareth Self, Gypsy Services Communications Support Officer**  
**t: 0113 247 5493**  
**e: [gareth.self@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.self@leeds.gov.uk)**

Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are among the oldest ethnic communities in Britain and the most disadvantaged. Many Gypsies and Travellers lack adequate accommodation and where sites exist, they are associated with many problems. This example of a Gypsy and Traveller site in Leeds illustrates the difficulties faced by this community in trying to improve the environment in which they live. Residents of Cottingley Springs site have begun planting gardens and are planning to improve the appearance of the entrance to their site and to create an attractive play area for their children. But lack of capacity within the community itself and the supportive voluntary sector, coupled with reticence on the part of the local authority and other mainstream agencies, combines to hinder their progress. BEN held a focus group with residents of Cottingley to try to find out how the Travellers could work together with others to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. In this article and the linked focus group report, residents and workers share their views on the ways forward.



### **Distinct communities, similar issues**

Romany Gypsies can be found in many countries across the globe. They were one of the earliest ethnic communities to establish a presence in Britain and have retained their distinct cultural identity here for over four hundred years. The Romany language is similar to modern day Punjabi.

Similarly, Irish Travellers can trace their cultural heritage back to as far as 400AD. At the time of the potato famines vast numbers of Irish people starved or became homeless and many survivors learned the skills needed for a life on the road, and their histories have become interwoven with those of the Romany communities. Many Irish Traveller families came to England during the 1960s.

Whilst it is important to recognise the differences between different Traveller communities, in actual fact policies tend to impact each group in a similar way. Travellers often face a particularly insidious kind of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Nomadic lifestyles are barely sanctioned by the authorities and Traveller communities continue to face striking disadvantages, compared to other ethnic groups.

Large numbers of Gypsies and other Travellers have traditionally frequented West Yorkshire for many generations, staying in different locations for various periods in order to earn a living. At one time there were 225 caravans on road side or waste ground plots in and around Leeds. In spite of this fact, there are no officially recognised short stay sites in the area.

Cottingley Springs is the only permanent site and there is a strict allocations policy with a long waiting list. (The list is effectively closed.) Those lucky enough to get a pitch on a permanent site in the UK are not entitled to proper security of tenure. Councils only have to give four weeks notice to evict a Gypsy or Traveller. But since a test case by a Leeds man, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled in May 2004 that the UK Government must now change the law to give Gypsies and Travellers equal rights.

Meanwhile any Travellers pitching their caravans in places other than the one official site in Leeds are under great pressure to move on, with nowhere else to go! Many Travellers have bought their own land but are unable to obtain planning permission and therefore cannot reside there. This means that they are legally



homeless and entitled to be offered accommodation, but this tends to mean settling in a house, giving up their traditional way of life and losing touch with their cultural heritage. As Violet Stewart said recently in Travellers' Times, "If this treatment were given to other ethnic people there would be an outcry."



### **Cottingley Springs in context**

Cottingley Springs Gypsy and Traveller Site can be found on the outskirts of South Leeds, opposite the old Jewish cemetery on Gelderd Road in the ward of Wortley. It is in an area surrounded by fields, but cannot properly be described as open countryside, since it is so near to a busy motorway, in an area dotted with industrial estates and generally prone to air pollution, traffic noise etc.

There seems to have been a traditional stopping place here for many years, which has been adopted by the City Council as an official Travellers' site since 1969. A purpose built site - or rather two adjacent sites - have been here for seventeen years : 'A site' was established in 1987 and accommodates mainly English Romany Gypsies; 'B site' was established two years later and is home to mainly Irish Travellers, although in reality there are links between the Irish Travellers and other sections of the wider Traveller community. However, 'A' and 'B' sites are used by two distinct social groups who hardly mix at all. This enforced proximity has led to serious tension in the past.

### **Refurbishment – a mixed blessing**

The City Council received a government grant under the 1968 Caravan Sites Act to create permanent pitches for 41 families. Initially the sites comprised little more than a field with a toilet. The sites now enjoy their own water and electricity supply, properly surfaced road access and street lighting, separate pitches for each family with their own fenced and gated area, including hard-standing for caravans. On 'B' site, there is a brick built unit called a shed on every pitch, which houses a sitting room, kitchen, shower and toilet facilities.

However, serious hardship has resulted from the refurbishment since people were obliged, according to one commentator, to live "on a building site" during the work. In addition, water meters were installed, without the residents' consent – it is unclear whether this is permissible in law, but there is no doubt that it runs counter to the cultural beliefs of the Gypsy people who view water as a natural resource, not a commodity – and families' water supply was allegedly used by contractors during construction work, causing massive bills which residents are forced to pay off at severe rates.

When Community Development Worker Harjinder Sagoo started in post with Leeds Voice in 2001, with the remit to support BME groups, asylum seekers and refugees as well as Gypsies and Travellers, he had not had any previous contact with Travellers except the occasional scrap dealer. He told me that "because of everybody's perception" of Gypsies, he was dreading his first visit to Cottingley Springs. It was a very cold January morning when he was greeted by the Manager and Assistant Manager of the site, and taken to meet each of the residents. He had to build trust very gradually with the Travellers, who are wary of authority, by explaining "I am not from the council". Harjinder's role is to act as a go-between, liaising between the residents and the council. He began talking to individuals, finding out what they need and want. He says it took him two years to build trust.

At that time, the pitches had what Harjinder calls 'amenity huts' which were brick built, but very small, with the toilet too near to the kitchen and nowhere to dry washing.

Harjinder tried speaking to the Director of Housing, but had no joy. "I was fobbed off", he said. So from there he went to the Race Equality Council, who immediately set up a sub-committee to look into Gypsy and Traveller issues and put questions to the local authority. The council's response was to set up an inter-departmental board to address the concerns raised by the REC. There was already an education service for Travellers in place, and this was joined by South Leeds Health Partnership for Travellers, a group of workers including health visitors, play workers etc. This large, multi-agency group had too cumbersome an agenda and so soon divided into three sections: education; health; and the accommodation group, which dealt with issues around unauthorised encampments as well as the official site.

It is to be hoped that this infrastructure will in time prove useful in the campaign to improve the lot of Gypsy people in Leeds; but for now, the Gypsies themselves do not seem to be aware of these political developments and there is little evidence as yet of their effectiveness at meeting the community's needs.

The council went on and made plans to improve the facilities on site, and contracted a Doncaster building firm to undertake the renovation work. The sites now enjoy their own water and electricity supply, properly surfaced road access and street lighting, separate pitches for each family with their own fenced and gated area, including hard-standing for caravans. On 'B' site, the amenity units, which the residents call 'sheds', have doubled in size to include a sitting room, kitchen, shower and toilet facilities, on every pitch. But in spite of being rather costly, the work was not completed to standard or within the estimated time scale. Harjinder told me that "people were really stressed as they were left without any heating or lighting over Christmas last year."

Meanwhile, 'A' site applied to ODPM in 2003 to upgrade the facilities, but was turned down. They applied again in 2004 and were successful, but the work has yet to take place.

Many improvements have been made over the years, but progress is slow and much work remains to be done. For instance, 'B' site has an office where residents can meet with the housing workers who manage and maintain the sites, and one tiny room of this building is used for monthly meetings of the Residents of Cottingley (ROC) group. 'A' site has just one small, brick built 'shed' which is used for fortnightly meetings, although in practice neither space is large enough for even a fraction of residents to gather at one time.

Until recently, the sites were not marked on maps and did not have a road sign to identify them. A supportive Green Party councillor arranged for that problem to be rectified. Aside from this, there is little in the way of infrastructure and few shared facilities on either site.



### **Potential for creating Green Spaces – improving the site entrance**

Harjinder says that once the works were completed on 'B' site, "it looked like a concrete jungle." In terms of green space, there is some overgrown land near the entrance to each of the sites, which could be developed as an amenity, and consultations have begun with Leeds Voice, as the lead agency and Groundwork Leeds, to explore design ideas. Groundwork Designer Dale Woodcock has produced drawings based on suggestions from Cottingley residents, and these are on display in the 'B' site office. Leeds Voice are conducting ongoing consultations and once everybody is happy with the plans, will put the job out to tender.

One suggestion is for a metal work sculpture to showcase young people's traditional skills. There is an issue for education authorities in that many Gypsy children leave school at ages 12-14 to pursue traditional occupations, so the metalwork project could be a way to engage young people in an educational project which is culturally relevant and appropriate to their needs.

Veronica Keon, a teacher at the Traveller Education Service described how Traveller children in Leeds often seem very 'confident in their bodies' when they first arrive in school, due to their active, outdoor lifestyle (so they could be good role models for those less active, settled children who are the target of current government policies on healthy lifestyles) but she observed that they soon find the classroom boring, and want more practical lessons which affirm their culture and lifestyle. Being herself from an Irish family, Veronica has noticed that many Irish families (both Traveller and 'Gorgio' ie non-Traveller folk) "came off the land" but now that they are in England, they would never go off-site to go walking in the countryside because often, "they don't know it's there".

However, while the design stage drags on, commercial vehicles have come in across this patch of land and fly-tipped rubbish in the strip of woodland adjacent to the site. Since then boulders have been placed across the entrance to prevent recurrences but the rubbish remains.

### **The compound and children's play facilities**

According to Richard Lancaster, Community Development Worker at South Leeds Health For All (SLHFA), on-site play space is invaluable to Cottingley residents, since the site is in an isolated location and the families there cannot easily access mainstream facilities. However, because it is a relatively small community, and because of the Travellers culture and lifestyle - they sometimes move off site and are not always there to look after things - there is reticence from the authorities to provide facilities.

There is an area of the Cottingley Springs site under tarmac, adjacent to the 'B' site office, which is sometimes used as a play area, but which desperately needs improving. Known as 'the compound', it is surrounded by a high fence which creates an unattractive environment but is needed to prevent various of the more itinerant Traveller families from other parts of Leeds coming to the site and fly tipping or pitching an unauthorised encampment.

There is no play equipment installed in the 'compound', only a surface of uneven tarmac, laid over the residue of industrial waste from previous uses of this brown-field site, which in turn rests upon naturally boggy ground – Cottingley Springs is so called for obvious reasons! The compound was used in the past for football and races, but has recently sprung a leak and been poorly repaired, so that play workers say it is unsafe and won't use it. The play workers from the Monday Traveller Funhouse came 3 or 4 days a week last year but this year their funding has been cut so they only come one day a week during school holidays to organise arts and crafts, games and sports.

Playworkers, including Karen Emery of SLHFA, did some consultation with residents aged 5-13. But as one resident told me, there was a consultation about play facilities with children on this site, herself included, 20 years ago but nothing was done, and now her children are being consulted. She is understandably cynical. According to Helen Jones, Co-ordinator of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE), the residents of Cottingley Springs are often used as a "captive audience for token consultations", to the exclusion of the many Romany people dwelling in houses in Leeds or on roadside park-ups.

Jimmy, a handsome young Gypsy man who is an ex prize fighter, wants to see a sports pitch on the compound, some proper play equipment with child-friendly soft tarmac, a basket ball net, and perhaps some attractive plants to soften the appearance of the high fence, some seating for parents to relax while supervising play sessions, and a lockable gate to which residents would have their own keys. However, Harjinder points out that the local authority are reluctant to take responsibility for the risk associated with any type of play equipment. Some residents also feel that play equipment would be unsafe and lead to accidents. They believe instead that the compound should be made into pitches, or 'slabs' as they are otherwise known (an area of hard-standing to pitch a caravan on) for two more families.

Meanwhile, the several small children who live at Cottingley Springs have to make do with playing in the open streets which run between their pitches. This is not ideal, as there are vehicles of all sorts parked or moving about, making it a dangerous place to play. Also some of the bigger children, particularly on 'A' site, have quad bikes which they love to ride around the site and in the adjoining field, sometimes without safety helmets, although this is not encouraged. The development plans drawn up with Groundwork include an idea for a scrambling track, although this idea is rather controversial among residents, as it is feared that it may cause noise pollution.

Helen Jones believes the plans would benefit from closer involvement of residents themselves. She told me that the Travellers' Action Group, the 'A' site residents' group, has a constitution and a bank account but needs a lot of support with capacity building to be able to fully engage with the process of improving the site.

Her personal view is that one immediate improvement which would be of real value to residents would be to create a walkway between adjacent 'A' and 'B' sites, so that children could visit their friends without needing to walk on the main road. This would also be a comfort to the Traveller parents, for whom children are their greatest and most valued resource, and would help to address their very real sense of isolation and well-founded fears around child safety.

Richard Lancaster, who has been involved with supporting the Travellers and improving the sites, told me that a lot of the problems stem from the isolated location of the site and flaws in its original layout. Richard's role involves supporting a wide range of disadvantaged community groups so there is a limit to how much he can help. He feels that what is needed is a longer term investment of resources specifically dedicated to developing the capacity of the Traveller community and empowering them to create and manage their own facilities. Meanwhile, SLHFA has been able to help in a small way with environmental improvements, which have immediate visual impact.

### **Residents' Gardens Project**

The one area where real headway can be seen is in people's individual gardens. Some project work has been undertaken to help residents landscape their pitches, and where this has been successful, it really does give the site a more attractive look and feel. Assistance has come from various quarters, but much of the work has been done by residents themselves.

During 2003, SLHFA facilitated horticulture workshops with residents of 'A' site, teaching people how to grow plants in pots. This has helped to bring a bit of colour to brighten up the rather overcrowded pitches on 'A' site.

Harjinder Sagoo, Community Link Co-ordinator of Leeds Voice, works with Travellers and also asylum seekers across Leeds, supporting them to tackle various issues including basic skills training, organising drop-in sessions etc. He has helped Cottingley Springs residents to organise trips to restaurants, Christmas parties and so on, and he helps them to raise funds for equipment for improving the gardens. Harjinder has been working behind the scenes in recent years to marshal some support for the Travellers' cause and to organise practical help.

In Spring 2004, Harjinder organised for community service volunteers from the probation service to come and clear away some rubbish on 'B' site and prepare the ground for gardening projects to begin, but apparently there was some tension between the Travellers and the volunteers, which could not be resolved by probation service supervisors (site staff were not on duty as the work took place over the weekend) so they did not complete the work.

South Leeds Health For All then came in and helped with laying turf and adding some garden features to three of the residents' plots, in succession. Richard Lancaster explained that his approach has been to try and involve residents by showing them what can be done. He views the gardening projects as starting point and a way to try and engender interest in caring for and improving the site. He told me that once the first lawn was laid, other residents were very keen to have a garden too.

When I first visited Cottingley in August 2004, the residents still needed 30 tonnes of topsoil and a lot of grass seed – since for subsequent garden it was decided to use seed rather than turf, for some reason. There was some friction and resentment among residents, brought about by the uneven rate of development of different families' gardens. On my second visit in November, the work had progressed a stage further, but some of the Travellers felt disgruntled about the standard of the work, the disruption it has caused in their daily lives, the health and safety risks it has presented, particularly to children, and the hygiene issues which were a serious concern to the women. Others were optimistic that plants would soon begin to thrive come the spring, and more could be added over time.

As with all green space projects, there is an issue over future maintenance. Once the lawns are sown, the site caretaker, Steven Hill, helps some families with their garden maintenance, especially where there is no man in the family, or where a resident has a disability – a very painful, hereditary form of arthritis is very common among Gypsy families. However the maintenance service is already very stretched and this extra help is largely down to the goodwill of the present caretaker.

## **Getting organised**

Each site has a residents' group, but the groups are quite informal and not constituted. 'A' site meet once a fortnight and 'B' site meet once a month. Speakers may be invited from various organisations to give talks at residents meetings. 'B' site residents group invited BEN to join them at their meeting in November 2004, to facilitate a discussion group about their experience of using, improving and creating green spaces.

It is widely appreciated that due to a combination of cultural and lifestyle factors, coupled with shortcomings in the education system, many Travellers lack basic literacy skills. Although many of the residents at Cottingley Springs are unable to read and write, site staff Gillian Thorpe and Gareth Self produce a newsletter once every two months, which they distribute by hand to each pitch, offering to read the news to residents. They included an item about the BEN visit, to encourage residents to attend the green space discussion. Focus group methodology has to be adapted to be effective with non-literate people.

At time of writing, discussions are underway as to how to arrange for a separate focus group to take place on 'A' site.

As an incentive to encourage people to participate in the focus group, BEN provided a selection of plants from the local garden centre, for people to add to their newly created gardens. On a positive note, Rob Duncan, Garden Centre Manager at B+Q Beeston has pledged to donate half a dozen hanging baskets to brighten up the pitches at Cottingley, in the Spring.

Gillian and Gareth of the Traveller Services Team are pleased to see these small improvements taking place, but are keen to know what serious efforts we can expect to see, as they hope for more significant change in the future.

## **Looking to the future**

Residents of Cottingley have invited Leeds Voice and Groundwork Leeds, together with local councillors, to the next meeting of ROC in January, with a view to moving forward with plans to improve the site. Harjinder is very much hoping that the Travellers will present a unified front and stand together to address the issues facing them all as a community. He feels that it is very important for Travellers to stop arguing among themselves and begin to show some leadership and staying power in their campaign, as for example they have done over the suggestion to introduce CCTV on site. At first people were suspicious and mistrusting of how this would be used, but gradually, opinion leaders within the community have managed to convince others that it would protect them, so now the most residents on the site are backing this idea.

Richard Lancaster believes that short term environmental improvements can act as the catalyst to show people change is possible, but that to bring about more sustainable change would need a change in attitude on both sides, and that takes longer to achieve. He feels the site would benefit from having a dedicated community development worker directly addressing environmental issues with residents over a period of at least a year. He says that it is important to work closely with people on the ground, to develop their skills at the same time as making a lasting difference to the condition of the site.

I asked Helen Jones what she felt was needed to move forward on improving the environment at Cottingley Springs, in the context of issues facing the wider Traveller community. She replied that the site is way too big and badly situated, as there are no facilities in that area. She traces a lot of the problems at Cottingley back to the lack of genuine engagement of Gypsy people in determining their own circumstances. In Helen's opinion, it is unusual to find groups of Travellers of any great size living together. Families are more likely to keep to themselves, only congregating occasionally, for instance at horse fairs such as Lee Gap in Yorkshire.

She said, "my long term view would be to knock it down and replace it with a network of small, family size sites around Leeds, in places chosen by the families themselves." But in the mean time, Helen made a commitment to "put weight behind a short term improvement to improve the environmental appearance" of the site, "if it was real and made the residents feel better – but we must be careful to ensure equality", she added.

Harjinder Sagoo agrees with the idea of a network of smaller scale sites designed by families themselves. He thinks that large Gypsy sites cause concerns for neighbouring Gorgio communities, but that smaller sites "would encourage people to mingle" rather than being "all in one person's back yard". He told me that he has lived for 40 years in this country and in this time has developed strong personal relationships with a number of councillors and other influential people, so has been able to secure the support of a number of

MPs for the Traveller Reform Bill. He says as a small minority community, Gypsies “are not a vote puller” but that we must seek long term strategies to address the need for more and better Traveller sites, even if only because it would be cheaper than constant evictions. Harjinder’s post at Leeds Voice is secure until 2006 and he hopes within that time scale “to do some real work and have something to show at the end of the day”.

### **Resources**

Travellers Aid Trust on 01269 870621 [info@travellersaidtrust.org](mailto:info@travellersaidtrust.org) Contact them for current grant programmes

### **Other Contacts**

Leeds GATE (Gypsy and Traveller Exchange).

This independent community association aims to address members concerns. They have limited resources, but are able to employ a community development worker and an advocacy worker. Contact Helen Jones, Coordinator, tel 0113 234 6556 email [Helen-jones@leedsgate.co.uk](mailto:Helen-jones@leedsgate.co.uk)

Traveller Education Service

Provide support to nursery, primary and secondary age children and their families, whether from Gypsy, Fairground, Circus, New Age, Bargee or other Traveller communities, both in schools and via on-site or roadside facilities. Contact Peter Saunders, Coordinator, or Veronica Keon, Teacher, on 0113 274 8050

Leeds Voice

Community Link Co-ordinator, Harjinder Sagoo, tel 0113 277 2227 [harjinder.sagoo@leedsvoice.co.uk](mailto:harjinder.sagoo@leedsvoice.co.uk)

South Leeds Health For All

Richard Lancaster, Community Development Worker, and Karen Emery, Play Worker, tel 0113 270 6903



## Discover Story Garden London

**Contact: Vicky Cave, Creative Director**  
**t: 0208 536 5542 general enquiries 020 8536 5555**  
**e: [Vicky.cave@discover.org.uk](mailto:Vicky.cave@discover.org.uk)**

*"Once upon a time, there was a piece of waste land in East London. It was contaminated with chemicals, and was a dump for old bicycles, sofas and fridges. Now it's the Discover Story Garden for 2-7 year old children."*



Discover asked local children what they would like to see in a play garden, and they said they wanted a monster with a tongue you could slide down. They wanted a free play space where they could express themselves and let their imaginations run wild. Their Mums wanted a learning environment where the children could develop ideas and improve their communication skills – important because there are over 100 community languages spoken among the children in Stratford. So sculptor Andy Frost and landscape designer Vanessa Barker worked with local school children and volunteers to design and create a garden to make these dreams come true. The Story Garden is open every day except term-time Mondays, it's free, young children and their families are very welcome, and there are people called Story Builders to help kids explore ideas, act them out and have great fun!

Benjamin Zephaniah, poet, local resident and Patron of Discover, says that "providing time and space for children to use their imagination cannot be overestimated. Discover offers real benefits." This is the story of how Discover consulted with its ethnically diverse constituency to create the kind of green space young people and their families really want to share.

Stratford is a busy neighbourhood in the East London Borough of Newham. Surrounded by major roads, complex railway interchanges, and industrial sites straddling the River Lee, there is little in the way of green space, and what there is often does not feel safe to play in. Young children in particular need somewhere secure to play outdoors happily.

This is an area with a very diverse and somewhat transient population. Around 120 languages are spoken, and as new communities arrive all the time, the cultural influences continually shift. Five years ago the Somali community was growing rapidly. Today new East European communities are becoming established. The young people want to be able to fit in and get along with each other, so they soon learn to speak English together. But their parents want them to be able to keep up speaking their mother tongue, and to have their culture acknowledged.



### **Children helped to design and build a garden of their own**

Discover wanted to help Stratford communities to create a playspace that would meet the needs of young children grappling with the challenges of life in a new environment. They had the idea that a Story Garden would help the children to make sense of their experiences. Many of these children do not have a garden of their own to play in, so Discover wanted to make a space that could 'belong' to everyone. They wanted to make sure the play area contained elements the children would enjoy – that it would be what they themselves wanted. So in the summer of 2000, they asked children at 10 local primary schools what they would like to see in a garden. The children called for a maze, tunnels, mirrors, slides – and they got them.

Sculptor Andy Frost looked at these ideas and wondered how to make them happen. Later that year he returned to two of the schools with a truckload of wood and a band saw to facilitate woodworking workshops. The children were amazed when they saw all this wood in the playground. They shrieked with delight, grabbed handfuls and eagerly examined the precious raw material. "Where does it come from?" they cried. Soon Andy got them working to create wooden models of the type of play equipment they would like to have in the garden. The children got to keep the models they had made, but Andy photographed them and used them to design his installations. The sensitivity of the consultation process is reflected in the outcome. The Story Garden is a very beautiful imaginative play space. It is safe, and although it has not been open very long yet, already it is well loved by those who use it.

The site used to belong to the council who used it as a maintenance depot. It became a site for fly tipping, and was contaminated with poisonous arsenic. So the topsoil had to be replaced, at great expense. Volunteers from UBSWarburg worked hard to put in plants and to weave living tunnels of willow. The local Children's Forum meets regularly and has had a lot of creative input into Discover. They came along one Saturday – with their parents and any interested friends – to help Vanessa, the landscape designer, to complete the planting. Then some students on placement from the NewVic Sixth Form College put in six weeks of exceptionally hard work to help Andy install the sculptures and lay the paving and turf.

### **Maintenance and security can be beautiful too**

The planting is based on Permaculture principles, which make it easy to maintain in an environmentally friendly way, such as companion planting. For example, the willow tunnel is looked after by marigolds which deter the aphids – greenfly and blackfly – which would otherwise attract wasps (and deter children!) In one corner there is a sensory garden with lovely bright coloured, sweet smelling flowers. The rest of the garden has an irrigation system built in, but this is one part that is designed to need looking after, because that is one of the ways children are able to interact with the garden – by planting and caring for it. Discover is cultivating relationships with the local nursery and primary schools to get children involved. It is very much a "hands-on" garden.

The Story Garden is surrounded by a high, secure but also beautiful fence to protect it during the night. Wrought iron gates were designed by a local artist who ran workshops with the playgroup, working from visitors' drawings. The light sensors, CCTV and floodlights obviously contribute to the feeling of safety, but these are not intrusive. The fence is softened by greenery but not a solid hedge. There are 'windows' through the shrubs so you can see in and out. The garden is lit at night by a ring of balls that glow different colours and look very pretty.

Open access projects like this often suffer vandalism and that was something staff were concerned about, but so far it has not been a problem. Vicky puts this down to the fact that so many people have been involved in designing it, it really does belong to the community. It may also be because the Story Garden looks so beautiful, people don't want to harm it, they want to take care of it.



### **Accessible, supervised, and fabulous!**

The Story Garden is open 10am – 5pm, and is free to 2 – 7 year olds and their accompanying adults. It is supervised by trained Story Builders who can encourage children to explore and inspire them to make meaning from the different elements of the garden. Each day's activities are themed around a special word. Children can tell their stories to a baby space monster, share them, act them out, and take home ideas and dreams.

To quote from some of the visitors to the Story Garden:

*“The garden is a magic, secret place.”*  
*“The Garden is beautiful and I love it.”*  
*“It's nice and relaxing for the parents too.”*

*The Story Garden is part of Discover, a new and innovative hands-on space where children and their parents, carers and teachers can play and learn together and make stories. They can dress up, make and play with puppets, explore different story settings such as a Secret Cave and huge Magic Parcel. Discover is open every day except term-time Mondays and entry is £2.50 per person.*

**George's Park  
Lozell's, Birmingham**

**Contact: Fauzia Mumtaz or Rupinder Chawlia**  
**t: 0121 507 6500**  
**e: [fauzia.mumtaz@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:fauzia.mumtaz@groundwork.org.uk)**

**Introduction**

This is the story of how George's Park in Lozells, Birmingham, was saved from vandalism and dereliction by a group of remarkable people. Led by community activist and community development worker Fauzia Mumtaz, the women and children of this community deserve proper recognition for their involvement in revamping their urban green space and bringing a sense of order and cohesion to the whole area. These warm-hearted and characterful individuals have succeeded in galvanising a community into action, for the good of all. Here's how they did it



**Rupinder**

I met Landscape Architect Rupinder Sogy in George's Park, Lozell's on a lovely sunny summer's afternoon. She had kindly arranged for members of the local residents' group to be there to talk to me, and I was immediately made to feel very welcome. I met a great many inspiring characters, all of whom are contributing to the renaissance of the park and to recreating a sense of community among these once blighted streets and open spaces.

**Jacky**

The first person I got to know was Jacky, a British Black woman who has recently started attending a training course and is looking out for opportunities to gain job experience and find meaningful work. When I told her about the work of BEN and how much I enjoy my job, she was very keen to know how she could get into a position like mine. She is very interested in community development and clearly has the initiative and people skills to do well in this field.

Jacky told me that although she is concerned about the management of George's Park and willing to be involved in the Friends' group, for mothers like her, it's hard to find the time to attend meetings. There is no



child care provided and it's difficult to concentrate if you take the children in to meetings with you, even where that is allowed.

(I felt quite nostalgic for my early days in this field of work, in the autonomous child care collectives and women's self-help groups in Brixton in the early 80s. If we couldn't get funding for childcare, we organised our own on a voluntary basis, and if we couldn't do that we did what is now known as 'multitasking' ie took the children to the meetings with us. To many paid workers who are more used to a clear distinction between domestic and professional responsibilities, this may seem like chaos, but the degree of empowerment we experienced was immense and I sensed the same potential among these women.)

Jacky also pointed out a building next to the park, Malika House, which is used as 'a school for drop outs', mainly African-Caribbean youngsters. Out of school time these young people often hang around the kiddies play area and don't seem to have anything much to do. She thought there was scope to organise some out-of school activities with them in the park, and felt that some kind of cultural heritage project would be very welcome. Then she had to leave to collect her daughter from school.

### **Fauzia**

The next person I met was Fauzia Mumtaz, a warm yet commanding woman with real credentials as a community activist, and newly appointed Community Development Worker with Groundwork Birmingham. She has been involved in this project to improve George's Park since day one. There had once been an ice-cream factory on this spot, and some houses which were probably bombed during WWII. Margaret Anderson from Sutton Coldfield Reform Church has photographs and documents relating to the pre-war history of the area, and has supported residents' efforts to develop George's Park - but more of her later.

The population in the neighbourhood surrounding George's Park is mainly Pakistani and a few Bengali residents. Apparently people from the different communities did not get on very well with each other to begin with. Fauzia has lived in this street for about 30 years now, and recalled what the site was like before regeneration work began. The entire area was overgrown, except for the football pitch which was used by joy riders. The play area was vandalised and everything but the slide was scrapped. For twenty years nothing was done to improve the situation.



In Fauzia's words, it was a 'drugs den' with lots of crime going on. People didn't feel safe to walk here, even in the day time, and women would meet up on the street corner in the morning to walk together • the long way round, rather than across the park - to school. This level of informal community organisation is literally vital to many people in minority ethnic communities, yet often goes entirely unrecognised and unsupported by the mainstream. It would be easy to glamorise the courage it takes to face the daily threats these women have had to face, but there is nothing pretty about the bag-snatching, mugging and rape which have happened in this park. News of these crimes travels via gossip networks throughout the community and everyone feels threatened and at risk. The women's own efforts to organise for their self-defence are commendable, but this alone cannot tackle the root cause of the problem.

In 2000, when PC Pearce community police liaison officer, put a leaflet through Everyone's doors about proposals to address these issues, Fauzia responded keenly. She was the only person to do so at first. After years of neglect, people had grown cynical and apathetic about any hopes of improvement. Fauzia admits her motivation was initially rather reactionary - if changes were going to happen, she wanted to make sure she could complain if they made things worse! A lot of people felt similarly at first, but didn't see much point in even saying so. Early meetings were quite poorly attended. But Fauzia observed that, as the meetings

continued regularly, after a time people began to believe things could actually change for the better. When folks began to see real changes happening in the park, they became more willing to get involved.

### **Bilal**

The first stage of improvement was to put up some railings to prevent vehicle access to the park, and to begin levelling the ground, which had been in big, rough mounds, obscuring sight-lines and providing cover for antisocial behaviour. A group of school children came together to form the Young Friends of George's Park, and the boys had designed an arched gateway for the park entrance. I was introduced to their chairman, Bilal, a very polite and sensible boy with a charming sense of humour. He told me about the consultation which had taken place with young people.



Originally the teens said they wanted a shelter as a hang-out space, but the Women's group were not so sure about that. They were concerned about young people being allowed to congregate unsupervised near an area of woodland used by courting couples. So discussions were held and a compromise agreed. The needs of wildlife were also taken into consideration - the woodland is home to foxes, squirrels and birds, so rather than cut it down the community agreed it should be thinned out with pathways cut through it for children to play hide and seek. And a bandstand was created, which young people can use as a place to congregate, but they are still visible at a distance, so the adults need not worry about what they are getting up to.

### **Asfa**

Asfa is a young mother with a small daughter and a young son. Both children are big enough to go and play on their own on the new play area equipment but need Mum on hand in case of bumps. The new seating area which residents asked for is well designed so that parents and child minders can do their own thing but just within sight and earshot of the playground. Asfa sits on a bench, watching all the comings and goings, filling me in on who is who and dispensing hugs and lollies as needed.

A skate park has also been created, in the part of the park where the play area used to be. Asfa tells me that local children don't use it all that much, as they're a bit young yet. They may sometimes take their mountain bikes down there, - although I've since learned that's not good for the concrete. But some young people come from a little way away with their skate boards and are really rather skilled at performing stunts on the half pipe. It's a good spectator sport and Asfa hopes that one day the younger ones can have some tuition, to learn some skateboard tricks without too much risk of getting hurt.



### **Imran**



The next person I met was Imran, a new member of the Young Friends group. He has only recently come to Lozells from Pakistan and communicates using Pakistani sign language, which is rather different from the tiny bit of British Sign Language I know. He taught me signs for Pakistan, woman, man, marriage, and sewing - Imran is a skilled tailor. Bilaal has learned very quickly how to communicate with Imran and was able to share private jokes with him, much to their personal amusement. He helped to interpret between us, enabling me to ask Imran about his role in the Friends group and his ideas for the park. He replied that he is new to the group but looking forward to playing an active part. The women remarked how pleased they are that Imran has been able to make friends so easily, as he could have had a much harder time trying to fit in.

### **Sameed**

Bilaal in turn introduced me to Sameed, the Vice-Chair of the group. Sameed is a bold, passionate and very caring lad who clearly enjoys his community commitments. He explained to me what the various officers' roles entail and told me all about the training courses the boys had attended, to learn about facilitation, budgeting and taking minutes. The boys are obviously benefiting personally from gaining sound skills for themselves and as well as benefiting many more people by applying these skills in the community. In a situation where ethnic community groups, through no fault of their own, often lack the capacity to develop their project ideas, it was great to see these young people being given the opportunity to get a head start in understanding how a group can be set up and run well in order to be really effective at achieving its aims and manifesting the dreams of their peers and their elders.

### **Sheraz**

Bilaal then introduced me to Sheraz, the Young Friends' secretary, a calm, confident person well suited to his role. Sheraz explained that the group has only a very limited budget but plenty of ideas for activities to develop and possible ways of raising funds to realise them.

The boys told me about the mature tree which used to be the children's climbing tree, but had to be cut down for health and safety reasons. They were considering how it might be replaced, as there is a wonderful climbing frame in the kiddies play park, but that's more for younger ones, and it's just not the same as having an actual climbing tree. The Young Friends are very conscious of health and safety: Fauzia's daughter was hobbling about on crutches having broken her foot recently. So there was talk of whether to try and level the grass better, filling in potentially dangerous holes. There are plans for First Aid training too, which a lot of the young people seemed keen to learn. This would give them the skill and confidence to deal with any accidents which may occur in the park, and help to increase the general feeling of safety.

Other project ideas were for a roll up cricket pitch, 'because the main area of grass in the park gets very boggy in the rainy season', and for recycling bins for paper and aluminium. We wondered if this might be a way to raise funding?

### **Margaret Anderson**

I was told the story of how the pensioners group from Sutton Coldfield Reform Church, encouraged by Margaret Anderson, had made a collection of funds to support improvements to George's Park and the boys from the Young Friends group had visited the church to thank the pensioners. They had training in how to give a presentation, and although they were nervous beforehand, it had gone very well and they now felt more confident about public speaking.

### **Women's group activities**

By this time the afternoon was wearing on, the children had all come out of school and were beginning to congregate in the park. Mothers were walking with babies and toddlers. Fauzia told me that the park becomes a hive of activity by about 6pm when everyone comes out to take the air. Old and young women can be seen most days going round the park exercising. They want to organise a group for 'power walking'. A leader has been recruited who will measure the distance with a special kind of wheel and decide on a two mile circuit to begin with. There is already a basketball team. The boys took up basketball first, then the women decided to start a team. They have had funding from Sport England.

Other activities which the women are undertaking, beyond the focus of the park, include computer training ('the kids can all do it, now the mums want to do it too') and debt management courses, health and safety, first aid and child care courses. The women have also organised trips for the whole community, including an outing to Barry Island in South Wales. The next trip will be to Blackpool later this summer for the fun fare and illuminations

## Community Resources

The women's group have a tiny room in the school where they can meet during school hours, but it only accommodates about 15-20 at most. There is an empty house which they have their eyes on as a potential community resource, but it would need a lot of work doing. Meanwhile they have identified a site adjacent to the park where they would like to have a community space. There is talk about getting a 'pod' on this spot - a two storey structure which could be used for a crèche, youth club and meeting space. There is no loo in the park, and that's a problem for a parent with two or more children of different ages, having to run back to the house or call on a neighbour to use their facilities, so the pod would include a loo and washroom.

The week before my visit, there had been a launch event in George's Park with some of the Board of Directors of Groundwork and some of the funders, like sport England, present. It had perhaps been a little premature as work on the railings is not yet complete - still going on behind us as we sat talking - so there are plans for a repeat in September. Residents are generally fairly pleased with the input of Groundwork to regenerating the park, although there was some strong feeling about particular issues, including the planting scheme. The women's group had freshly planted up the flower border with a bright display of red geraniums especially for the occasion and I could feel the sense of pride and ownership the women now have - that this is their park and they have the power to make a difference to what happens here - it is their environment.



The sense of empowerment is reaching out further now into people's lives within the community. Fauzia is trying to identify a nearby nursery and greenhouse where children and adults can raise their own plants to improve the park. A lot of the houses in these streets have their own gardens but many are paved over. People are interested in gardening, but would rather get together and do it in the park, instead of on their individual plots. It's more sociable and enjoyable that way, they can support and encourage one another. They would like to have fun get-togethers with a tea party, as a way to tackle isolation. They've thought about growing fruit and veg too. The kids are very excited about it. Flowers are pretty but they don't last. If children can grow food to bring home to their mums to cook, it gives them something to show for their efforts and becomes a source of respect within the family.

## Mrs Begum

An older lady who had been sitting all this while on a nearby bench, with her husband, watching the proceedings, came over to offer me a cup of tea, which I accepted gladly. Mrs Begum speaks only a little English, so I quickly learned how to say 'thank you' in her mother tongue - Urdu - 'Shukria'. Fauzia explained that this was her mother - the driving force behind all this activity. 'Mum is pushing everyone', she explained.

Then my hosts pointed out to me an image which will stay with me always. An old, old lady, dressed in white was walking very, very slowly with her zimmer frame down the street beside the park. Since her illness she had remained house bound for some time until a neighbour had encouraged her to learn how to raise her foot over the door sill and step outside. Now she was able to take a little stroll each day, just a few paces at first but gradually increasing day by day. This gentle exercise was helping her to regain strength and aiding her recovery. It was evidently improving her sense of wellbeing and quality of life, to be able to stretch out in the sunshine. Everyone agreed that if the park had not been opened up in the way it has, this grandmother would never have felt safe enough to come outdoors again in her life.

This is how much difference ethnic community participation in green spaces can make.

## **Hidden Garden Glasgow**

**Contact: Linda Macdonald, Resource Manager**  
**t: 0141 433 2722,**  
**e: [linda@nva.org.uk](mailto:linda@nva.org.uk)**

The Hidden Gardens is a visionary new landmark for Scotland, a contemplative space in the heart of Glasgow and a sanctuary, which celebrates the diversity of nature and humanity.



### **Background**

The Hidden Gardens, Scotland's first contemporary sacred gardens, is being created by transforming a derelict site to the rear of Tramway Theatre in South Glasgow's Pollokshields.

The project is an inspirational collaboration between Scottish arts charity nva organisation, landscape architects City Design Co-operative, and an international team of artists in consultation with the diverse local communities.

nva organisation has a long history of producing powerful large scale works, interpreting natural and man-made landscapes in exciting, mind broadening new ways. They aim to enhance the image of Scotland as a country of serious artistic standing, attracting major media attention for their unique cultural activities. Their works also echo and encapsulate historical and cultural diversity in a way that is meaningful to incredibly mixed audiences.

For the last three years they have been working on a variety of environmentally sensitive areas to create cultural events which also initiate long term conservation or improvement strategies, with the support of national agencies.

The Hidden Gardens is one such project, entailing the creation of a unique public green space celebrating the diverse cultures of the city's population. Urban regeneration policies, which often involve the creation of new public spaces populated with commissioned artwork, are common to most European cities. Inaugurated during the Year of Cultural Diversity 2002, this project, to convert an ex-industrial site of 0.8 hectares, is a large, artist led environmental regeneration project.

### **Consultation**

nva organisation has strong links with local communities and genuine efforts were made to consult with as many residents as possible.

Linda Macdonald, nva organisation's Resource Manager, told me how she used to work as Arts Development Officer in Easterhouse, the notorious 1950s built 'spillover' estate where asylum seekers – the first to be subjected to the government's dispersal policy – now try with more or less success to rub along with the indigenous residents. It was there that she learnt that it can be hard to communicate with everyone, and not everyone wants to be involved or participate in your project.

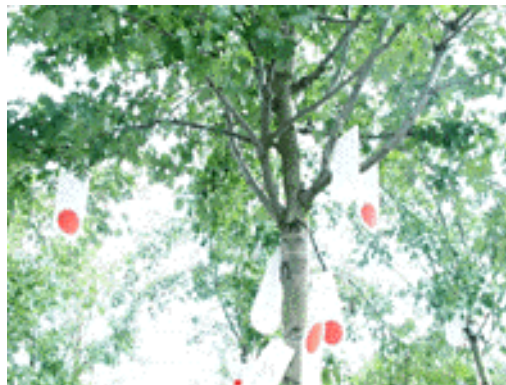
With this proviso, nva organisation set out to be truly inclusive. Their community liaison officer went out every day for 2 years, consulting with people in the immediate vicinity and further afield, before the decision was made as to what type of garden this would be. Workshops were conducted with the five primary schools and one secondary school in the area. Recognising the need to be culturally aware, visits were made to the key faith groups including the Sikh community who have just been granted planning permission to build a Gurdwara on neighbouring land. Although Pollokshields hosts the main Asian population in Glasgow, the only Hindu Temple is in the city centre, so consultations were also conducted there.

Feedback from questionnaires and interviews revealed that people wanted a safe, peaceful, beautiful garden with water in it. Asked, "How can you use this?" people responded that the garden needed to be educational, family oriented, alcohol free, and to respect a preference for gender segregated public spaces by employing a female gardener.

### **Design concepts**

Although not every particular need may be met, many of the desired elements are apparent in the resulting landscape. It is clear from the subtlety embodied in The Hidden Gardens' many, beautiful design features that these consultations have gone far deeper than the typical, token efforts of some 'top-down' projects. Such specific attention to detail, within a holistic design, can only result from authentic conversations, the engagement of whole persons transcending cultural barriers to connect at all levels – mind, body and spirit.

To quote Angus Farquar, Creative Director of nva organisation, 'The Hidden Gardens celebrate the universal spirit of nature through horticulture and human culture, a dialogue, which at its most sublime can help us to sense the soul of the world and the joy of being part of it.' As such the gardens are seen as a respite and refuge where bigotry, racism and conflict are challenged by the use of imagination; a sanctuary dedicated to peace.



### **Hard landscaping and Artworks**

Until recently a derelict eyesore, the plot of land behind Tramway in fact has an interesting history. Originally a tree nursery, after a period of disuse it had then been converted to a tram depot and boiler house. These layers of industrial wasteland and woodland wilderness are retained in City Design Co-operative's contemporary 'reinterpretation' of the site.

Designers Rolf Roscher and Chris Rankin state that they had aimed 'to trace back to sources of common ideas and themes' linking divergent communities through their respective horticultural traditions. Julie Brook's Broken Circle, for instance, is a micro- built environment, a circular rill exploring the relationship

between water and land, which draws inspiration from both Islamic and English gardens. It is one of five distinct art installations linked to a spiritual overview encapsulated in the idea that all aspects of life are non-oppositional. This thinking gives rise to the unifying design feature of a strictly formal pattern of paths encompassing the Hidden Gardens, echoing the age-old sacred routes surrounding hills, stupas, temples, mosques and monasteries.

Sandstone way-markers engraved with Gerry Loose's circular poems repeat the numerological theme found in the five pillars of Islam, the five sacred trees of Buddhism (and the five sacred things of Wicca?). Peering into a vast aluminium kaleidoscope, I disappeared for a moment into a minute, meditative otherworld within its coloured interior. Kids apparently love this artwork, which swivels like the old witches hats from my childhood playgrounds. Perhaps the most enchanting discovery is the xyloteque – a kind of woodland library of Scottish trees, which defies description. It simply has to be experienced!

### **Cultural planting**

The Hidden Gardens have been described as Asian / Celtic gardens. Plants such as magnolia, black bamboo and Chinese plum, chosen to express local cultures, are paired with indigenous sister species. The garden explores the idea of the movement of plants across continents. Unlike so many gardens in Britain were plants from many parts of the globe coexist, all the plants here are either Asian or 'native'. The Muslim community asked for fruiting trees such as apple and fig; Hindus wanted to see herbs – basil and tulsi.

Although the old boiler house chimney still stands tall, a key feature of the site, in many ways the central figure of the Hidden Garden is the ginkgo tree. This stately tree has spread its green protecting crown over the earth for 300 million years. 160 million years ago it grew worldwide, including in Scotland and the countries of origin of many of the communities of people and plants here now, so in a sense it is both native and exotic. In ancient times, "Asia's Sacred Tree" protected the temples of Japan and China from evil spirits. This living fossil seems to have defied time and changes in the environment. Its regenerative power is immense. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it was brought via Holland to the whole of Europe where it inspired Goethe's poetry and later appeared in the Art Nouveau decorations common on building facades around Glasgow. Now virtually extinct in the wild, this tree stands as a monument to common origins.



### **Participation**

After two years of preparation, Hidden Garden opened to the public on the auspicious occasion of the Summer Solstice, June 2003.

nva organisation have worked with the Tourist Board to ensure the widest possible publicity for the garden. The thinking is that by bringing tourists into the area, the garden can help to give a much-needed boost to the economy of Pollokshields and to the city of Glasgow as a whole. It seems to be working. Already a great many people have visited Hidden Garden. The visitors' book contains a very cosmopolitan selection of entries of travellers from far and wide. Comments are overwhelmingly positive, describing the garden as "magic", "wonderful", "fabulous" and "funky".



Two Open Days in September 2003 were aimed more at local residents and attracted 300 people per day, generating a healthy list of potential volunteers.

Volunteer roles will include giving guided tours to visitors. There are also opportunities for local people to come and take part in gardening. Volunteers recently helped to plant six thousand bulbs on a bank bordering the site.

### **Training**

There is a training element to the project. nva organisation currently employs two school vocational trainees who attend courses, run by Glasgow City Council, in hard and soft landscaping. They will work for one day a week with the Hidden Garden on a six month placement, including learning about how to work with Black and minority ethnic communities. After this period the council guarantees them an interview for a modern apprenticeship. A new training scheme is also due to start in March 2004, funded by Arts in Business

Daldowie, the council's training centre, welcomes 160 recruits per year, through promotions in schools, but this was not enticing representative proportions of young people from Glasgow's ethnic communities to come forward. So nva organisation is now working with BEN's EQUAL Project and Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance to address this issue.

### **Events**

Throughout the Autumn a series of free events are taking place at the Hidden Gardens. Every Saturday there is Storytelling about nature and all things magical; and on Sundays, music sessions blending classical, Celtic and World music, served up with hot soup. Most exciting of all is surely the Festivals of Light. This season of celebration includes lucky Rangoli painting for Diwali, a bazaar in the follow up to Eid, and Winter illuminations, rounding off with chestnuts and a carol concert in late December. The Diwali celebration has already taken place. It was a huge success, attracting about 900 people, in spite of Glasgow's first proper rain for 6 months.

### **The Future**

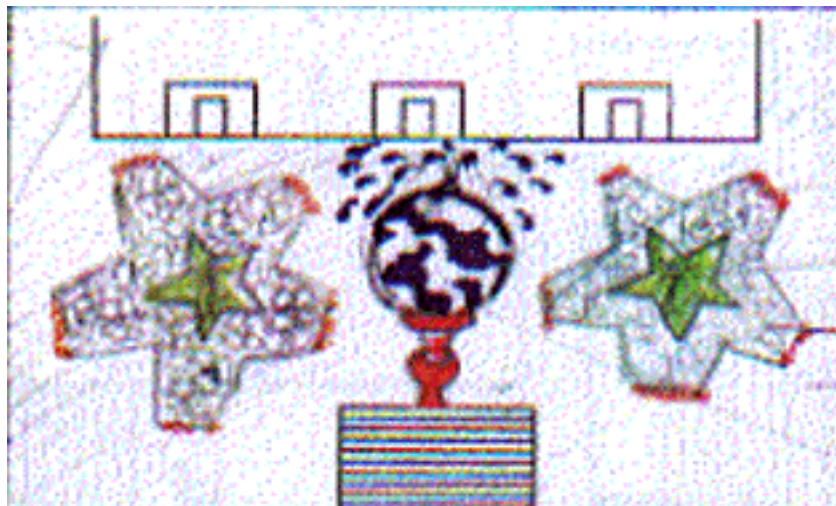
One area of the Hidden Gardens site remains to be developed. Currently used by the gardener as a storage area, the idea is to create an open-air, culture-friendly kitchen complete with rammed earth bread oven. So there's lots of potential for greater community involvement in the Hidden Gardens as time goes by.

**Kafel Centre  
Swansea**

**Contact: Omer Williams, BEN South Wales Development Officer**

**t: 01792 468268**

**e: omer@ben-network.org.uk**



It is now clear that the majority of Swansea and its surrounding area's growing black and ethnic minority community are a permanent feature of the multi-cultural society that is the UK.

Kafel is a voluntary charity organisation working with Swansea's Muslim ethnic minority community, taking its name from an Arabic word meaning 'to nurture'. This community is made up of people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and includes Pakistanis, Arabs, Turks, Malaysians, Mauritian Indians, Africans and many others, as well as Swansea's largest and most disadvantaged community – the Bangladeshi community. Together the Muslim community makes up around 70% of the ethnic minority population of Swansea.

It is Kafel's intention that the Centre should benefit, in particular, the most vulnerable and neglected sections of this community, namely, women, the youth, the elderly and the disabled. With this in mind, it is proposed that in the evening, the Centre would provide sporting activities and during the day, it would become a day centre for the elderly. It would also have a whole floor set aside for women with crèche facilities available, as provisions for Muslim mothers and their children are currently non-existent in the community. On weekends, at present, there is nowhere for the community to gather for social activities, such a centre would provide this and cater for functions such as parties and weddings.

While it is Kafel's primary intention to provide services and facilities for those ethnic minority Muslim communities, whose social needs are currently not being met, we are happy to open the Centre to others. The organisation wishes to make the Centre and its facilities available for hire to the wider Welsh community, so that as many people as possible can benefit from what we hope will become a shared resource.

The Kafel Centre aims to provide the following:

- Cultural Awareness Seminars
- Conference and Lecture Rooms•• Play Groups and Crèche Facilities
- Fully equipped Sports Hall
- Gymnasium and Health Club
- Weekend/Saturday Schools and Homework Clubs

- Mother Tongue classes
- Anti-Drug Addiction and Anti-Crime Programmes
- Social Activities for the Elderly
- Landscaped Community Garden
- Translation and Advice Service
- Complete Access for the Disabled
- Community Organisations Resource Room
- Arts Centre (with exhibition and workshop)

Many of the above will be carried out in partnership with local governmental, statutory and voluntary bodies.

### **How The Garden Project Came About**

Kafel were invited, by the Minority Ethnic Women's Network (Swansea), to a meeting where the Black Environment Network was making a presentation of work they had carried out with various ethnic minority community groups throughout England and Wales, to help them establish community gardens in their local area. Among the projects featured in the slide-show presentation were those by other Muslim communities around the country, and which reflected Muslim art and culture. BEN's Development Worker was approached after the meeting and invited to visit the Kafel Centre to view the courtyard area that the Muslim community in Swansea was keen to develop.

It has been known for some time that there is a demonstrable need for such a community garden for those ethnic minorities who live in Swansea's city centre, in particular the Bangladeshi community. The majority of those who will be using the Kafel Centre, live locally in high density housing and have limited access to gardens or communal areas due to lack of private transport or affordable public transport.

The Kafel Centre is ideally suited to meet this need, being situated in the Castle Ward which has a high percentage of Bangladeshi and other minority communities, and having a sizeable but unused area at the front of the building. The Kafel Centre aims to cater for Swansea's Muslim ethnic minority community by providing a range of activities and services particularly aimed at women, young people, the elderly and those with disabilities. The Multi-Cultural Community Garden will provide a safe, attractive environment within walking distance of their homes.

The transformation of the garden will also enhance the Kafel Centre's presence in the local community, and send out a positive message by creating an amenity that can benefit the wide community. At present there are very few green spaces in the city centre and the Kafel Centre provides an ideal location for creating such a space.

After the meeting with BEN, the Kafel representative, who had been present at the meeting, fed back information about BEN's presentation to the Kafel Centre's committee. The committee was inspired, as they finally felt that a fantastic opportunity had presented itself to make the most of the unused land at the front and to the sides of the building.

Following BEN's visit to the Centre, to which Prince's Trust, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and Community Design Service were also invited to come and offer their suggestions, CDS carried out a preliminary site survey and reported their findings to the Kafel Centre committee. A meeting was then arranged with the above parties to discuss the best way to move forward. At this meeting, the committee was advised to provide documentation demonstrating community interest in and support of the garden project, and to ensure that the community was involved at all stages of the project's development.

## **The Kafel Centre Garden Consultation**

On Sunday 30th January 2000, a consultation took place to gain the views and ideas of the local community about the proposed Multi-Cultural Garden at the Kafel Centre. The consultation was led by Omar Williams (Kafel), Tanya Nash (Prince's Trust) and Siobhan Hayward (BEN). Participatory methods were used to enable everyone to make a contribution and their voice to be heard. Over 40 people, representing a wide age range and from different ethnic backgrounds took part in the event. The feedback was very positive and included many imaginative ideas for the development of a Multi-Cultural Garden. As part of the consultation process, a questionnaire was distributed to the wide community. Out of 200 questionnaires, 104 were returned, a 52% response rate, which was excellent.

## **Analysis of the Consultation Event**

The consultation event involved a visioning question "Imagine in ten years time the Kafel Centre is serving the people in our community in a positive way. What do you see physically in the garden and what activities do you see taking place?" In groups of 6 participants drew ideas for the garden or wrote suggestions down. Each group fed back their ideas which were then grouped to create a spider diagram. Once all the ideas had been recorded, each person was given 5 stars to vote which headings were most important to them. They could put all their stars under one heading if there was one thing they felt strongly about, likewise there was no pressure to use all the stars.

## **Visioning Question Results**

- Q. What would you like to see in the Garden?
- Q. What would you use the Garden for?
- Q. When would you be able to use the Garden

## **Conclusion**

The excellent response to the consultation demonstrated the enthusiasm and support for a Multi-Cultural Garden Project and gave a clear idea of the type of garden the community would like to see developed, as well as highlighting many community and social benefits. Below is a summary of the main points:

Members of the community consulted about the project envisaged the garden as a beautiful landscaped area, with lots of colour, trees, shrubs and flowers. Seating and shade were identified and the interpretation of the site through artwork reflecting a diversity of cultures, for example floor mosaics and a fountain. A play area was also seen as an important element.

## **Benefits to the community included:**

- Creating a safe and attractive environment in a built-up, urban environment;
- Creating an amenity that will benefit a wide cross-section of the Muslim community and wider community. In particular, women, young people, the elderly and those with disabilities by providing seating and shelter, a play area, and activities for all age ranges;
- Promoting health by encouraging people to be outdoors and engage in activities such as gardening and growing vegetables and herbs;
- Providing a focal point for social occasions and helping to promote positive relationship between generations and developing links with the wider community;
- Involving a wide cross-section of the community in developing activities and events relevant to the garden. For example, the consultation showed that members of the community were very keen to develop art related projects for the garden that reflected the different cultures (e.g. designing floor mosaics, murals, centre pieces such as a fountain, signage and decorative railings). By involving the

community in the design and ongoing development of the project it will help to promote a sense of ownership and care for the garden.

**Benefits to the environment included:**

- Introducing native trees and shrubs;
- Introducing plants from the Indian sub-continent and Africa to reflect Swansea's Muslim ethnic minority communities' heritage;
- Introducing artwork created by the community which represents links between Islam and the environment;

Ensuring that those materials used come from sustainable sources.

The questionnaire also demonstrated that the garden would be well used at all times during the day. The Muslim community in Swansea is very conscious of how ethnic minorities are viewed in general by members of the wider British society. They are, therefore, keen to do something positive not just for their own community but for the rest of Swansea, to show that they want to bring benefit to everyone by playing their part in developing and taking care of the common environment



## **Khalsa Wood Nottingham**

**Contact: Harbant Kaur Sehra**  
**t: 0115 979 9227**

Harbant Kaur Sehra, community development worker, was originally approached by Groundwork Nottingham in 1994 to work with children and young people in Asian communities, gathering and sowing seeds in a park. She went on to organise countryside access taster trips with the Hindu Muslim and Sikh communities.

Then in 1999, Harbant co-ordinated a very significant event:

13th April is the usual date of Vaisakhi, the Sikh festival that celebrates the founding of the Khalsa –the fellowship of baptised Sikhs. Khalsa was founded by Guru Boginda Singh in 1699, and so 1999 saw the celebration of the 300th anniversary or tercentenary of the birth of Khalsa. This was a big international festival, and many British Sikhs went to India to celebrate.

Yet, thanks to a very high profile campaign by Harbant, 600 people attended a special ceremony in Bestwood Country Park - the founding of Khalsa Wood.

People in the Sikh community are very motivated by faith. This includes a reverence for nature, a commitment to family and community life, and a tradition of 'sewa' (altruism and volunteering). Vaisakhi is a time for people to stand up for their beliefs. The Sikh community in Nottinghamshire were looking for an appropriate way to express these values and mark this important occasion. With this in mind it was decided to stage a grand tree-planting ceremony and plant 300 trees!



As one young person has explained, *"I am a Sikh, I might be involved with other voluntary organisations but I want to know more about my own community, my own identity and I want to pass this on to my children."* volunteer from Sikh Community Youth Service (SCYS) quoted in *My Time, My Community Myself: Experiences of Volunteering within the Black Community* by Seema Bhasin, National Centre for Volunteering.

Of course, trees are a wonderful symbol of sustainability. Children will remember the special day when this wood was established, and in the future they will reflect on the meaning of that occasion for their community. And in years, maybe centuries to come people will look back with pride at the contribution these families made to creating a beautiful green space and conserving the environment. What better way to express the enduring values of your culture than by cultivating a living monument to stand as a legacy for the future and a lasting testimony to your commitment and faith.

So the success of the event was due in large measure to the conviction of the community. As Harbant put it, *"If we do something in name of religion, like voluntary work or giving to charity, we are very keen."* On a practical note, Harbant was also able to contribute to the day's success by planning a high profile campaign.

The idea was to plant 300 trees, one for each year of the tercentenary of Khalsa. To do this, Harbant aimed to attract 300 people to plant one tree each. In order to make sure everyone in the community felt included and no-one left out, she sent leaflets to all the Gurdwaras, put details in the Punjabi press and advertised on Asian community radio. She was able to provide transport thanks to a grant from Green Connections.

To her delight, over 600 people arrived on the day, and in spite of terrible weather, they dug holes under umbrellas in the pouring rain! At first one tree was allocated to each family. This worked well, because it encouraged family members to work together, and gave them a sense of 'ownership' of the particular tree,

and hence the Khalsa wood as a whole. As the first plantings were completed, people returned to help plant the remainder, so the entire day was a great communal effort.

And there was a grand vegetarian barbecue - in true Sikh tradition of the 'langar' where a meal is shared by all, regardless of social barriers.



The trees chosen were oak saplings, which were transplanted from other parts of the park where they would not have fared so well. They were lifted and brought to their new site in advance by volunteers from the Sikh community with the help of park Rangers, Groundwork and Princes Trust volunteers.

Many people who have come to Britain from the Punjab share a common heritage of having been farmers by trade so they have skills and knowledge about growing plants, but they do not have so many opportunities to practice those skills over here. They may very well grow vegetables in a small garden, or perhaps keep an allotment, but this partnership with Bestwood Country Park provides access to land for planting trees, which would not otherwise be possible for most families.

Rather than mark each tree with a plaque linking it to the family who planted it - this might not be such a good idea, in case some of the trees were to die - the whole area has been dedicated with one large wood carving in the sign of Khanda - the symbol of Sikhism. This was filmed by Carlton TV and Harbant has a video of the occasion.

Many Sikh families are living in the city of Nottingham and surrounding towns and villages in the county. As well as providing a focus point for community celebrations, Khalsa Wood is also a place for family outings and quiet retreat.



Since the 300th Vaisakhi there have been annual gatherings. A further 200 saplings were planted in 2000. In 2001 foot and mouth disease precautions meant that 400 more young oaks had to remain in their pots to be planted on another occasion. More recently, at a tree-planting ceremony in February 2002, 100 fruit trees have been added, and it is hoped that, once mature, these will provide a good crop and help to generate some income to support the Ranger service.

It is no wonder, considering all this, that Khalsa Wood has received so much recognition from the mainstream environment sector, including:

Award from BT / WWF - environment in the community

Acorn Awards - trees of Time and Place 1999/2000 shortlisted (small acorn)

Harbant asked to go to London for DCMS' planning meeting on social inclusion policy

Nottingham Council have a clear vision of the importance of trees in the environment. You can read more about this on their website

[http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/coun/departments/leisure\\_com/trees/default.asp](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/coun/departments/leisure_com/trees/default.asp)

People in the Sikh community understand this and they are also very aware of the part played by trees in preserving people's health and wellbeing. There is a strong concern to see that the trees are growing well, and to continue improvements to the Khalsa Wood, to make it a welcoming and safe place for the whole community. For although the Sikhs have been a central force in creating this new green space, Khalsa Wood is a resource for everyone, and it is open to the public at all times.

This sometimes means that Asian people may feel vulnerable - there has been a problem with vandalism, which police are trying to tackle. Harbant is concerned that this has led parents to feel less safe to allow their children to visit the wood on youth group outings. They have done other activities like horse riding instead, but it would be a pity if they did not choose to build on the emerging tradition of community activities in Khalsa Wood. Harbant remains optimistic.

Following the success last year of a Punjabi play, staged in November with lottery funding, there are plans this Easter to perform poetry about Khalsa Wood. A brilliant writer came before and gave poetry workshops to the young people, in the Sikh tradition of revering nature - these were published in the Punjab Times. Watch the Newsflash item on this website for details of future events.

There are plans afoot to create a gateway into Khalsa Wood, to put up carved posts and form a pathway leading through the oaks, and to install places to sit near the fruit trees as a meditation area. The project also links to a project in Delhi where a worker from Manchester is helping to set up a tree nursery to supply trees for planting around all the Gurdwaras in the province.

Other useful links and contacts:

Nottingham Agenda 21 website

[http://www.nottsagenda21.org.uk/action/h\\_vol.shtml](http://www.nottsagenda21.org.uk/action/h_vol.shtml)

has more information on Khalsa Wood and other green initiatives in the area.

<http://www.lhi.org.uk/index.html> - Local Heritage Initiative has more information on Khalsa Wood, it allows you to comment of the project and gives information on how you can do a similar initiative in your local area.

Sikh Community and Youth Service, 27 Park Road, Lenton, Nottingham NG7 1LB (tel. 0115 950 7481)  
[booklet available on Sikh History in Britain - aimed at teachers, parents and young people].

## London Wetland Centre

**Contact: Stephanie Fudge, Centre Operations Manager**

**t: 020 8409 4403**

**e: [Stephanie.fudge@wwt.org.uk](mailto:Stephanie.fudge@wwt.org.uk)**



Directly under the flight path of London's Heathrow Airport is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), protected by law because it is the home of the rare Smew, a small duck. This may sound at first like a rather obscure Green Space of the Month, but read on, because this is in fact one of the top wildlife sites in England, and it is taking special steps to involve the many ethnic communities living nearby.

BEN worked with London Wetland Centre on a consultancy to see how they could increase the participation of ethnic communities in the use, improvement or design of elements of this urban green space. We helped them to look at what they have done so far to encourage and enable ethnic community groups to participate; what response this has received from the groups; the potential for developing ethnic community involvement and how this might be realised. The aim of this article is to share this learning with other green space groups who may be engaged in a similar process.

London Wetland Centre was originally a reservoir complex on the outskirts of the capital, which became redundant when the London Ring Main was installed. It is now an enormous 105 acres of specially created wildlife habitats including a lagoon and many ponds, pools, lakes and reed beds attracting more than 150 different kinds of birds and a host of butterflies, dragonflies, bats and frogs.

More than this, it is also a fast growing visitor attraction, the first of its kind, offering Londoners and tourists alike the chance to submerge themselves in nature and commune with wildlife at very close quarters without even leaving the Greater London area



Opened in 2000, this project is a good example of the way the environment sector has developed over the years, moving beyond a purely scientific, ecological remit to include important social elements. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's stated mission is "saving wetlands for wildlife and people", and this is clearly reflected in the high quality design of the Wetland Centre, in terms of sustainability and access. Furthermore, a unique programme of public awareness and environmental education ensures that people have the chance to engage meaningfully with wildlife in a natural setting.





This ethos really chimes with BEN's philosophy. As Judy Ling Wong OBE, Director of BEN, has often said, people will only learn to love and protect nature if they have the opportunity to experience and enjoy contact with the natural world. A visit to London Wetland Centre offers an excellent opportunity for any community group to really engage with wildlife in context, in the landscape. For ethnic communities there is a special dimension, since the Wetland is a sanctuary for a great diversity of migratory birds from all corners of the globe. Whatever your cultural heritage, you will be able to find links connecting you – connecting us all – into the global web of life.

In terms of social commitment, Centre Operations Manager Stephanie Fudge told me that she and her staff are passionately keen to get disadvantaged people out here. They want to encourage a feeling of wonder, safety and entitlement among all their visitors. To this end they are seeking funding for an outreach/social inclusion worker. Meanwhile they are working to foster an organisational culture of trust, safety and spiritual nurturing, which will radiate out into everything they do. In this way they intend to keep people interested and learning, inspire them, and let people be themselves.

In practical terms, it is hard to monitor the Wetland Centre's visitor profiles in terms of ethnicity. Yet as Stephanie Fudge, Centre Operations Manager explained, casual observation suggests that audiences are becoming more diverse. However, the challenge is now to find ways to build on initiatives to date, in order to increase the participation of ethnic communities in the use, improvement or design of elements of this urban green space.



So far the staff team have looked at how they can offer access to different groups, for example by getting companies to sponsor groups to visit and make a contribution to the environment. This approach has been tried with a group of young carers – a diverse group of young people of whom around 50% are from ethnic communities and most are also from deprived backgrounds.

Southwark Young Carers came to the Wetland Centre for a respite break, sponsored by BP. The staff here developed the project with the young carers group, raised funds for transport and materials, and organised special activities to help the young people enjoy a rare chance to connect with nature. After icebreakers and a site visit they went on a bat walk, learned how to build bat boxes, some of which they put up here and some they took home to put up as part of London Biodiversity Action Plan. They made a moth trap in the

evening – and met David Attenborough, who had just chanced by! They slept over, did a spot of bird watching before breakfast and on the second morning they made plans to come back in the future and monitor how many bats have moved in. they had a party to celebrate their achievements, and obviously had a great time.

Staff of the Wetland Centre are engaged in an ongoing access project, of which the Southwark Young Carers Project is just a small part. They have in place an outline outreach programme, have raised some funds and are working to raise more. They want to encourage ethnic community groups to organise events linked to international wetlands themes. For instance, Stephanie suggested that London's Brazilian community might like to help support the endangered Merganser duck. Or perhaps there is a group who would wish to adopt the White Winged Wood Duck from NE Asia?

Birds have immense symbolic value in most cultures. Think of the crane, symbol of longevity in China; the Eagle, signifying freedom for many Native American peoples; or the owl which augurs bad luck in certain Mediterranean cultures. To the early Christians in Celtic Britain, the 'wild goose chase' was a metaphor for the journey of the spirit through life. The custom, still common in Britain, of greeting magpies with a courteous gesture, derives from a tradition among one of our older ethnic communities – the Romanies.

People, like birds, have always migrated. Swallows, swifts, house martens and sand martens fly in from Africa, heralding the start of summer. Shoveller ducks and teal, commonly found in India, travel East to West and can also be seen here in Britain. The Wetland Centre aims to reflect this natural diversity in both its human and winged visitors.

The site is divided into three main areas, the world wetlands, water life and the wild side. The world wetlands area is a bit like a zoo for birds. The whole area is protected by a strong fence to stop foxes from catching the birds. Within that you will find 14 zones representing Africa, South America, The Falklands, North America, Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, East Asia (rice paddy), South West Asia (reed swamp), Siberia, Spitzbergen, Scandinavia and Iceland. There is also a peat swamp forest and a kingfisher bank.



Wetlands are special areas where the land meets the water. There are many types of wetland including riverbanks, water meadows, flood plains, mangrove swamps, peat bogs, ponds, pools, lakes, reed beds, lagoons, coastal estuaries, mud flats, salt marshes, coral reefs... They are very important places for all kinds of wild plants and animals, especially fish, amphibians and mammals, but most particularly for birds, whose presence serves as an indication of the ecological health of an area.

Wetlands world wide are under threat, from every manner of unsustainable development – increasing air travel, inappropriate building projects, degradation of water quality through agriculture, industry, damming and tourism. 50% of wetlands have been lost in the last 100 years. It is vital that this trend be halted, and indeed reversed. The Wetland Centre wants to build links between community associations across the world to assist with monitoring populations of wild birds.





If you are interested in finding out more about national and international wetlands conservation projects, and helping to make them more inclusive, check the BEN website for a Newsflash about the Wetland Link International website, due to be launch shortly.

**Lower Spen Nature Reserve  
Ravensthorpe**

**Contact: Jennifer Barr, Wildspace! Community Liaison Officer**  
**t: 0113 231 2360**  
**e: [info@pondtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@pondtrust.org.uk)**



**Context**

Kirklees (Metropolitan Council) is a poor area relative to the rest of W. Yorks. It is one of the few flat areas in the county with a high proportion of countryside. The economy is based on manufacturing. With a population of around 850 thousand, there is high unemployment and lots of empty council housing. People get 'dumped' here.

Batley and Dewsbury were Irish areas, but now have large Gujarati communities. Dewsbury has one of the largest areas of derelict land in the UK – ex canal and railway land.

Ravensthorpe is more multicultural, with more scattered populations, and less social cohesion. There are housing, crime and drugs issues. Ravensthorpe was once home to Italian, Polish and Ukranian communities (did people assimilate or move away?) It is currently 50:50 white: Asian, of which mainly Kashmiri / Mirpuri (speaking Urdu or Punjabi) plus a few Indians (no Bangladeshis) with lots of refugees and asylum seekers – mainly Iraqi Kurds and Africans. There are a handful of Bosnians and Croatians. The white population is ageing compared to the younger Asian population profile. Culturally, there is a significant 'generation gap' in the Asian community.





## Conservation

Wildspace! Is a national programme run by English Nature and the New Opportunities Fund to encourage community involvement and management of Local Nature Reserves. Ponds for People is a national community project run by the Ponds Conservation Trust.

Jenny Barr manages a number of Ponds for People projects across West Leeds, most of which are well supported. The Lower Spen LNR is a quality green space in an area of high traffic congestion and air pollution. It is working well as a nature reserve, but it suffers serious problems of vandalism, including dumping, arson, racist graffiti etc.

The local Youth Offending Team has been carrying out reparation work on site with small groups of young offenders. Benches which had been destroyed by fire have now been replaced, with wheelchair accessible bird hides. New pond scrapes are under construction. And in a innovative attempt to avoid vandalism, 'interpretation boards' are being installed – on the council web site!

These improvements should help to make BME visitors to the site feel safer, but what else can be done to increase levels of engagement with the nature reserve?

Jenny works with local schools and did a bat box workshop recently.

- C of E Junior School 90% BME – 'at bursting point'. Headmaster Mr Lockwood. Works with a Neighbourhood Enrichment Officer appointed by the council to raise Asian parents' awareness of their children's education.
- White kids travel to the Catholic school in Dewsbury or Murfield. Grace Landscapes built a garden there last year and parents are asked to maintain it at six-monthly events.
- Boothroyd Primary School has an air pollution monitor in the playground and parents are very concerned about high rates of cancer in children.

Jenny also circulated a questionnaire to residents about their interest in nature conservation and got a good response, including a few Asian names.

She is working with freelance artist Adam Strickson (ex of Chol Theatre and Hadrian's Wall project) to develop a community arts project, aiming to reacquaint people with nature and bring together people of different communities in a celebration of nature through art. A small EMAS grant (from BEN's Ethnic Minorities Award Scheme) was accepted in 2004 and an application for the majority of the funding was made to Yorkshire Arts Council.

Adam has interviewed and written about Travellers in York, and he is currently working on a cross-cultural drama project linking bilingual young people in Caernavon and Bradford.

Adam has observed that UK Asian communities often come from a farming background, but over here they have little or no contact with the land and the memory soon goes. He is asking why? People in Bradford have more time now and there is an increase in gardening and walking for health, especially among Bengali women. Community development initiatives tend to move quicker in some cities like Bradford and Leicester (perhaps Leeds is an exception) and take longer to establish in the towns and villages like Ravensthorpe. Also, Bangladeshi women use small spaces to grow food, but Pakistani women do not. We don't know why.

On 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2005 Adam led a project, together with Loca, a local arts agency, and community development workers Fahat and Maria to create a 3m diameter 8 pointed Islamic star made entirely from natural materials: bullrushes, rosehips, moss, holly, bindweed and giant hogweed all suspended on a willow frame. The sculpture took more than 3 days to build and involved over 20 volunteers. Gold clay stars and red ribbon were used for the finishing touches. Once complete the star was photographed and the image used to produce Eid and Christmas cards.

A similar event is being planned to take place with school children on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March.

## **The Medicine Wheel Milton Keynes**

**Contact: Peter Goss, Trustee**  
**t: 01234 712933**  
**e: Petergoss999@hotmail.com**



The Magic Medicine Wheel is a beautiful collection of stones. Native Americans believe that the position of stones such as these creates an energy which magnifies spiritual energy.

The ability to connect with your spiritual self may be partly due to the presence of the Buddhist Temple and adjacent Peace Pagoda, all within close proximity, providing an ideal place for quiet reflection and thought.

### **About the Medicine Wheel**

The Medicine Wheel is an exciting stone structure set on 'sacred' Green Space in Willen North Park, Milton Keynes. The stones are positioned to be in alignment with the earth's natural powerful energies, and it is said that if prayers are offered at the centre or 'source' of the wheel, those wishes are amplified. At the centre is the Sacred Fire which is lit at ceremonies, the fire represents the Sacred Spirit in all things, places, people, and for all time. The Guardians of the Wheel believe that its essence is unconditional love, wisdom, peace and illumination.

Roy Littlesun, the adopted son of a Native American elder Titus Quomayumptewa, designed and initiated the Wheel as part of a worldwide movement to bring Peace to our planet. A group of volunteers co-ordinated and assisted in the building of it, and it is from these first volunteers that the Trustees or Guardians of the Wheel were created.

This 'Common Ground' is open for use by individuals and groups for meditation, celebration and prayer. The use of the Wheel is inclusive, non-denominational and open to use by people of all faiths and none.

The Wheel is made up of 108 limestones from the nearby village of Weston Underwood. Native Chiefs from the Onodage tribe came to Weston Underwood and spent time praying and smoking their pipes of peace over the place where the stones originated from.

The Wheel has four large gateways which represent the four compass points, the seasons, the races and the four elements. The two lesser gateways on the outer circle are aligned along an earth natural energy line, in Milton Keynes.

The outer and inner circles symbolise our outer and inner worlds, the universe and humanity within.



There is a single flat stone lying to the South East of the East Gate, known as 'The Africa Stone' – this is linked to the Kalahari Bush people who have also built a 'Circle of Hearts Medicine Wheel' in the Kalahari dessert.

The uses of the Wheel are varied, ranging from celebrating the equinoxes, Blessing of Rivers, International Women's Day and One World Week. All are welcome to join in any of the ceremonies. Information of coming events can be found on the notice board near the Buddhist Temple opposite the Wheel. If you wish to use the Medicine Wheel to hold an event or ceremony, contact the trustees via the Buddhist Temple.

The Aims of the Medicine Wheel are:

- To provide a Sacred Space in Willen North Park
- To advance education
- To widen public participation for balanced use of a green space for quiet reflection, thought, meditation, prayer, gatherings, ceremonies and celebrations
- To promote the peaceful message and meaning of the Medicine Wheel
- To promote cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue.

### **Future Plans**

The trustees are in the process of producing an educational pack for schools, youth and community groups. Other organisations are welcome to use the Medicine Wheel.

There are many different manifestations of the Medicine Wheel, including the traditional and the constantly evolving concepts of the Wheel, such as that in Willen Park. Further information on Medicine Wheels can be found at [www.pathofthefeather.com/pof6.htm](http://www.pathofthefeather.com/pof6.htm)

### **Activities in the Open Green Space**

The Medicine Wheel stands on land owned by the Milton Keynes Parks Trust. The volunteers, who are now Trustees (preferring to see themselves as guardians of the wheel) requested Landscape Architect Neil Higson to draw up detailed plans from the first sketches by Roy Littlejohn who initiated the Circle of Hearts Medicine Wheel, as part of a worldwide movement.

On visiting the park it is unlikely you would be bored because the ethics of the Medicine Wheel are so inclusive. Opposite the Wheel is a beautiful Buddhist Temple and next to Willen lake stands the Peace Pagoda, these are both often linked with the programme of activities around the Wheel itself, and annual ceremonies by Nipponzan Myohoji and various Buddhist traditions are held here. There is also a 'One World Tree' on the hill near the Peace Pagoda. People tie their prayers and thoughts on it with ribbons.

The anniversary of the Peace Pagoda is held in June, when speeches and messages of peace are offered. There are music, dance and cultural performances - a true event for all where everyone is welcomed.





## **Mile End Park London**

**Contact: Lorraine Hart, Environment Trust**  
**t: 020 7264 4660**  
**e: [lorraine@envirotrust.org](mailto:lorraine@envirotrust.org)**

### **Introduction**

Criss-crossed by roads and intersected along race, class, gender and age lines, this urban park illustrates how people from diverse ethnic backgrounds negotiate 'contested space'.

Established in 1944, the Abercrombie Plan for London intended Mile End Park to serve as a 'green lung' allowing the impoverished, overcrowded East End to breathe. By the 1960s a sports stadium had been built and some landscaping achieved but the park was fragmented. A long, thin strip of open space alongside the canal, either side of the Mile End Road, commuter traffic cuts the park in two, and several main roads criss-cross the site, causing massive noise and air pollution and, at one time, making it very hard to walk or cycle between one residential area and another. The original dream was to create a unified stretch of parkland forming a green corridor and pedestrian link between North and South.

It was not until 1995 that the vision began to materialise, when the Environment Trust together with the East London Partnership and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, bid to the Millennium Commission for funds to transform Mile End Park into the popular amenity it is today. Known as 'The People's Park' and hailed as 'a model for the Millennium' by Cllr Helal Uddin Abbas, Leader of the Council, the development of Mile End Park was based on very extensive, very inclusive consultations. According to 'Mile End Park: A Celebration' published in summer 2001, 'a massive number of meetings were held with local people and the plans were changed numerous times to accommodate what the community said they wanted in the park. People wanted all different sections of the community to be able to enjoy the park, but in harmony, not in conflict.'

The key feature in achieving this sense of unity and harmony is Piers Gough's remarkable Green Bridge – a tree lined walkway and cycle route arching high above the Mile End Road, allowing easy passage between Limehouse and Bow. Ongoing maintenance of Mile End Park is funded in part by asset-based income generation ie rental from shop and restaurant premises at the foot of the 25m wide green bridge.

Other features in the park include beautifully landscaped terraces with sensory planting and lakes, which have helped to significantly increase biodiversity, attracting nesting birds, dragonflies and other wild life; an Ecology Centre to assist visitors in appreciating the importance of wildlife in the park; and an 'Arts Park' open air gallery and pavilion. A 1,000 seat natural amphitheatre, the Play Arena, is designed for all kinds of play and performance.

Facilities for young people are many and varied, including a children's park for the under 8s, electric go-karts for bigger children, and sports facilities for all ages, including a climbing wall and an extreme sports centre. An adventure playground has been built for bigger children, the plans for the structures being based on a competition-winning design by young women.

### **Contested space**

Lorraine Hart is now Director of the Environment Trust, and formerly organised a series of community consultations in her role as Community Liaison Officer between 1995 and 2002. She seems to know every inch of the park like the back of her hand and is on good terms with pretty much everyone in the area. Lorraine explained the make-up of the local communities, and the way this affects their use of the park. Because the park is open to the public, with an unfenced perimeter, it is impossible to monitor who uses it, but from casual observation it is clear that a range of ethnic communities freely use the park. However, some groups use certain parts of the park more than others, and there are sometimes tensions between different users.

The Eric Street Estate is mainly populated by Somalis and young people from the African community tend to use the top half of the park and Bow Warf.

In Stepney, the Ocean Estate houses mainly Bengali / Bangladeshi families who use the part of the park near the estate for extended family picnics. Occasionally one sees courting couples seeking a little privacy on a park bench.

The Somali community say that they don't feel safe using the Ocean Street part of the park, which they see as a Bengali territory, because of drug problems associated with the "Massive" gang. A Rapid Response Team has been set up as part of the youth work team to address the problem and funds have been found for a Connexions centre based in the park.

Bow is home to the African Caribbean community, while the area to the North of the Mile End Road is predominantly White, middle class, and the Palm Tree pub in middle of park used mainly by white working class people. Black boys often congregate in the park and Stepney pensioners complain to the council, simply about the presence of the boys, as if they feel that they pose some kind of vague threat.

The park plays host to an annual fairground visit and there was trouble one year when fighting broke out between local youths and Traveller lads.

### **Form and Function**

As well as tensions between the various ethnic community groups and different age groups using the park, there are tensions between the various functions the site serves. For example, there are tensions between the canal and the park with canal boat users on the one hand feeling vulnerable to vandalism, whilst themselves being seen by environmentalists as posing a threat to wild life inhabiting the banks and tow paths. Tensions exist between other sustainable transport users: cycle traffic has ballooned since the 'opening up' of Mile End Park, which can conflict with needs of other users such as walkers.

### **Friends group not very inclusive**

The Friends group runs lots of events with Bangladeshi women's groups but this doesn't necessarily lead to the women joining the Friends group. There is still work to be done in creating a Friends' group representative of all park users.

**Minet Country Park**  
**West London**

**Contact: Micah Ingalls**

**t: 0208 574 5935**

**e: [uk@arocha.org](mailto:uk@arocha.org) / [Micah.Ingalls@arocha.org](mailto:Micah.Ingalls@arocha.org)**

Minet Country Park is a newly created country park on a site of abandoned farmland in West London. International Christian conservation group A Rocha is facilitating the Living Waterways project with involvement of local Asian, white and Black communities from Southall and Hayes.

In an area of high-density housing where people have little access to green space, this once derelict site is beginning to flower, providing a welcome resource for local people and a vital habitat for wildlife. Skilled environmental scientists work alongside community activists to monitor changes in the way the site is used by plants, animals and human visitors. The site now has permanent legal protection. But developers are hoping to construct a huge housing estate on adjacent gas works land.



A Rocha's strong links with local community groups help to give voice to the concerns of different sections of the community regarding the future of Minet Country Park. The project's inclusive approach ensures equal opportunities for all staff and volunteers, whilst stimulating interfaith dialogue and assisting social cohesion. A wide-ranging programme of activities gives people of all ages and abilities a chance to get closer to nature. This project is a good example of faith groups working together to tackle issues of social and environmental justice.



## Living Waterways

A Rocha UK's Living Waterways project centres upon Minet Country Park, a new green space being created for wildlife habitat and human recreation in the densely built up area of West London where the boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon meet. Flanked by the well known British Asian community of Southall to the East and multicultural Hayes to the West, A Rocha's flagship site is situated in one of the most populated, and one of the most polluted parts of England.

Once owned by the Minet family, the site at Springfield Road comprises approximately 90 acres of former farmland just four miles from Heathrow airport. The land was allowed to fall derelict at one time and was bought by the GLC in the 1950s. Over the years, it has been used by certain of the local people for motorbike scrambling, car boot sales and so on. The entire site has been prone to fly tipping, and particularly the waterways - Yeading Brook, which runs along the Western edge of the land, and a storm drain which runs through the centre of the park.

There is an ongoing history of intense of industrial activity in the surrounding areas. Ancient and modern industrial architecture dominates the skyline in all directions save one: to the East, alongside the massive gasometer, can be seen the golden dome of the largest Sikh Temple outside of Amritsar. (See the web link at the end of this piece for more information about the opening of the Gurdwara in 2003, and about the Sikh community in Britain.)

One zone of this sizeable site, a thin strip of land between the river and the canal, belonging to British Waterways, is badly contaminated by chemical waste from canal dredging and waste products of the nearby gas works. Adjacent to Guru Nanak Sikh school and a residential neighbourhood comprising 80% people of South Asian origin, 10% Black British and 10% white people, this is as clear cut an example of a social and environmental justice issue as you could hope to find. This is a major issue, which A Rocha and the Southall Sustainability Forum intend to address



## The work so far

At a cost of one and a quarter million pounds, a brand new, very attractive Country Park has been created on the land, which is now owned by Hillingdon Borough Council. Rich in wildlife and accessible to local people, the site has a Children's playground and a lodge to house indoor, nature-based activities. Extensive landscaping has been undertaken to create water features, pathways, and a cycle track. The gas works zone is currently fenced off and negotiations are underway to create a local nature reserve here.



## Spiritual ethos, inclusive approach

The lead organisation in the partnership responsible for creating Minet Country Park is A Rocha, an international Christian environmentalist organisation committed to the conservation of nature through local, community-based programmes around the world. They have branches in 12 (15!) countries, including Portugal, India and the UK. The name A Rocha is Portuguese and means The Rock.

A Rocha is an equal opportunity organisation and, while distinctly Christian in its beliefs and practices, is open to people of all faiths and backgrounds. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation. As an Anglo-Welsh, practising Pagan I felt really welcomed by the staff and many diverse volunteers at their UK office. I joined the group for lunch - everybody eats together once a day - and was inspired by experiencing a profound depth of dialogue and debate about pressing issues of spirituality and sustainability.

### **Conservation, Education and Community**

There are three main strands to the work of A Rocha UK: conservation, education and community. They aim to achieve the holistic transformation of a diverse multicultural urban area through partnerships with groups and individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, finding common ground in learning to understand, appreciate and care for the local environment.

For instance, the idea of 'Creation Care' crosses religious and cultural divides. A Rocha was given £4,000 of Network Development Fund to bring together community and religious leaders to address environmental issues during 2003. Leaders from every major faith group in Southall and Hayes have signed an 'eco Pledge' agreeing to practice what they preach about the environment.

#### **Faith Leaders' Environmental Pledge**

**As representatives of the religious communities of Southall and Hayes, we:**

**Express our deep conviction** that religious and ethical values are vital in addressing the environmental challenges facing humanity both globally and locally.

**Acknowledge** that members of our faiths have often contributed to the poor state of the environment and have rarely practised the true teachings of our faiths.

**Commit ourselves** to educating our respective communities and followers on the environmental content of our religion with a view to promoting environmentally responsible behaviour.

**Commit ourselves** to promoting practices that are in accordance with our religious beliefs and based on respect for life and the need to live in harmony with nature.

SHARE newsletter (that's Southall and Hayes Action to Renew the Environment)

Issue no 1 in Spring 2003 carried details in Punjabi, Urdu and Somali about the religious leaders' Ecopledge, plans for Minet Country Park and details of planned activities. It also included a survey of residents' attitudes on environmental issues. Respondents' ethnic origins reflected the wider population. Results showed that most Southall residents strongly agree there is a connection between the quality of the environment and people's quality of life. Many believe that living wastefully is wrong and that religious organisations should take more responsibility for the environment. Top issues were fly tipping, pests and drugs, followed by crime, litter and traffic congestion. Most people only visit green spaces occasionally and 60% had not yet visited Minet Country Park.

### **The Context**

Aside from Minet Country Park, there are only two very small areas of green space within walking distance of Southall: Spikes Bridge Park and Southall Park. One local resident and businessman I spoke to recalled playing cricket there as a child, but complained that these places have not been well maintained. They have become unkempt and subject to the usual issues facing urban green spaces - litter, graffiti, dog mess, drug problems and so on, making people feel unsafe to use them.

### **Making it Happen**

The Living Waterways project acknowledges that Minet Country Park does not exist in a vacuum, but is embedded in a very diverse community with many challenges and problems of community cohesion. Home to settlers from every ethnic and political group in South Asia and many North African communities besides,



all the tensions of the sub-continent are acted out on street corners in this little West London town. Southall is a microcosm, intensely reflecting the pressures and conflicts of globalisation.

In this context, the 9 paid staff and many volunteers, reflecting the local population, work together to improve biodiversity and wildlife habitat, through an approach known as 'restoration ecology' whilst developing community based activities which help to improve people's access to the natural environment and their relationships with one another.

There are debates within conservation circles about the extent to which restoration projects such as this should simply allow nature to 'do its own thing' or whether we should intervene to enhance the chances of rare plants and animals surviving. Colin Conroy, Scientific Officer, has adopted the middle ground, by passively observing and monitoring the migration of species such as cornflowers, meadow cranesbill and poppies onto the site, whilst introducing marsh marigolds and watermint.



### Things to do

Previous activities at Minet Country Park have included health walks, wildlife walks and boat trips. A programme of events for 2004 is available from A Rocha, including, for example: a family picnic; a summer play scheme for 30 children, with fun bug related activities, culminating in a family fun day out; nature based Art in the Park for women; autumnal bird watching; a talk about foxes and badgers; and a 'winter wander'.



### Getting involved

Over 100 local volunteers have been involved in the Living Waterways project in recent years. They have come from every background - Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Christian, students, asylum seekers, young offenders and pensioners. They have been involved in various aspects of the project such as tree planting, art and craft. They have also benefited from the community-based approach, offering a chance to make friendships, improve English language skills and enjoy some exercise in the open air.

Volunteers are invited to assist with the programme of events in various ways. Other tasks include weekly and monthly work parties, which tend to take place on Fridays involving a wide range of people in practical conservation work on the site, or elsewhere in the local area.

A Rocha also carries out a range of scientific surveys at Minet Country Park, including bird counts, dragonfly counts, butterfly transects, botanical surveys, weekly bird-ringing and fortnightly moth trapping. Experienced or trained volunteers are very welcome and there are some opportunities for committed volunteers to receive training in this type of work. Volunteers are also needed for data tabulation and manipulation, for the biological surveys and for processing the findings of consultations with local communities. Of course there are always regular office tasks to be done too. If you would like to help with any of these, please contact Colin at the A Rocha UK office.





### **The future - developments big and small**

Developers are drawing up plans for a vast housing development on a brownfield site bordering Minet Country Park. Southall Sustainability Forum, an alliance of business leaders, local elected community leaders and voluntary agencies, is inputting to the planning process with a view to ensuring that the development is appropriate, affordable and sustainable. There is real potential for street level involvement in designing sustainable communities but severe challenges, against a backdrop of the poor record of social and environmental justice in the area.

Concerns raised by SSF about the Gas works proposal address demographic factors of the particular communities in Southall and Hayes, such as the relatively young population and demands on education, healthcare, shopping and recreation facilities. The forum urges developers to take advantage of the opportunity for this estate to become a progressive model of renewable energy design. At present designs fill even to meet statutory minimum requirements. Traffic congestion, pedestrian access and enhancement of the canal-side environment are stressed in the Forum's response to the plans, and wildlife corridors are recommended. Measures for inclusion of an Environmental Community Centre are included, linked to a consideration of the amount and type of green space available. Attention is given to the needs of wildlife, such as migratory birds, as well as people. Noting that 'existent green space is of far greater value for conservation than artificial green spaces' the report asks the developers to rethink positioning of a cricket pitch, community green space and neighbourhood park, in line with best practice in nature conservation.

A Rocha are campaigning to convert the contaminated British Waterways owned land alongside Minet Country Park into a local nature reserve, although it is within the 'green belt' so there is some contention surrounding this proposal.

Meanwhile more modest ideas are being developed by A Rocha and local communities for gardening and horticulture projects in the area around Minet Country Park, possibly including an allotment and demonstration garden for the environmentally sustainable production of fruit and vegetables.

### **Commitment to an inclusive, community based approach**

Here at BEN we talk about our aim of 'doing ourselves out of a job' by ensuring that ethnic environmental participation becomes embedded in every level of mainstream activity. At A Rocha UK they put this philosophy into practice in a very real way. Micah Ingalls, Community Projects Officer, has as the ultimate objective of his work programme the 'smart' target (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time limited) of recruiting his own replacement, from within the local communities with whom he works. He has been head hunting and has already identified a number of potential candidates to carry forward his good work.

**Visiting and walking the wildlife trail, or just reading more ...**

For more information about Minet Country Park including a detailed 'virtual walk' of the site, a fascinating step-by-step guide to the site with an easy to read aerial photo/map and excellent nature photography, you can visit <http://ianhday.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/index.htm>

**Resources**

A Rocha produces an annual 'Conservation Sunday' pack. Recent themes have included 'Healing the Land' and 'The Celts, Creation and the Bible' and these popular packs are still available from A Rocha at £6 each or £10 for both.

For news of the opening of the Sikh Temple, and information about Sikhs in Britain, please go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/news/march/templegallery.shtml>

**Moat and Tower  
Northfield, Birmingham**

**Contact: Sue Fenoughty  
T: 0121 354 8438,  
E: suefen@enviro.fsnet.co.uk**



The moat that gives its name to Moat House tower block is an important green space for the elderly people who live there. It is also a haven for wild life in an urban setting, and that adds immense quality to the residents' lives. But much more than this, the moat turns out to be a significant historic location - one of the most important archaeological sites in Birmingham, in fact - and as such, a fantastic resource for everyone in the local community.

Northfield is not an especially multicultural part of the city, and Moat House Residents' Association comprises mainly English people, with perhaps the occasional Asian or Irish accent. Still, the Moat and Tower is distinctive as a BEN Green Space of the Month because it is an example of an innovative, community led heritage project which can inspire other community groups by showing what can be achieved when ordinary people engage with the historic environment around them.

Network members may recall Sue Fenoughty's presentation of this marvellous project at the BEN conference in March 2003. Here is a chance to learn more about the inside story of an amazing community group and their fight to improve their own environment, for the benefit of all.

Hawkesley House dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and has belonged to the Middlemore family for most of its history. The homestead, consisting of a long hall with a courtyard, bakehouse, chapel, dovecote, stables and barns, was originally encircled by a moat, not for defensive purposes like a castle, but more as a status symbol. The moat would no doubt have functioned as a pool for fish and a reserve of water in the event of fire. Archaeological digs in the 1950s showed that the buildings were made of timber with tiled roofs.



On the day when I visited Moat House, the ladies in the common room were trying on Elizabethan costumes ready for the forthcoming re-enactment of a day in the life of the Middlemore family. I was served tea with Jumbles, yummy if rather hard biscuits from an original Elizabethan recipe. Local primary school children are also preparing to take part in the event, enacting a mini play about Anthony Sherlock, a visiting priest. This was a Catholic stronghold at a time when Catholicism was outlawed in Britain. What a wonderful image of sustainable development – an intergenerational project keeping alive a heritage of spiritual diversity manifest in the landscape!

A colourful and fascinating leaflet, produced by the Moat House Residents' Association, explains how, during the English civil war, between 1642 and 1646, "the Middlemore family was ousted from Hawkesley by Parliamentary troops who took it over as a fortified garrison. It was besieged by Royalist troops in May 1645 enforcing a surrender when King Charles arrived, but the buildings were nonetheless razed to the ground by Prince Rupert's men". Together with a watercolour illustration by Steve Rigby, this account captures some of the drama, and strategic importance of the story of this place.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century a farmhouse was built on the site, and was occupied during the 1920s by Clara Jane and Albreda Austin, mother and sister of Sir Herbert Austin of Longbridge car plant fame. The farmhouse in turn was demolished in 1957.

The current buildings were erected, shoddily some say, during the 1950s, as part of Birmingham's programme of expansion of council housing. Other tower blocks in the neighbouring regeneration area of Longbridge have suffered massive vandalism and are due for demolition but the fate of this particular block remains uncertain.

According to many of the present occupiers, Moat House should never have been put here at all. There was dispute amongst historians as to the precise location of the historic events described above, since there is another place called Hawkesley a few miles from here which the Ordnance Survey map had mistakenly indicated as the site of historic interest. The council at that time had been happy to believe the map, as it suited their plans to position working class housing here, alongside an electricity sub-station.

The moat itself was dismissed as a mere ditch by planners and 'landscaped' (partly filled in, partly fenced off) in the most economical way possible. Still it provided a feature to add interest to the grassy area between the tower and neighbouring low-rise blocks. Doreen, who is one of the more vocal residents, remembers when she was at school, the moat was very lush and home to water lilies, irises and carp. Betty, of the erstwhile Northfield Society, describes the joy of watching a brood of ducklings being raised on the moat. Then Emily Warwicker sadly recalls how the valuable plants were stolen and the moat became a polluted dumping ground. People were even putting old furniture in there. "It was foul", says Emily, "there was not other word for it." But the city archaeologists didn't care about the rubbish. They took the view that that's what ditches were for.

Meanwhile the housing department have recently constructed a fence to keep people from walking too close to the 8 storey Moat House tower and overhead porches covering the paths leading to the entrances, to protect residents and visitors from falling masonry! The building is clearly in a poor state of repair and some tenants are campaigning for other basic maintenance and improvements to their homes and the grounds surrounding them, although as elderly residents in sheltered accommodation, they find it a challenge to organise. There is quite a high turnover of tenants in Moat House. But Emily and her husband Arthur were determined to do something. They told me, "we wanted a clean up, in our lifetime". The Moat and Tower heritage project became a focus for this campaign.

Emily and Arthur went to the library and studied maps. They talked to their neighbours from the prefabs and got lots of people involved. Local historian Jim Melling made a sketch of how the site would have looked in medieval times. The story emerged of how the Roundhead, Tinker Fox had surrendered to the King in 1645. Then John the hairdresser produced an old newspaper photo of Hawkesley manor before it was demolished. One resident was keen to involve local schools and began to draw up a timeline.

In 1999 Moat House Residents' Association was granted a Millennium Award from Birmingham City Council Housing Department. The grant would not cover capital costs but it did allow for training and publicity. Sue Fenoughty was appointed by the residents' association as an environmental education consultant, and with help



from the local community, councillors and local government officers, they have carried out extensive research and are developing a vision plan to conserve both the archaeological and ecological features of the Moat.

During the first two years the project made a number of achievements:

- A desk top archaeological survey of the site
- An ecological survey of the medieval moat
- Publication of an illustrated leaflet detailing the site's history
- Open days on site with the council's 'History Bus' and archaeological walkabouts
- Permission obtained from the Secretary of State to conduct an auger survey of the moat and remove rubbish from last 20 years
- Removal of weed from the moat
- Maintenance strategy obtained for management of the site
- Resource pack compiled for teachers to use at the site for curriculum based studies
- Study visits from local schools
- An interpretation board

The project has been remarkably successful at involving people and raising awareness of heritage throughout the community, including all ages.

The story didn't end there. Funding had run out – and so had the water from the moat! The side walls had sprung a leak and needed the mortar replacing but the council wouldn't do the work and so water levels were steadily falling. Doreen told me how the caretaker had to try and refill the moat from a hosepipe during hot summers, although that is not really allowed by the water authority. On one occasion Emily and Arthur persuaded the fire brigade to come and fill the moat in exchange for a donation to their benevolent fund, but this was not a sustainable approach. After four years of this, the moat was almost dry.

As for funding for the moat, Emily, Chair of the residents' association and her husband Arthur, the Treasurer, have helped to raise money for the project through raffles and applications to the local ward fund. Undeterred, Sue also stayed on as a volunteer and together, the group successfully applied to the Queen's Golden Jubilee Fund. This paid for further improvements including painting the railings around the moat and supplying materials used by a local girls' secondary school to make historical emblems to fix on the railings. Decorations to the railings have raised the tone considerably and the girls enjoyed designing emblems and creating festive butterflies and dragonflies in their technology class, to embellish the site during events. These are cosmetic improvements though, and a fundamental approach is still required.

The Heritage Lottery Fund have since given a major grant of £25,000 towards exploring (not actually tackling) the problem of water loss, as well as staging a re-enactment of the siege that took place here 350 years ago. The longed-for clean up has removed debris down to the level of the 1957 excavations and construction work. Archaeologists have sunk auger holes and a geophysical survey has been undertaken, involving secondary school pupils.

Seeing how the fortunes of the site are changing, the housing department then pledged £8,000 to pay for proper repair maintenance to the structure of the moat, although there is no evidence of it at time of writing. Doreen and Betty have been attending Moat Meetings every month for the last four years to try and get the council to move but describe their position as "obstructionist". The maintenance strategy commits the council to ensure a water level of no less than 10cm. Subcontractors, however, have proved ineffectual and the residents themselves have volunteered to don protective clothing and wade in to tackle the build up of algae. Seeing this, a couple of local lads who looked a bit rowdy (Jill, the warden tried to shoo them away at first) came and asked, "what can we do to help the moat?" They put their pocket money in a plastic cup and donated it to the cause.

Sue has been talking with the Environment Agency about what can be done. The nearby River Rea floods, but cannot be diverted to fill the moat. A dowser has identified underground water courses but similarly, these could not be diverted without permission from the Secretary of State. Severn Trent Water might be able to supply a standpipe, but that would be chlorinated and possibly fluoridated, which is not good for wild life. Another drawback is that it would cost money, as well as increasing the risk of drops in water pressure, meaning no tea – which to the residents is unthinkable! A drainage engineer from the city council has suggested collecting water

from the flat roof to drain into the moat, and this environmentally friendly solution might be possible to organise as a PR exercise.

### **Plans for the Future**

Next May Fairfax Battaglia and the children from the local boys' and girls' schools will join forces to re-enact the siege of Hawkesley. right here on the original site. Picture them in full costume, flooding past the electricity substation where the Tudor gatehouse once stood, charging across the moat into the car parking area ... and having to ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for permission to drive pegs into the ground to pitch their authentic medieval tents. This farcical situation has developed because the significance of this site has been recognised at some levels, but not yet at others.

Then in June the Medieval Heritage society are planning a weekend event for local residents. The residents' association meanwhile has plans for a better interpretation board and a reprint of the schools' resource pack. But one can't help thinking that something more fundamental is needed. Doreen told me about the frustration of watching the moat's lifeblood drain away while the men who are meant to be responsible "drift in and out" contributing nothing. "They think it's a small project", she says. But clearly it means more to her than that. "Birmingham has lost its character completely" she tells me. It's not industrial any more, its character has to change. The new Bullring Shopping Centre is very dramatic but not really relevant to local people.

Here at the Moat and Tower there is probably not enough left to see to make this a prestigious visitor attraction, but the residents know they are walking on layers of history, and are committed to preserving these stories in a living tradition. Projects like this improve the quality of the lives of ordinary people like Emily and Arthur immeasurably, giving them the chance to share the meaning of this heritage with the next generation.

How can BEN members learn from this? What legacy would your community wish to share with future generations?

## **Mughal Garden Lister Park, Bradford**

**Contact: Joy Leach, Friends of Lister Park  
t: 01274 223665**

**Hawarun Hussain, Bradford City Primary Care Trust  
e: Hawarun.Hussain@bdct.nhs.uk**

### **Introduction**

This historically important park in a famous old Yorkshire mill town cost over £4 million to restore. A key new feature introduced to this award-winning park is the Mughal garden designed to reflect the rich Asian cultural heritage of Bradford. Used by local communities for walking, school trips etc, the park appears to be very inclusive. But some residents feel there could have been more consultation at the planning stage. Various developments are now addressing the views of users and a mul-cultural programme of activities is ongoing.



Bradford is a mill town with strong links to the Indian sub-continent and the money behind Lister Park originally derived from Manningham Mill, whose great chimney still dominates the area. In 1870 the Lister family sold the family seat, Manningham Park as it was called then, to Bradford Corporation on condition it be used as a public park. Once a deer park, Lister Park is on the English Heritage register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest in England, and it contains six listed buildings, including Cartwright Hall, a grade II listed art gallery. Other features include the boating lake, bandstand and a botanical garden added in 1903. In its Victorian heyday the park was often packed with people enjoying a range of traditional pass-times.

But towards the end of the 20th century Lister Park, like so many other beautiful parks in Britain, had fallen into disrepair as a result of neglect brought about by funding cuts. It welcomed far fewer visitors. Dense shrubbery surrounding the park became a haven for undesirables. Rival gangs of youths engaged in fierce territorial disputes and threatened to 'tax' (ie rob) passers by. It's no wonder many people felt unsafe to use the park on a day to day basis. Meanwhile the park had played host to the annual Mela, festival of Asian culture, which grew bigger year on year until it had really outgrown the space. Converging cars caused parking chaos in neighbouring residential streets and local Asian communities complained of the noise and disruption. The Mela has now moved on to pastures new, and that is another story.

### **Time for change**

Recognising that something needed to be done to improve Lister Park, the local authority consulted 15,000 local people, who said they wanted a café, an improved boating pavilion and a children's play area. The restoration plan put forward by the council also included designs for a Mughal garden to reflect the cultural heritage of the area's large British Asian community.

In 1997 the Heritage Lottery Fund gave a grant of £3.2m to support the restoration project, with a further £1m of partnership funding. The work is now complete and has obviously made a big difference to the park. Shrubs have been removed, opening up wider vistas through the mature trees, and CCTV cameras give a heightened sense of safety. Bollards have helped to curb traffic nuisance. And what was once the over-spill car park of Cartwright Hall has been completely transformed into a key new feature – the Mughal water garden. This spectacular water feature has raised the profile of the park significantly, both locally and nationally, reflecting as it does the rich cultural diversity of Bradford's history. It formed a central element in Bradford's recent 'Capital of Culture' bid, and helped to win Lister Park its prestigious Green Flag award.



### **Paradise garden encapsulates local distinctiveness**

The Mughal dynasty was founded by the Emperor Babur in 1527 and lasted until 1857, producing a number of visionary and charismatic kings whose contribution to art, architecture and horticulture were magnificent. Mughal architecture is a synthesis between Islamic and Hindu architectural styles prevalent in the Indian sub-continent. Epitomised by the Shalamar gardens in Lahore, originally commissioned by Emperor Jahangir (reigned 1605-1627) for his consort, the Empress Nur Jahan.

Many Mughal gardens can be seen as paradise gardens, creating the effect of total immersion of the senses. Invariably square or rectangular, they are subdivided into smaller parterres with imposing tall entrances. Characteristic design elements include horizontal planes, terraces arranged in a symbolic hierarchy, symmetry, linear paths and avenues of trees. The focal point is always an arrangement of canals edged with stone or brick, in which water cascades over carved chutes. Trees, such as plane and cypress, emphasise the lines and create a background to rose beds bordering the streams. The overall effect is one of complete calm and delight. All Mughal gardens evolved their own unique, individual characteristics to suit local conditions – materials, craftsmen, climate, finance and surrounding buildings. For these gardens area always linked to buildings, be they a palace or mausoleum.

The Lister Park design, rather than attempting to replicate Mughal gardens elsewhere, is a site-specific design based upon the underlying principles of Mughal architecture. For instance, Mughal gardens would originally have taken advantage of naturally occurring streams flowing from the mountains, channelling the water into canals for pleasure and decoration near to the palaces, then flowing on down to irrigate crops in adjacent fields. However here in Bradford, approximately a quarter of a million litres of water is pumped through underground pipes and endlessly recycled to create an effect reminiscent of a sloping hillside. The garden is designed to tie in with Cartwright Hall. Although the building itself is in a rather different Victorian 'Rococco' style, the two are not unsympathetic towards each other, using the same pale coloured local stone. You can see from these 'before' and 'after' shots the impact of this new design element.



This design feature is followed through in the way that Council services are structured. Instead of being a quite separate building, incidentally situated in the middle of the park, Cartwright Hall is now integral to the park and activities are planned to connect the gallery with the surrounding landscape and wider communities. (See below for details of current activities in Lister Park and Cartwright Hall.)

### **The importance of inclusive consultations**

However, even though the idea of the Mughal garden was intended to reflect the cultural heritage of the area, some local residents did not feel that local communities had the chance to be involved in developing plans for the park.



Naweed Hussain, a local community activist, with a key role linking Muslim communities to the mainstream, explained to me that green space is very scarce in the inner city wards inhabited by the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Kashmiri communities. And although everyone uses the park now, especially in the summer mornings and evenings, there is still a feeling among many residents that they could have been more fully included in the consultations. It seems there were no attempts made to target consultations specifically towards different language groups or faith-based organisations.

Naweed pointed out that the old mill workers' houses in Manningham have very small gardens. So Asian families, who have a passion for gardening, are keen to tend allotments, if they can find land nearby. In one back street, the residents association have reclaimed a pocket handkerchief of derelict land to create a toddlers play park with a bench and attractive flower border. He suggested that the park could play host to gardening fairs to raise awareness of issues and opportunities in horticulture for local people. But he felt that local people would not know how to go about putting their ideas into practice. "There is too much red tape," he complained.

### **Friends of Lister Park**

Friends of Lister Park (FLIP) has been set up since the development of the Mughal Gardens. It aims to ensure that its own membership is representative of all users of the park; to promote the park as a safe and freely accessible space; to represent users views and play an active role in the day to day management and strategic development of the park. Following a public meeting, the group is prioritising links with young people and residents on the park's perimeter, many of whom are elderly. A reminiscence project is underway to document older people's memories and archive photographs of the park.

FLIP is an inclusive group, with members representing the various ethnic communities who use the park, but Naweed Hussain believes that it needs help with capacity building, like so many friends groups.

A youth consultation event in 2002, including free boat rides and ice cream, attracted a large number of young people from a wide range of backgrounds (albeit twice as many boys as girls). They mostly seemed very keen to join the friends group and have their say about the future of the park. Many of them said they felt unsafe after dark and would like to see more staff in the park. I asked Park Keeper David Elcock about this and he told me there were originally 24 staff. At one time that number was reduced to 2, but at present there are 7 employees, including wardens and rangers – all of whom are very friendly.



### **All walks of life**

Hawarun Hussain used to work as a community link worker to the Bangladeshi community, supporting the development of one of the UK's first Asian women's allotment projects, Growing for Health. That group is now self-organising and Hawarun has moved on to work in Walking for Health, supported by Bradford City Primary Care Trust. On the bright but chilly Autumn morning when I visited the park, I saw a great many Asian people walking. Some ladies walked in groups set up through Hawarun's walk leader training programme and others were walking independently, perhaps encouraged by primary healthcare professionals or simply by increased awareness within the community of the importance of exercise. Hawarun told me they feel safe because of the friendly presence of park keepers. She said, "This park is just too good to waste!"

Hawarun's latest initiative is an Arabic dance class in the new bowling pavilion. I joined this women-only group for an evening of very enjoyable exercise and fun. It felt immensely empowering to participate in such a profoundly feminine, ancient tradition in what was formerly an older-white-male dominated setting. At first the men were uneasy about sharing the space, but the two groups are gradually learning to trust one another. In the afternoon I saw a number of older Asian men, singly or in small groups, taking a gentle stroll

on the grass or resting on a bench in the sunshine, enjoying a moment of peaceful contemplation. But they seemed just as likely to sit in the formal gardens by Princes Gate, facing a statue of the pagan hunter goddess Diana, as by the paradise fountains of the Mughal garden.

I saw a party of multi-cultural school children savouring the delights of the Mughal garden. One can easily imagine how wonderful a water garden would appear in a hot, dry country. Here in the North of England, the symmetry of the fountains was off-centred in a brisk autumnal breeze and the children laughed to receive a sudden cold shower!

It was then that I noticed the sign, translated into, I believe, Urdu, saying that paddling in the water garden is forbidden for health and safety reasons. Now I am assured that this is very sensible advice, since the water is changed only once a year and may contain slimy algae, broken glass and goodness knows what. But I can't help wondering why there was no equivalent translation of the interpretation board, telling the tale of the Mughal dynasty, the Emperor Jahangir and his consort, the Empress Nur Jahan?



#### **Activities in Lister Park and Cartwright Hall**

There will be a Cultural Diversity Conference and Festival during October in Cartwright Hall. Activities include storytelling, turban tying, music, dance, theatre, body art, crafts, poetry, food stalls and a bouncy castle. An exhibition entitled "Meeting God: elements of personal devotion in India" introducing the Hindu and Jain religions runs until January 2004. A Big Draw event in the run up to Divali focuses on Aarti, a technique using powdered pigment on oil, to make a communal design. And in Jan-May 2004 Tim Smith's photos of many of the 2 million people making up South Asian communities in Britain will be on view. Entrance to all museums and galleries in Bradford is free.

On 19th October there will be a fungus hunt in the park, starting at 10am. In November you can enjoy a tree walk, learn the names of trees and their history. Also discover the wildfowl on the lake, and winter berries in the botanical gardens. December brings a Christmas stroll and decoration demonstration, with mince pies and mulled wine in the boating pavilion.

## **Pumpkins for the people**

### **Asburton, Devon**

**Contact: Peter Chin Kean Choy**  
**t/f:01364 653618**

Photography by David Murray

Lia Leendertz is gardening columnist for The Guardian

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Many vegetable gardeners find it difficult to make use of surplus produce, but Lia Leendertz discovers how one man is encouraging people to donate their excess crops to feed the homeless

Gluts and droughts are an inevitable part of vegetable gardening, as it is almost impossible to estimate exactly how many tomato or runner-bean plants are needed to feed a family. Divination apart, and without an accurate prediction of how weather will affect crops, the only thing that can be relied on is that there will be excesses and shortfalls. Most people err on the generous side, and may spend half the summer bottling, freezing and pickling their harvest, before the time comes to give away their surplus crops; but there are good causes that can benefit.



### **Helping communities**

Peter Chin Kean Choy, an energetic t'ai chi teacher living in Devon, has chosen to harness overabundance and the benevolence of gardeners for the greater good. He has made it his mission to encourage people all over the world to take a new approach to vegetable growing and to use their gluts to help their communities.

Peter's vegetable of choice is the pumpkin cultivar 'Potimarron'. His scheme is simple: he will send free seeds of 'Potimarron' to anyone who asks. In return, he requests that they promise to track down their local homeless shelter or soup kitchen and donate a proportion of the fruits to them. The seeds of any fruit they themselves eat must be saved and passed on to other gardeners or returned to him for redistribution. It is a simple idea based on trust, but Peter already has about 1,000 gardeners involved in the UK, Europe and the USA.



This is no real surprise when you meet him in person. Peter is a ball of energy and enthusiasm, and clearly loves his pumpkins. His literature calls them 'a fruit veggie of the heart, body, mind and soul', and he and his t'ai chi groups often practise around the plants. The word 'Potimarron' is derived from French. Potiron means pumpkin and marron chestnut: the taste is a combination of both. It is widely grown in France, which is where Peter first encountered it.

He has a great belief in the good nature of gardeners, on which his scheme's success relies. 'Behind every garden is a good heart,' he says. 'All gardeners have a love of the environment, they plan ahead, they are wise. When you see a group of gardeners together it is always friendly and harmonious, but so often they are just patting each other on the back saying, "oh, what a beautiful garden you have". I want to tell them that maybe they can actually do something.'



*Peter Chin Kean Choy (above) teaches t 'ai chi among rows of pumpkin 'Potimarron '.*

*He urges gardeners to donate some of their crop to homeless shelters and save seeds for friends to grow*

Peter is most enthused about the idea of feeding people. 'There is a simple solution to the problem of people starving – feed them,' he says. 'People say if you teach a man to fish he will eat for a lifetime, but what if he has no water?' he says. 'Some people have no means and the most simple way to solve the problem is to give them some food. This is the 'Potimarron' revolution.'

Although Peter does have half an eye on solving world hunger, he is most interested in gardeners taking responsibility for local problems. He takes several 'Potimarron' to his local homeless resource centre, St Petrok's in Exeter, when a new batch ripens. He also includes other produce that is plentiful at the time, as well as a bunch of flowers for the workers. 'Fresh vegetables are expensive,' Peter says, 'and people need to eat them every day. 'Potimarron' is particularly useful because it stores for up to 12 months, so can be left on a shelf until the moment it is needed.'

### **Far-reaching effect**

Linda Sillifant chef at St Petrok's, says the donation of fresh food has a far-reaching effect. 'We have a budget for fresh food, but the more that is donated to us, the cheaper we can sell it, and the more likely people are to come in. Once they are through the door we can talk to them about their problems and offer them services such as counselling.'



Alex Green from Crisis FareShare, which encourages businesses to donate surplus fresh food to centres for homeless people, suggests that gardeners should contact their local council and ask for a list of projects in the area that will accept food donations.

Peter is delighted that gardeners are taking part in the scheme, and hopes to expand it in different ways. He has helped St Petrok's set up an allotment to grow its own food and is starting to work with schools. Many people seem to find his simple, direct approach irresistible. 'Why wait until you feel guilty at Christmas or harvest time to give food?' he says. 'People are hungry now. Nature is abundant, so come on, let's share it!'

#### **TIPS FOR GROWING PRODUCTIVE 'POTIMARRON'**

Gardeners interested in joining Peter's scheme and growing pumpkin 'Potimarron' should contact him for a batch of seeds.

Peter pregerminates seeds in February or March on damp tissue paper, wrapped in aluminium foil. Kept in a warm dark place they usually germinate within a week. He plants seedlings into small pots, and once they have four leaves, plants them out, at least 1.5m (5ft) apart, into soil enriched with compost or well-rotted manure. Peter suggests gardeners in colder areas grow them in a polytunnel or glasshouse, as fruits need heat to ripen.

Train the large plants over frames 1. to allow light to reach leaves and fruits and to prevent fruits touching the ground, so they are less likely to rot. From April onwards, plants require regular watering. 2. Each can produce five to eight fruits: stop further fruit production by pruning the plants back, as excess fruits will not reach maturity. Harvest through July, August and September. Fruits to be stored should be left on the plant until the skins harden. Leave as much stem on the fruit as possible when it is cut: short stems can encourage rot. 'Cure' fruits for at least 10 days in a warm, dry place 3. and they will store for up to 12 months. (Peter and local children draw designs on the immature fruit to produce the decorative scarring shown here).

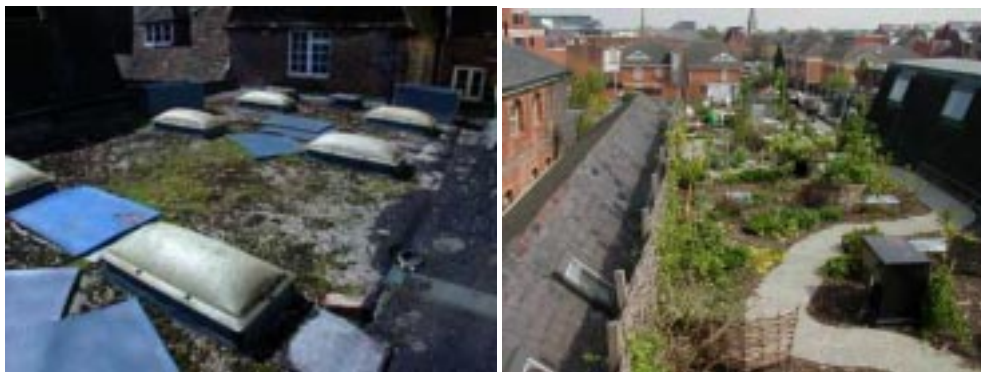


Gardeners taking part in Peter 's scheme need to donate 70 per cent of fruits to a local homeless charity. When preparing fruits for cooking, scoop out seeds and wash them, and leave them in a warm place to dry. Give seeds to other gardeners or back to Peter for redistribution.



**Edible Roof Garden**  
**Reading International Solidarity Centre**

**Contact: Steve Jones**  
**e: [steve@risc.org.uk](mailto:steve@risc.org.uk)**



International Solidarity Centre turned a leaky roof into an amazing edible roof garden and educational resource for teaching practical skills and raising awareness of the global links between social, economic and environmental issues. Using innovative design based on 'Permaculture' principals, the roof garden – made entirely from recycled or sustainably produced materials – is home to 140 fascinating plants, each of which tells a story about the diversity of climates and cultures around the world and their fragile interdependence. Historic Roots

Reading is a relatively wealthy town on the banks of the River Thames in Berkshire, Southern England. The town has strong historical links to the Quaker faith. Well known Quaker companies like Huntley and Palmer, biscuit manufacturers, helped to build the place. The Quaker community also played an important role in the campaign to abolish slavery and in the Central Club on London Street you can see a mural depicting local Black history.

Although situated in the heart of a very green and pleasant county, Reading town centre is very much a built up area, lacking in green space.

Reading International Solidarity Centre, at 35-39 London Street, is keeping up the local tradition of campaigning for international justice, whilst addressing environmental issues by creating a highly original garden project – up on the roof!

The 'Gardens of Berkshire' (the Yellow Book of the National Gardens Scheme) describes the RISC entry as a "small town centre roof garden developed to demonstrate sustainability and our dependence on plants" and points out that it is featured in Britain in Bloom's "most innovative garden" category for 2003. The garden is open to the public on certain days of the year, with tours by arrangement. It is accessible by an outside staircase, which may present an obstacle for people with mobility difficulties.

RISC is part of an educational charity called World Education Berkshire, registered as a Company with Charitable aims. The trustees give strategic guidance to the organisation and the collective, which is responsible for the day to day running of the centre and its many, wonderful projects, is structured as a collective, ie the ten employees are all equal and each has their own areas of responsibility. RISC worker and building co-ordinator Martin Mikhail is quite an expert on local history and explained about the background to the centre and its incredible, edible roof garden:

Originating in Ascot, from 1983 to '87 the Charity had been based in Slough and working on a range of projects across the county, run from a double-decker bus. The RISC centre was established in 1987 originally in smaller, rented premises in Reading. The current building on London Street was purchased 'for a song' in a poor state of repair nine and a half years ago and formally opened in 1996.

### **Contemporary flavour**

The Centre is home to eight different organisations including BME groups such as the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Action Group and Reading Refugee Support Group, as well as the well known One World Week, a 'virtual organisation' known as the Aid Workers' Network, and various others.

The building houses a large and well stocked Fair Trade shop and the Global Café serving international cuisine made from organic, locally produced and fair traded ingredients. It also generates an income from the hire of conference facilities to appropriate public and private sector organisations and individuals, on a sliding scale including subsidised rates for community groups.

However, there was a problem. The old building had a leaky flat roof at the rear and its occupants had been using buckets to catch drips for five years. It was not properly insulated, so it was difficult and expensive to heat. In addition, there had been complaints from the neighbours about the noise from events. RISC staff calculated that they needed £12k to repair the roof, making it warm, waterproof and sound proof. But it is always hard to raise funds for roof appeals. Martin, who worked on the roof garden project in the early stages of its development, told me how the idea for the roof garden emerged organically from the collective vision of the charity.



## **Food for Thought**

Thinking behind the garden is based on Permaculture principles – you can learn more about this approach to sustainable development by following the link from the RISC web site. A central principle in Permaculture states that “the problem is the solution”. RISC cunningly turned the threat of a leaking roof into an opportunity to develop an exciting, innovative and inspirational project which would stand a far better chance of attracting funding.

First they agreed they would need triple glazed domes on the roof, to allow light into the building below without allowing sound to escape. Then they began thinking of ways to further sound-proof and insulate the structure. They looked at green roofs or living roofs as they are sometimes called, which were quite unusual then but more buildings have them now. Green roofs are often just grass or wildflower meadow, but sometimes are sown with succulent plants like sedum (see the example of the London Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, Green Space of the Month - ) Living roofs have a number of advantages in that they increase biodiversity, they have high thermal mass which helps to insulate buildings and they are especially good for managing water run off, or indeed for harvesting rainwater for use as an on-site resource (more on this below.)

Next the group realised that there was little point in having all this cutting edge technology and fascinating plant life up here and not making full use of it as a resource to meet RISC's aims. They had the idea of 'stacking functions' – another Permaculture principle – to make this into an edible roof garden as an educational resource. Since part of the purpose of World Education Berkshire and RISC is to raise awareness of global food issues, ideas began to shoot up for plants which could be grown to illustrate the issues and help people to make the links. For example, there were plans to plant an olive tree, not just for decorative purposes but because it teaches us about the necessity of oil production in Palestine. A hardy variety of banana, the Japanese mountain variety, would stand for fair trade, and so on. The project became known as the Growing our Futures project and the resulting garden now actually produces organic vegetables, salads and herbs for use in the Global Café downstairs, tackling the issue of food miles as well as being an award winning visitor attraction and model project.

## **Weighty matters**

There were concerns as to whether the structure would be able to support the weight of all these features, so Martin organised a surveyor to do a feasibility study. Once plans were drawn up and approved, Jessica Witchell, an erstwhile member of the RISC collective, applied for funding from the Community Fund, SEED, the lottery's environment fund, the Environment Agency and the Environment Trust for Berkshire (via landfill tax). Jess has since left to have a baby, but not before writing an interesting article about this project for Permaculture magazine, in which she points out that “Food is an excellent medium to explore how our lives are inextricably linked to other people around the world.”

The construction of the garden is itself a lesson in sustainability, putting into practice the waste reduction hierarchy – reduce, reuse, recycle and rot.

Paving for the garden path is made of local, reclaimed stone and features corner stones, salvaged from other parts of the building, which had originally been brought from France 800 years ago as ballast in ships, and had then been carved into columns and gargoyles belonging to Reading Abbey. We know this from the stone masons' inscriptions on their bases. When the Abbey was demolished by Henry VIII its raw materials were reused by local builders. The Abbey remains can still be seen nearby, next to historic Reading Gaol. This is one reason why the garden has become part of the Reading Heritage Trail.

The garden also uses sustainable materials for the benches and decking, which are made from green oak, produced by an enlightened Berkshire timber merchant and his mobile saw mill, as it is not economical to drag fallen oak from the woods to process it in the workshop.

Topsoil for growing plants is supported in raised beds made using hazel hurdles, but not in the traditional hazel-only style, which is once more becoming popular in Britain. These innovative structures use hazel poles woven through a metal frame to give added strength and contain the roof top plots. Compost for the raised beds is made on site using biodegradable waste from the kitchen of the Global Café below.

Because it can get very dry up here in the summer, plants are tended by an automatic micro-watering system run on solar power from roof top photo-voltaic panels with a wind turbine for top up during cloudy days. Batteries for storing the renewable energy are kept in a green house, and water, collected from all the sloping roof surfaces at higher levels of the building, is stored in two large tanks concealed in a light-well in the centre of the building. In the winter, excess water can be diverted to flush the downstairs loos. As with all the elements of this marvellous garden, the watering system is also an educational resource linking to issues in water resource management both here in Reading and globally. A leaflet explaining more about the system is available from RISC.



### **Designing for cultural relevance and educational value**

A wide range of potential stakeholders were consulted during the design stage, including ethnic minority groups along with other community groups, schools, artists and environmental organisations. Jess writes that “ The garden also provided a great opportunity to twin with partner groups in the ‘South’ (often referred to as ‘developing’ or ‘third world’ countries)” including Nepal, Cuba, the Philippines and Zimbabwe. In the latest twinning initiative, Dave Richards, RISC's graphic designer and education worker is currently planning a visit to Barbados in the Spring, to explore possibilities for a twinning with the country of origin one side of his family.

With the help of Paul Barney Landscapes, culturally significant plants were selected to relate to some of the groups using the garden, and twinned with it. The Growing our Futures project is a multidimensional garden, planted with trees large and small, climbers, shrubs, herbaceous plants, ground cover and root crops, just like the layers of a natural forest, and every plant is edible, medicinal or has some practical use.

Around 140 plants are featured in the roof garden: plants such as Turkish Rocket, a peppery salad plant, Chilean myrtle which bears delicious 'ugni' berries and maize, the staple of food crop of much of Latin America and Africa, which is so closely linked to the current debate about genetic modification of plant life. These plants, which come from all around the world, can teach us so much, not just about biodiversity but also about different cultures and how they have contributed to our knowledge of plant lore.

For instance, I learned that Japanese Horseradish, also known as 'wasabi' – the green condiment served with sushi – is thought to be a good herbal remedy for fish poisoning!

Even a plant as familiar as the humble potato has an extraordinary story: domesticated by Incas in the Andes mountains over 7,000 years ago, where some 3,000 varieties were cultivated, and brought to Ireland in 1588 where it became the staple crop, until 1845 when potato blight brought about famine, the worst disaster to hit Europe since the Black Death of 1348. An information sheet available from RISC can tell you in greater depth how the story of the potato teaches us to appreciate the importance of biodiversity.

If you are unable to visit the roof garden, it is worth a visit to the RISC web site. There is a very useful list of species to be found, giving details of the plants' Latin name, common name and family, together with a database giving details of plant uses, and a gallery of photos of the garden under construction and in leaf. This would be a useful resource for anyone thinking of growing a cultural garden, designing an educational resource or developing a Permaculture project.

### **Volunteers and visitors from near and far**

It took 300 volunteers over 2 years to renovate the roof. This included 4 lots of 15 international work camp students per year for two years, plus 90 individuals. Trusted prisoners from the local gaol also helped to build the garden, whilst improving their skills ready for life on the outside.

A number of volunteers are involved on an ongoing basis to maintain the garden. Steve Jones is the Garden Project Worker and he works with the volunteer co-ordinator to organise monthly maintenance sessions around seasonal themes such as seed swapping, pruning, composing, planting out seedlings, harvesting, seed collection and herbal remedies.

Steve joined the RISC collective in 2002, but actually his connections with the organisation go as far back as 1985 when he became the bus driver of the education bus and education worker focussing on issues such as hunger in Africa and trade and debt. Steve has a degree in development and is a trained business studies and economics teacher. He has gone on to specialise in sustainable development and environmental issues after having worked at the Centre for Alternative Technology for 7 years as well as acting as membership secretary for the Permaculture Association. Steve has lived and travelled extensively in Africa, India and North America, and is now based in North Wales. He studied Permaculture in Zimbabwe, where people live closer to the land than in Britain. Whereas for people in Britain, sustainable development can seem rather abstract, Steve highlighted the fact that for subsistence farmers, techniques such as Permaculture are vital.





### **Spreading the message further**

The RISC collective work with local schools, community groups and through links with other countries to help people 'make the links' about sustainable development.

The roof garden has inspired two schools to want to develop gardens of their own. In Woking and Bracknell, school children have discovered a renewed interest in gardening and wish to renovate their wildlife garden. In Caversham, High Down school has a walled garden which is not in use. Steve is planning to work with 'less academically inclined children' to create a Permaculture garden, as a medium for learning practical skills.

Steve told me that RISC is looking for ways to take the inspiration of the roof garden out into the community. *"For me, it's only a stepping stone to getting people involved in sustainable development,"* he explained.

I did not know before that coffee is the second most traded product in the world, next to oil, and yet all the producer countries are desperately in debt due to unfair trade agreements. What's more, coffee is a shade crop which grows best under the canopy of the rain forest, and as we all know, rain forest is one of our most precious environments globally. Yet profit-driven farming methods are clear-felling forest, causing environmental devastation. This is why it is so important for us all to start thinking about switching to fair trade products. Coffee is just one example. On the RISC web site you can find information about other cash crops such as tea, cocoa, cotton and tobacco.

Steve uses these plant stories when he works with groups to help them increase their awareness of sustainable development issues and to assist people in gaining skills which will have a real impact in the struggle to build a fairer world. He tries to tailor sessions to suit the specific needs and level of interest of the group he works with. For instance, volunteers at the monthly maintenance sessions may simply wish to learn basic skills like seed collecting. On the other hand, the edible roof garden has hosted two visits from groups of organic farmers from Uganda, and Steve has been able to help the farmers to improve their growing practices and to increase their awareness of global economic and social issues.

The edible roof garden is a remarkable green space in that it involves ethnic communities from all around the world. It is fascinating to learn about the links between cultures, as embodied in the many plants we grow and trade internationally. But the garden has really achieved its aim when we grasp the necessity to do more than contemplate these global issues. This garden teaches us all to take responsibility for playing our own part in achieving sustainable development.

**Reference:** RISC Assessment: Growing from the Roof Up by Jessica Witchell in Permaculture magazine no 35 Spring 2003 pp3-7

**Resources:** <http://www.risc.org.uk/>



**River Lea**  
**Stamford Hill, London**

**Contact: Richard Butcher-Tuset**  
**e: richard.tuset@leariverstrust.co.uk**

### **Introduction**

Rivers and canals are very special green spaces, but they are not always accessible for all to enjoy. This is the story of how Orthodox Jewish boys and girls came to participate in river-based activities on the River Lea in London's Stamford Hill. A group of boys showed initiative and asked to learn rowing. Sensitive consultation then helped to raise awareness and build trust between the ethnic minority Jewish community and the gentile run sports clubs. A river-based art project by the local Jewish Girls' school inspired pupils to develop design ideas and gain a sense of ownership of the waterside environment. It is hoped that this will lead on to further community involvement in river-based recreation and amenity.



### **Context of community participation in waterways based activities**

Rivers and canals are very special green spaces, interesting features of the natural or built landscape, they are potentially beautiful places for open-air relaxation and enjoyment. They are also potentially challenging places, prone to pollution, habitat destruction and conflicting use. Hence partnership working is vital to their successful management.

### **Partnership working for waterways regeneration across London**

London Waterways Partnership News makes exiting reading if, like us, you are interested in ethnic communities' involvement in using, improving and creating green space. It is packed full of stories about many projects ranging from the community participation in restoration of the River Brent, through teacher training in canal heritage and narrow boat navigation in the Colne Valley, and a citizenship project including young people in decision making about waterways in Enfield, to regeneration projects involving local people at various sites along the Regents Park canal

### **Minority Ethnic Orthodox Jewish Community living near, but not using, the River Lea**

A glance at a map will confirm that the areas these waterways pass through are often those populated by multicultural or predominantly 'ethnic minority' communities. This is particularly true of the River Lea, which passes through Stamford Hill and Clapton, home to Europe's largest Orthodox Jewish community of around 16,000 people. This largely residential area surrounding Springhill and Springfield Park houses high concentrations of Orthodox Jews, yet very few (if any) public services cater for these communities' specific needs. For instance, prior to 1998, very few Jewish children had access to river-based recreation, because youth sessions at the rowing club took place on Saturday mornings when it was impossible for the children, celebrating the Sabbath, to take part.

### **Background to Lea Rivers Trust, a member organisation of BEN network**

Lea Rivers Trust is an innovative and dynamic water related charity based in the Lee Valley in East London, amongst an extensive network of waterways steeped in archaeological and industrial heritage. The Trust tackles a range of projects to promote and enhance the waterway environment and positively contribute to the social, economic and environmental well being of East London and the Lee Valley. LRT Chief Executive Richard Butcher-Tuset had been involved with setting up a BEN network project with Judy Ling Wong (now BEN's Director) in the early 1990s and has always been very committed to ethnic environmental participation. Richard has steered LRT to reach out to previously excluded groups within the Orthodox Jewish community, and to develop partnerships with other organisations doing the same.

### **Consultation on involving Jewish communities in waterways activities**

Lea Rivers Trust commissioned a study on involving Orthodox Jewish communities in waterways based activities at Springhill, on the River Lea in Hackney. This excellent piece of work, undertaken by Lucille Pryce with the help of two community consultants, Yaffa Gefen and Sophie Bernstein resulted in a detailed report aimed at building trusting relationships between waterways voluntary sector organisations and the Jewish communities, in order to identify the best ways to support their sustainable involvement in existing and new waterways activities.

### **Report raises awareness of cultural concerns and voluntary sector groups**

The report is a great resource for cultural awareness raising, covering many aspects of Jewish community life, history, customs, lifestyle and a contact list of schools and community groups. The Jewish presence in Hackney dates back to the 1780s and today comprises 21 schools, 10 Hebrew day schools, 15 boys' colleges, 15 men's colleges, over 80 community groups and 56 synagogues, many of which are in people's homes. This diverse community includes Ashkenazim (from Eastern Europe), Sephardim (from Spain and the Mediterranean) and Temamim (Yemenite) Jews among others.

The report also gives useful background information about a range of open spaces known collectively as Lee Valley Regional Park, and the voluntary organisations based at Springhill: Lea Rowing Club and Leaside canoeing and education trust, which have played a key role in linking to the Jewish communities.

### **Jewish Boys Rowing and Canoeing Programme**

Water sports have become very popular with the Jewish boys living near the river at Stamford Hill. It all began in the summer of 1998 when a group of Jewish boys approached the Springhill Rowing Club on their own initiative and asked to row. Les Fitten, a long time member of the club, agreed to teach them. Through the summer of 1999 they met on Friday afternoons when the boys have a break from school. Les was impressed with the boys' faithfulness in attendance, their enthusiasm and the support from their parents.



The following summer, Les had arranged to go on holiday to the States and could not continue to work with the boys. Youth Experience in Sport (YES) – a charity supporting the Lea Rowing Club - was concerned that the programme should continue and raised money through Awards for All to pay instructors. For the following two years (2001-2) the programme was supported by London's Waterways Partnership (LWP). In 2001 a pilot canoeing programme was added to the rowing, run by Leaside, a canoeing and cycling centre 2 minutes walk from the two courses - funding for that last year came from Lea Valley Regional Park Authority with a contribution from YES. Over this time a volunteer named Marcia Thompson who had been working as a co-ordinator of the programmes, liaised with Jewish mothers to enrol boys on the courses and working with the various organisations involved to establish funding each year.

Marcia's account of the programme concludes with some parents' comments. She reports:

*"It is very obvious to anyone standing on the bank that the boys are having a very good time, that this is a genuine adventure for them. One mother told me that for an hour before his lesson her son was bouncing around in the kitchen in excited anticipation of his rowing lesson. Another mother on Lingwood Road, which borders on the Springhill Sports Ground, grew up in Vienna where she took part in many sports activities including rowing and regrets that her children have not had the same opportunities. She says of the programme, "It is a very good idea. It's relaxing for the boys and takes them away from the pressures of school. It's good healthy outdoor activity - good for the mind and the body. And it's fun."*

An evaluation report of the rowing programme compiled by LWP and LRT shows clearly that the most valued element of the rowing and canoeing is the enjoyment factor, followed by fresh air and exercise. Although learning skills and water safety are important learning outcomes, the boys are not so much interested in becoming champions as letting off steam. Interestingly as regards awareness of the wider waterway environment, one participant mentioned having 'learnt information about river wildlife' suggesting that there has been some, possibly informal but nevertheless meaningful, sharing of information over and above that relating to boats!

The main aim of the programme is to address the exclusion and lack of sporting activities accessible to children from the Jewish community by piloting the provision of activities specifically catering for the needs of this community. It is important to note that it was not a specific aim of this pilot programme that the participants should interact with people from other local communities. The regeneration focus was rather that, by using a pro-active, targeted approach, a particular community previously excluded from using the waterways would be enabled in accessing this element of their environment. However, in the interests of building trust between the various communities living in Springfield area, any new interaction that did occur as a result of these programmes can be viewed as a positive outcome. The earlier consultation had highlighted the reasons for low levels of trust:

*"There is a strong fear of anti-Semitism within the Jewish community. This is based on their history, personal experiences and perceptions. Whether real or perceived this means that the Jewish community will exclude themselves from activities or new experiences where they see anti-Semitism as a potential threat."*

When parents were asked to evaluate the Jewish boys' rowing programme, a staggering 90% said that it had made them more trusting of the organisations involved in running the rowing and canoeing. "If I didn't trust the organisers I wouldn't have let my son participate." There is now demand to continue and expand the programme, including additional Sunday afternoon provision for boys with possible rowing excursions further afield, and separate provision for girls' rowing. However, customary dress code dictates that Jewish girls must always wear long skirts (not trousers) and this presents an obstacle to water safety. The advice of a Rabbi is being sought to address this barrier to inclusion. Meanwhile an art activity has been carried out with a local Jewish girls' school.



### **Take pART - A Day in the Life of the River Lea (between Springfield Park and Markfield Park)**

Between March and April 2003, Lea Rivers Trust's take pART developed and delivered A Day in the Life of the River Lea, an art project that brought together young people from the Orthodox Jewish Community in Stamford Hill and a practising artist. The two parties worked collaboratively to produce several pieces of art work inspired by the River Lea. The project originated as one of the recommendations from the consultation report Involving Orthodox Jewish Communities, carried out in September 2002 by Lucille Pryce, on behalf of London Waterways Partnership (LWP) and Lea Rivers Trust (LRT), and with the support of Yaffa Gefen and Sophie Bernstein, Community Consultants and local residents.

Artist Maria Amidu worked with forty students from Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School in Stamford Hill. The group visited the River Lea at Springfield with Maria and Jemma Lessware, the education environmentalist from Lea Rivers Trust. The young people learnt about their local waterway environment, took photographs and gathered inspiration for their artwork. The students then worked alongside the artist during several art workshops in the school, manipulating photographs taken during their visit and transforming them into patterns and designs evocative of their trip to the River. The children's images were printed onto fabric using the ancient photographic technique of cyanotype and were arranged to create a gigantic tapestry. At the end of the workshops all participants visited the William Morris Museum to look at art works related to the project.

Inspired by the work developed with the children, Maria has created a series of miniature prints under the title 'A Day in the Life of the River Lea (from Springfield Park to Markfield Park)'. The images feature motifs created as part of the workshops, and have been reworked as a series of wallpaper samples. This artwork will be permanently displayed at the school, as a poetic reminder of the proximity of the River.

The young people benefited from working in close collaboration with a practising artist and from learning a wide range of artistic techniques, while discovering and gaining a sense of ownership of their local waterway environment.

*"Pupils were able to experience direct contact with art in 'practice' and were encouraged to find inspiration in their local natural environment and to develop their ideas. The visit to the William Morris Museum reinforced their coursework." Teacher*



### **Wider community involvement - Place check**

Community consultants were taken to look at the facilities in Springhill. Using the Placecheck method, developed by the Urban Design Alliance, Jewish women focused on three main questions: what do you like about this place? What do you dislike about it? What needs to be improved? Their comments sound like a sadly familiar account of many of our rather neglected and unwelcoming green spaces: lack of information signage, overgrown or inaccessible footpaths and steps, litter, dogs and dog mess, graffiti, lack of play facilities and no kosher milk or snacks in the caf". Aside from one or two exceptional outreach projects, staff and volunteers at the facilities did not reflect the make up of the local population and displayed an apparent lack of basic awareness of Jewish customs and culture. The report recommended training sessions to introduce equal opportunities and cultural awareness.

A questionnaire distributed to school and community groups received a very low response rate, but informal discussions at Jewish events produced some helpful and interesting comments. For instance, the River Lea is the quickest walking route to important places like Homerton Hospital, and if it felt safer, more Jewish people would use it, especially on the Sabbath when Jewish people are not allowed to travel by bus. People were interested in activities such as health walks, guided walks, canoeing and life saving. There was interest in the Pride of Lee, a boat offering trips to community groups, and it was felt that Kosher food and Jewish music would create a good atmosphere. One sympathetic idea to reduce opportunities for graffiti is to introduce climbing plants.

A number of recommendations were made, to address the issues raised in this consultation. For instance, it was noted that because of their independent status, Jewish schools were not included in mail shots by Haringey or Hackney council, so missed out on information about the trusts educational programme. This has been rectified by the inclusion of a contact list of schools and colleges.

### **Useful resources**

River and Rowing museum, Henley on Thames [www.rrm.co.uk](http://www.rrm.co.uk)

Inland Waterways Association, 'Towards Greater Social Inclusion - Landmark Document'.

<http://www.waterways.org.uk/> Copies of the IWAAC Report on Social Inclusion are available free of charge from the IWAAC office: Tel: 020 7253 1745 Fax: 020 7490 7656 E-mail: [iwaac@btinternet.com](mailto:iwaac@btinternet.com)

British Canoe Union <http://www.bcu.org.uk/>

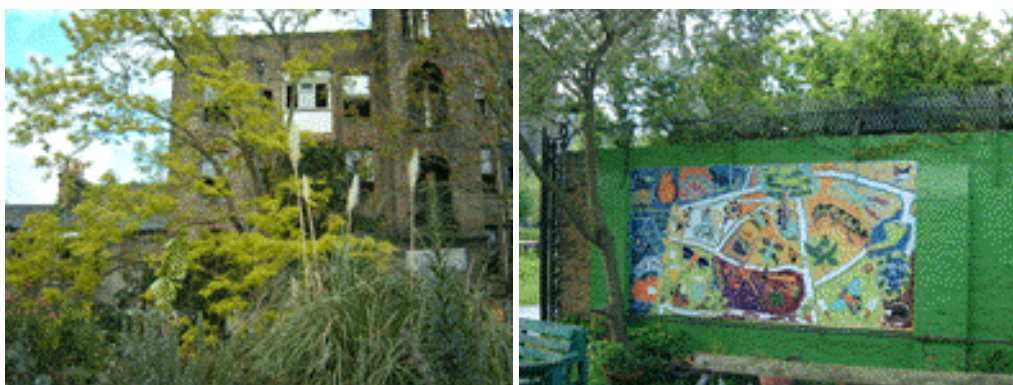


**Roots and Shoots**  
**Lambeth, London**

**Contact: Linda Philips, Scheme Manager**  
**t: 020 7587 1131**  
**e: admin@rootsandshoots.org.uk**



Roots and Shoots is one of the founder members of the Black Environment Network, having joined forces with other projects in London in the mid eighties to encourage ethnic participation in the environment. It is unusual in that it is a multi-use space, providing training facilities for disadvantaged young people; educational resources for schools; a garden centre for local residents; and of course it provides essential habitats for innumerable species of wildlife, such as foxes, newts, dragonflies and bees. The main features at Roots and Shoots are a plant nursery and a wildlife garden complete with apple tree walk, pond, wild flower meadow and paradise corner. The garden aims to provide a haven for wildlife in the heart of London and to make that haven accessible to all.



### **Hooray, Hooray, the First of May!**

I arrived bright and early on May Day morning, after a night of spectacular stormy weather. There was a lovely fresh earthy smell in the air, and a calm but busy atmosphere among the staff, trainees and volunteers. A local resident, a retired City gent, who had been a friend of Roots and Shoots, had recently died, and his funeral cortege was preparing for the slow drive by. Linda Philips, the Scheme Manager of Roots of Shoots, was making up a posy for him, carefully binding together an array of freshly picked flowers.

### **Nurturing exotic plants and preserving cultural heritage**

Trainees were getting ready for Open Day, pricking out seedlings to pot on for a plant sale. The training project offers courses in horticulture and carpentry to local young people aged 16-23. There are 21 trainees places available and 16 of these are currently filled. Linda introduced me to Samantha, a trainee who was recovering from a nasty cold. She helped to show me around the site. First we looked inside the polytunnel where the seeds are sown. Here trainees learn how to nurture the seedlings of many popular garden plants, including vegetables favoured by the African Caribbean community, such as tomatoes, okra, peppers and aubergines. Roots and Shoots is built on the site of an old lead factory, so the soil is contaminated with lead and also cadmium, and food crops cannot be grown directly in the soil. But there is one raised bed containing vegetables grown entirely from safe organic compost made here on site. Container growing is the solution to poor soil quality and lack of garden space in the cities. Linda spoke about an old West Indian chap who comes in to buy his seedlings, and brings them on in recycled cooking oil drums in his back yard. He is famous in these parts for his magnificent crops.

We inspected the damage done to the polytunnel's polythene roof by squirrel's claws, and by baby foxes who use the structure as a climbing frame, and slide down its curved sides! I thought this mammal activity sounded very endearing, but Samantha is not too keen on foxes. And the squirrels, apparently, steal all the walnuts from the walnut tree that was planted by the entrance when Roots and Shoots opened in 1982. The squirrels eat some nuts and bury others to save them for later. So we can expect to see the area covered in walnut trees a few years from now!

Samantha will soon be 18. She lives with her Mum in a flat about 5 minutes walk from here. She told me that she enjoys working with plants, but when she finishes her training she wants to get a job as a hairdresser, because it's a 'proper job' ie with better pay. As a trainee working Monday to Friday, Samantha earns £56 pw; she pays housekeeping to her Mum and puts £10 every Friday into a Parners scheme. When she has saved up £500 she wants to go on holiday with her boyfriend. She says she'd love to go to Jamaica, as she's never been there before.



### **Totally inclusive, cradle to grave**

We looked at Lambeth Walk Open Space along side Roots and Shoots, where residents in the tower blocks campaigned to create a toddler's play park. The space is fully accessible with just a low fence around it, and a sign asking dog-walkers to show respect (it used to be just a dog toilet before the campaign). Roots and Shoots helped to plant it up, and Linda told me that it looks beautiful in spring and summer, when it's ablaze with flowers. There is not much equipment - and no tarmac - just a crescent shaped bench for parents to sit on and grassy hummocks for toddlers to play upon, and they love it. While we were there the local Digibus came and parked up by the play area, and several of the trainees piled on board. They use it because IT is part of the basic skills training offered at Roots and Shoots, but there are no computers here.

In the old building which houses the kitchen, a hall and the loos (there are plans to do it up), I met another trainee, a young man who suffers with a mild learning difficulty and quite severe anxiety. He was extremely conscious of health and safety issues, and most insistent on expressing his concerns to me. Later, I saw him at work in the big greenhouse, transplanting seedlings, and he was very much calmer, deeply engrossed in his task and clearly enjoying his work. Again one sees evidence of the 'biophilic effect' a scientific term for the way that the love of nature can bring a sense of wellbeing to the troubled human soul.

The next stop on our tour was the little memorial to a lady who used to be in the Women's land army during World War II. She became a very keen plantswoman, and put in lots of energy to Roots and Shoots. There is a beautiful wooden arbour seat, in her honour, constructed by carpentry trainees, set amidst a sea of glorious, blood red wallflowers and tulips.

### **Cultural gardens link people and plants from diverse roots**

We passed along a pathway - neatly paved, fenced with willow hurdles, planted with spring bulbs and decorated with an attractive display of ceramics, all the work of trainees - and this led through a rustic gateway into the wildlife zone. My senses were immediately assaulted by the powerful perfume of roses, the vivid colours of abundant flowering shrubs, joyful birdsong, buzzing honeybees, and a rich diversity of textures underfoot - springy, uncut grass, moist soil and soft leaf mould. Moreover, this is a genuinely multi-cultural garden. Among the many established species of British hedgerow plants, and familiar European herbs, I recognised the towering spike of an echium; not the knee-high Viper's Bugloss (*echium vulgare*) common on British coasts but the seven foot tall bright blue spike of a giant echium from the Canary Islands. Then to my great surprise, a banana tree! On closer inspection, the latter is firmly rooted in a large pot wrapped all around with insulating material to protect it from the frost.





In this job I am often lucky enough to have the chance of seeing plants from around the world being cared for in greenhouses. Here at Roots and Shoots I spotted Swiss Cheese Plant (not from Switzerland at all, but from the tropical rain forests of South America), Aloe Vera and Prickly Pear under glass. But never before have I seen such a collection of tender fruits grown successfully outdoors. Because the garden is enclosed on three sides by buildings it is a sun-trap, and the many larger plants create windbreaks. Hence the garden has a favourable microclimate for tender plants. In paradise corner, the sunniest spot, there are three varieties of passion flower, a Brazilian pineapple guava and a Tree of Heaven. An old-fashioned English hazel tunnel supports a mass of tangled kiwi vines. Kiwi fruit was first grown as a commercial export crop in New Zealand, where it got the name, but originated in China. Another Chinese plant, the buddleia, brought to this country as an ornamental garden plant but now a common sight on waste ground in Britain, is a favourite with butterflies. How wonderful to be able to lose yourself in a buddleia jungle in the heart of London.

When BEN's Director, Judy Ling Wong, was developing the first cultural garden at neighbouring Walnut Tree Walk School, she asked a friend trained in horticulture at Windsor about identifying plants which came from the countries of origin of the inner city children. Her friend laughed and said, 'The typical British garden is but a collection of glorified foreign weeds!' You can read more about the origins of British garden plants, and their meaning for people who share their origins, in Judy's article *The World in Your Garden* in BEN's Key Articles, vol 1 p21 - which can be downloaded from the Resources section of BEN's website. To obtain a resource sheet of plants from different countries, contact [Rachel@ben-network.org.uk](mailto:Rachel@ben-network.org.uk)



### Children inspired by nature

Linda introduced me to David Perkins, Wildlife Outreach Worker who teaches ecology to visiting children from local schools, and creates wildlife gardens in the schools' own grounds. David has been working with Roots and Shoots for 3 years and has built up this work a lot in that time. Linda points out to me that this is a valuable resource for this area, where few people have a garden of their own, and many live in tower blocks. The site itself is surrounded by Victorian houses, which create a sheltered spot, and in turn benefit enormously from the view of lush greenery.

Often, refugee and asylum seeker children first gain access to the project through school. One such boy returned, after a school trip, bringing his Mum here - they were from a rural, farming community in Eastern Europe and they miss the greenery which is otherwise absent or relatively scant in their new urban location. A class visits Roots and Shoots from one local school or another on most days. Today it's the turn of Keyworth Primary. Three small groups of evidently culturally diverse youngsters are exploring the many facets of the wildlife garden.

Suddenly, one of the children pops up out of the verdant undergrowth and announces that she's seen a dragon's lair. Enchantment radiates from her lovely black face. I tell her I don't think they have real dragons in London, but she's adamant: she's read the sign. True enough, I did find an area cordoned off with a sign. I guessed this was in fact a compost heap, or perhaps an area of garden under construction. The point is that the children have a fantastic time exploring along the winding pathways through the shrubs. The wildlife setting inspires the imagination and restores faith in natural magic. David called to the group to come and see what he'd found in the pond. There in a dish was an amazing creature with frilly gills on the side of its head. It looked a lot like a miniature dragon, but in fact it was a baby newt. A group of children gathered round to get a closer look. In another dish David showed them the larva of an actual dragonfly. They were delighted.

### **Bees and budding bee keepers**

Meanwhile one of the teachers was showing another group the apple tree blossom and the beehives, and explaining the relationship between them to her fascinated pupils. Bees are valuable not only because they produce honey, but more importantly because they are vital pollinators for most of our food. Yet due to urbanisation and intensive farming practices there is serious concern about the risk to our food supply from a new strain of bee disease. You can read more about this in *The Guardian*, Sat April 26 th p11 or go to their website (see below).

Roots and Shoots is home to the London Beekeepers Association who hold regular meetings and run courses. I spoke to Jo, who attends David's bee keeping course, and she described the many rather eccentric people who come from all around London to study apiary. One old lady always comes and always falls asleep. One woman who comes from Japan intends to move to Hawaii and become self-sufficient in honey. One local artist makes artworks involving honeycomb, which you can see at the Open Day (details below) and he's involved in volunteering to build a new bee-house observatory from hazel hurdles grown and made on site. These will be too high for children to see over the top, so David is going to create slots at eye level for kids to look through and watch the bees doing their work. There was a batch of honey waiting to be separated from the wax. They do it by turning the honeycomb in a barrel, a bit like churning butter. Jo couldn't tell me how much wax to honey you get but apparently, 30 jars from 2 hives raised £145 at last year's honey auction.

David and I speculate about how many people from ethnic communities may be involved in bee keeping. There are about 35,000 bee keepers in Britain, including a great many in London, but there are also significant numbers of lone bee keepers, so one cannot really know how diverse they may be. But since the acquisition of a set of protective bee suits, schools groups and trainees can get very close to the hives at Roots and Shoots and learn more about bees. So perhaps increasing numbers of local children will take an interest in this fascinating hobby and potential cottage industry in the future.

### **Plans for the future**

Roots and Shoots are fundraising to replace their leaky old building with a state of the art community hall, classroom and workshop space, complete with solar panels for water heating and a sedum covered 'green roof'.

Roots and Shoots Open Weekend 7 th and 8 th June 2003 from 11am to 4pm.  
Admission £1 adults 50p children

Saturday is aimed at children with juggling workshops, face painting, possibly Brockwell Drummers, a raffle and much more.

Sunday is more adult oriented with tours of the wildlife garden, activities such as willow weaving, and an exhibition by local artists and photography club members, whose work will be for sale.

### **Resources**

To read more details about the plants and wildlife at Roots and Shoots, check their website at [www.roots-and-shoots.org](http://www.roots-and-shoots.org) or phone and ask for an annual report.

An article in *Gardens Illustrated* May 2002 by Widge Finin includes further details of the plants and animals to be found in the wildlife garden and marvellous photos by David Loftus.

[www.guardianunlimited.co.uk](http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk)

for the article Honeybees under threat from 'apian Aids'

**Rosehill Quarry Community Park  
Swansea**

**Contact: Mike Cherry, BEN South Wales Development Worker**  
**t: 01792 462990,**  
**e: [mike@ben-network.org.uk](mailto:mike@ben-network.org.uk)**



*View over the city*

Rosehill Quarry Community Park is a semi-natural urban green space, which strikes a delicate balance between wilderness and recreation amenity. Many varieties of wildlife coexist with diverse human communities in this lush habitat of bare rock and running water. Traditionally used by working class people for recreation - walking, playing and gathering berries - the management group is now actively encouraging ethnic community groups in the neighbourhood to participate fully in activities in the park.

Rosehill Quarry is a very unusual place, defined by the topology of the city in which it is situated. Swansea is a coastal city, with a jumbled mix of industrial, residential and wild areas threaded among steep hills running down to the sea. The city centre is overlooked by a mighty slab of sandstone supporting three distinct, densely populated human communities. Uppermost is the vast housing estate of Townhill, a mainly white neighbourhood which includes a famous early example of social housing design. On the hill's steepest side lies Mount Pleasant, consisting of several strata of privately owned and rented town houses arranged in terraces sloping down past the college of further education towards the business district and shopping centre. On the gentler Western slopes, backing onto the University is the residential neighbourhood known as The Uplands. Both Mount Pleasant and The Uplands are home to a great many students and to a high proportion of Swansea's ethnic communities.

Running around the sides of Townhill there is a band of rock too steep to be built upon, which has been recognised by the City and County of Swansea as a wildlife corridor, part of an important network of green spaces and wildlife sites dotted throughout the city. Rosehill Quarry is one pearl on this string of potential Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCS).

### **Chequered History**

This six acre site was quarried for stone for house-building from the 1840's, thus creating the only flat ground in the area. It then stood derelict for some time. In the early 20 th Century, this flat area became a fashionable tennis court, but that too stood derelict for a time, becoming overgrown with gorse and bramble. Margaret Burdett, a member of the Rosehill Quarry Group, has described in the journal of Landscape Design, October 1990, how "the quarry basin itself developed into a place for fly-tipping, burning copper wiring and abandoning stolen vehicles."

Yet, she goes on, "In spite of these problems, people still visited the quarry for picnics and blackberry picking and to enjoy the beauty and remote feeling of the area." For although it is only a stone's throw from the city centre, the site commands sweeping views over Swansea Bay and, on a clear day, across the Bristol Channel to the North Devon Coast.

Positioned as it is between Mount Pleasant and Townhill, Rosehill Quarry serves as a direct walking route to the city centre for those who are fit enough to make their way back up the challenging gradient of Constitution Hill. What better place to stop and catch your breath on the ascent?

In the 1970s, planning permission was granted for a huge block of flats, but as luck would have it, they were never built, and local people awoke to the potential of the site for recreation. Residents' initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s persuaded the city council to buy the quarry site, and designate it Public Open space in the Local Plan. The Rosehill Quarry Group was formed, with support from the council, to develop and maintain the quarry as Swansea's first Community Park.

### **Delicate Balance**

The Community Park must strike a balance between the recreational aspirations of the different communities it serves and the needs of the wildlife for whom it is a vital habitat. Hence it is not a formal, cultivated park, but rather a quiet sanctuary, with a feel of wilderness about it.



*Icicles in Rosehill Quarry*

Wildlife areas include several ponds, a stream and a waterfall. The quarry supports more than one hundred species of plants including rowan trees, oak and royal fern, among others; thirty odd species of birds including sparrow hawks, kestrels and tawny owls, as well as frogs, newts and an array of dragonflies and damselflies, notably the rare bluetailed damselfly – which has been adopted as the quarry's symbol.

Recreation features include benches and picnic tables, play equipment, a BMX track and, believe it or not, a Cretan labyrinth made from that ubiquitous local natural resource -cockleshells. When I visited one frosty morning I found the labyrinth hidden under a thick blanket of wet brown fallen leaves, but I was able to trace its route by the satisfying crunch of shells underfoot. It is a very meditative activity, to spiral in and out of an ancient maze, contemplating this paradoxical combination of local distinctiveness with diverse spiritual heritage.

The geology as well as the plant and animal life of the quarry makes it a fine place to explore and a useful field study resource centre for schools and other environmental study groups. The old tennis court has become a kick-about area, used by local children for games and by the nearby primary school for physical education. Terrace Road Primary School, which includes significant numbers of ethnic minority pupils, does not have any other access to a grass sports area. The kick about area is used for the annual school sports day, but that might be the only time some of these children get to play on grass. So negotiations are underway to convert the kick about area for more formal use by the school.

### **Community Participation**

People can join in with using, improving and creating new elements of the Rosehill Quarry Community Park by joining the quarry group, which meets monthly, or helping on practical work days once a month. Membership of the committee is described by one member as "very fluid", with people coming and going and not a lot of continuity. More people are gradually getting involved and the group is keen to encourage this, aiming to become fully inclusive. So far the main interest from ethnic communities has come from the young people, who come to play football and play hide and seek in the undergrowth. Reheena Begum has been working with BEN and the Rosehill Quarry Group to try and encourage the wider community to become active too.





Rehena is one of those very dynamic people who can be found in every community, stirring people up and getting things to happen. Being born and bred in Swansea's Bangladeshi community, she knows pretty much everyone and has strong links with many community groups, such as the Bangladeshi Welfare Association, Swansea Muslim Youth League (SMYLE) boys and girls clubs and Darwatul Islam community group. She is employed by Swansea Council for Voluntary Services as a Trainee Community Development Worker but is currently on 9 months placement with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, shadowing their Community Development Worker, organising projects and generally learning by doing. She is also a proud Auntie to 14 nieces and nephews and volunteers in her spare time lay on stimulating activities for the young people and their friends and families.

### **Increasing physical activity**

Although many people in the Bangladeshi community know about the Rosehill Quarry, they would not have thought of visiting it for a number of reasons – the steep climb; lack of transport; fears about personal safety or just lack of confidence to explore unfamiliar territory – issues affecting every community but especially ethnic communities. Increasing physical activity is a high priority on National government agendas at the present time, and is addressed in Judy Ling Wong's paper, "Increasing physical activity within ethnic minority communities", available on the BEN web site.

Rehena told me how she managed to get people interested: first, she organised an environmental art workshop at Swansea Environment Centre for Darwatul Islam, attracting 35 women and children to make decorative plant holders and plant them up with colourful flowers to take home to brighten up their small, town-centre gardens. This workshop took place in the big old hall next to BEN's South Wales office, so we can attest to the buzz of excitement throughout that afternoon.

The groups were delighted with the day and wanted to do more, but these things take a lot of time and energy to organise. So Rehena talked to Mike Cherry, BEN Development Worker in Swansea, to see if he had any ideas. Mike is also a resident in the Mount Pleasant area and in his spare time he and his wife Jannie volunteer with the Rosehill Quarry Group. Mike suggested that the Bangladeshi groups might like to participate in a Summer Fun Day that was being organised. Activities included parachute games, an environmental treasure hunt, conjuring, plate spinning, tug of wars and guided tours of the Quarry.

Every Sunday afternoon in the Mosque, a group of girls aged 6-15 year meet; and every Sunday in the early evening another group of 16+ young women meets in a nearby home. They would love to meet in the open air in the summer if there was somewhere they felt safe to go; but they would only go as a group, not as individuals. And even then, they have no minibus, so it would be hard to get everyone up there. So Rehena and a co-volunteer from the other community group, ferried people by the car-load the short distance from the Mosque and bookshop to the community park.

All day long they drove back and forth giving people lifts, with just a short prayer break at midday. This had the effect of bringing the two groups together, to mix with the white community and created a feeling of harmony and community spirit. While the young people happily played together under Mike's supervision, Rehena was able to show the adults around and help to familiarise them with the different facets of the site. Many of the young people attending Terrace Road Primary School are from the Bangladeshi community and they use the quarry with school groups, but this was the first time they had come in their own time, with their families and community groups.



Mike commented that the event was for everyone, but Rehena's group brought lots of energy to liven up the day. The initial aim is to introduce people from ethnic communities to the space and support and encourage them to feel able to use it more. Feedback from the Fun Day confirms that this was a successful introduction, and the groups have asked for more opportunities to participate.



*Earth bubble – photo by courtesy of South Wales Evening Post*

There are plans for a further event, supported by the Small Woodlands Trust, to celebrate the quarry as a small woodland. The event will take place in February, and include a wide variety of activities, such as:

- bird watching and making bird boxes with someone from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- coppicing with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)
- hedge planting for local school children with the council's development department nature conservation team
- making shelters from natural resources
- clay-modelling workshops with Rehena
- also lantern making storytelling, perhaps a barbeque, and an earth oven for bread making.

It is hoped that eventually Swansea's ethnic communities will come to have a sense of ownership of the space and feel able to use it in their own ways, and contribute to its management and upkeep; but there is a long way yet to go. Some families have commented that they would love to use the secluded, natural areas for prayers, but they would be concerned about, for instance, encountering dog-walkers or the evidence of them. Issues such as this would need to be addressed if the community park truly wants to become a resource for all. It will take a long time of gradual trust building between different communities for this goal to be achieved. It's good to know that the work is underway.

## **Ryton Organic Gardens Coventry**

**Contact: Jowanna Lewis**

**t: 024 7630 8209, or 0845 0641164**

**e: [organicfoodforall@hydra.org.uk](mailto:organicfoodforall@hydra.org.uk)**

As more and more people become concerned about what goes into their food, especially those with children, organic gardening – gardening without the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides – is becoming increasingly important to many people, including Britain's many ethnic communities, as a way to enjoy healthy food without harming nature.

The Henry Doubleday Research Association has been studying and developing organic gardening techniques since 1985. They have 3 organic show gardens in England: Audley End organic kitchen garden near Saffron Walden in Essex; Yalding historic garden near Maidstone in Kent; and Ryton Organic Gardens near Coventry in Warwickshire. All are easily accessible by public transport or by road and would make an interesting day out for any community group interested in gardening in an environmentally friendly way.

- Yalding tells the history of gardening in Britain as you walk through an ancient woodlands, medieval physic, knot and paradise gardens and a 19th century artisans plot, borders inspired by Gertrude Jekyll's ideas, before reaching a 1950s 'Dig for Victory' Allotment.
- Audley End, a Victorian kitchen garden linked to a Jacobean house and run in partnership with English Heritage, supplies organic fruit and vegetables to the very famous, very posh Dorchester hotel and restaurant in London, rather tending to support the image of organic food as being affordable only by well off people – an image which is now being challenged.
- Ryton Organic Garden, the focus of this case study, is the headquarters of HDRA and a showcase for organic gardening. As well as many fascinating gardens, Ryton is home to the magnificent Vegetable Kingdom, a vast collection of historic seeds and display of vegetable history. It's worth quoting at length from their guidebook, to get an idea of how relevant this is for ethnic communities today:

"Britain has a wonderful heritage of vegetable varieties that has grown and evolved over the centuries. Successive waves of visitors, immigrants and returning explorers have brought vegetable seeds with them. The Romans introduced lettuce and garlic, for example; in the 9th century, Arabs and Jews brought cauliflowers and aubergines, whilst the exploration of the New World by Columbus paved the way for the arrival of tomatoes, potatoes and runner beans. This continues to the present day with Afro Caribbean and Asian immigrants bringing with them vegetables, such as kalaloo, that they would have grown back home. The role of The Vegetable Kingdom is to highlight this aspect of Britain's heritage and to show how important vegetables are to our health and well-being."

Ryton Organic Gardens is home to the Organic Food for All Project, or OFfA for short.

As the name suggests, the idea is to make tasty, healthy food affordable to all by helping people to grow their own vegetables really cheaply. OFfA will provide training and support to socially excluded groups who are not currently growing their own produce, to get them growing organically. Even if you have very little space you can grow food easily on an allotment, wasteland, garden, balcony or window sill. Volunteers will be recruited and trained to act as mentors to novice organic gardeners. OFfA will work with local community groups, health workers, councils and businesses to help everyone get the most out of the project.

Potential groups are being identified now, and ethnic community groups or multicultural groups from all around the UK are very welcome to get involved. 12 groups have so far signed up from Leeds, Birmingham, Nuneaton, Yeovil, Watford, Kingston, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and the Isle of Wight. They are hoping to get started growing food this summer. The first mentor training will take place at the end of June, and a second series of training events is planned for the Autumn.

Training will cover all key aspects of organic growing including soil and what grows where, crops and crop rotation, what plants grow well together, spaces for growing and what methods to use, composting, seed saving, sowing, harvesting, storing food and recipes. The whole of Ryton Organic Gardens will be used as a teaching resource, so trainees will have a chance to see the herbs and flower gardens, fruit trees and bushes, the bee garden, paradise garden and so on. But the main site for training will be the demonstration allotment. Mentors will be provided with a tool kit and supplementary information to enable them to support their groups. A hotline has been established, offering fact sheets and advice, to further support OFfA volunteers.

More groups will be targeted next year with a major advertising campaign, and the project will run for three years initially, hopefully much longer. Jowanna Lewis, Project Co-ordinator, will be promoting the project through HDRA membership, as well as Centres for Change, the sustainability centers network, London 21, LA21 officers and the Centre for Alternative Technology. OFfA will also work with GPs as a way to reach out to otherwise 'hard to reach' groups. Jowanna hopes that by advertising widely the project will reach beyond the usual WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) networks to include a more diverse audience. She has identified a need to translate fact sheets into community languages and is looking for volunteer translators.

The project is funded by donations from HDRA members, and sponsorship from KETTLE ® Organic potato chips, and is seeking further funding and additional partners.

## **St Agnes Park Bristol**

**Contact: Peter Wilkinson, Head of Parks Department**

### **Background**

At the turn of the millennium, St Agnes Park was a virtual no-go area frequented mainly by local drug dealers. The Victorian lodge house was derelict, the playground abandoned, with overgrown shrubs and dead trees making the park seem like a dark and dangerous place. Today, it is a clean, bright, welcoming community green space at the heart of Bristol's multi-cultural St Paul's neighbourhood. A major factor in its revival is having a park warden living on the ground and a building, which brings the community into the park. The restored lodge is now home to Park Keeper Constantine Blake, a well know local figure who has received an award from the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management for his role in transforming the park. The building's new annex also houses a management committee drawn from local communities, together with offices and meeting space fro various community groups. So what else happened to bring about this dramatic change for the better?

*"It's about the community coming together to make this a community park," Constantine says.*



### **Making it happen**

First an organisation called Involving Residents in Solutions (IRIS) funded by the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) conducted consultations with local communities. They found out that people wanted to use the lodge for a resident park keeper and as a community resource; and they wanted to clean up the park, improving lighting and pruning trees and shrubs.

The next step was for IRIS to help St Agnes Park Association to apply for funding to achieve their goals. Refurbishment of the building was paid for by £165,000 from the Regional Development Agency (RDA) and the SRB's Inner City Lifeline scheme. Salaries for Constantine and his colleague Kathy Jacks a community development worker, were paid from European funding.

The council's park maintenance contractor got together with the probation service to tackle the clean-up, then donations from the council, the Home Office Police fund and residents' own fundraising provided thousands of bedding plants and bulbs to brighten up St Agnes Park.

A survey by Bristol parks department showed that, as well as appreciating improvements to the infrastructure and maintenance of the park, a majority of residents felt that improved security was an important achievement. Armed with this evidence, they were able to make a case for Neighbourhood Renewal funding to pay for additional lighting. Children are now able to use walkways through the park as a safe route to and from the nearby school. Peter Wilkinson, head of the parks department says,



*"A safer park makes people feel more confident and better about themselves."*

We asked Constantine what sort of activities local people enjoy in the park and he listed,

*"family picnics, a fun day at which they have puppet shows, workshops - children orientated, teach them how to DJ and everything - they have a four day event just before Jamaican Independence Day with circus leader workshops, drama ..."*

In 2002 St Agnes Park received a mention from the Civic Trust in recognition of the architectural restoration of the lodge. By March 2002 IRIS withdrew from the project. St Agnes Park Association is growing, becoming increasingly representative of the communities it serves, and has plans to become a charitable company which would manage the lodge and may manage the park in future. Constantine still lives in the lodge house and is currently employed by Bristol City Council on secondment to Bristol Contract Services who maintain the city's many parks and green spaces.

In order to address wider community concerns, and in the context of the Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative, Constantine now works half his week at St Agnes and the remainder of his time is divided between nearby St Paul's Park, Grosvenor Road open space and Mina Road Park. When he sees that some maintenance work is needed, he brings his tools and attends to it.



### **Future Plans**

The St Agnes Park Association want to improve the kitchen in the lodge house annex and get it working as more of a café, to bring in some funds. The Parks Department are thinking of ways Constantine can safely transport tools on his weekly rounds. One idea is to use sustainable transport such as a milk float or a little three wheeled buggy - like a motorised rickshaw.

There are plans to develop the park further over the next couple of years, with new paths, a play area and better shrub borders. A memorial garden to Bangy Berry, the community worker who was shot dead in St Pauls in the 1990s, has occupied a small corner of the park, but the hope is to position a more prominent feature - perhaps a sculpture placed in a circular flower bed - to create a focal point in the park. A design for improved railings and entrances would enhance the feeling of St Agnes Park as a 'secret garden' - a surprise green space in the midst of the urban chaos.



### Further Information

For Alison Benjamin's Guardian article 'Bright Spark' go to  
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/societyguardian/story/0.7843.553847.00.html>

Institute of Leisure and Amenities Management <http://www.ilam.co.uk>

Database of historic parks  
<http://www1.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/landscapes/ukpg.database>

Background to community safety in St Paul's area and survey results  
<http://www.crimebristol.org.uk/audit/appendix3.html>  
<http://www.crimebristol.org.uk/index.html?audit/action-groups/ashley.html~main>

Bristol City Council website gives lots of information about how to get involved in parks:

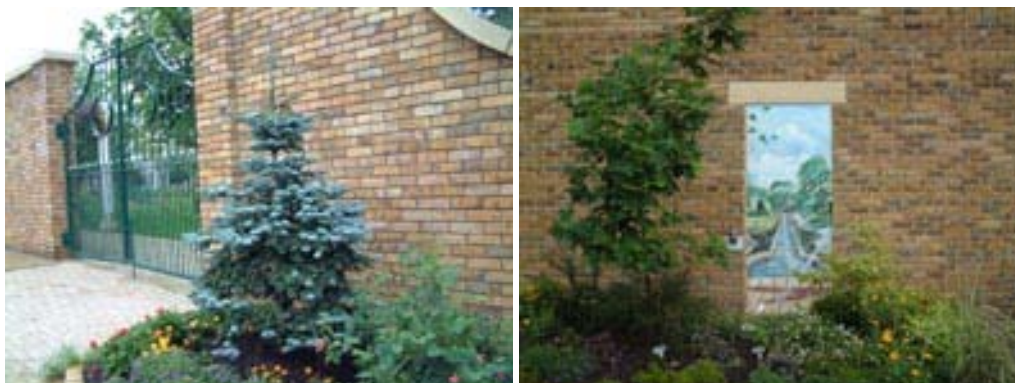
To complete a survey on park maintenance in Bristol go to  
<http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/cgi-bin/w3index-frames.p1?BLO0017+BG>

For a picture of residents volunteering to maintain St Agnes Park see  
<http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/cgi-bin/w3menu?C+BLO00108+BG+F+CMM00102+DPE00104>

For more details about Civic Trust awards visit  
<http://www.civictrust.org.uk/top.shtml>

**St Gemma's Hospice  
Leeds**

**Contact: Sr Brigid Murphy, Director of Spiritual Excellence  
e: [brigidm@st-gemma.co.uk](mailto:brigidm@st-gemma.co.uk)**



St Gemma's Hospice in the Moortown district of Leeds has been revamped to create an environment where the presence of nature is thought to be critical to successful healthcare. Good, holistic hospital design of this kind offers an important model at a time when significant government funding is being invested in improving the architecture of health care settings. Meanwhile, the Joint Leeds Hospices Ethnic Minority Project has recommended that policies should reflect diversity issues throughout all aspects of the palliative care service. This article explores the extent to which the needs of ethnic communities have been considered in the landscape design which is so central to St Gemma's philosophy and structure. Impressive efforts have been made to move from a singular religious outlook to a more inclusive, multi-faith approach. Potential for further development is identified.

**The vision behind St Gemma's**

Founded in 1978, St. Gemma's Hospice provides physical, emotional, social and spiritual comfort to patients and families facing a life threatening illness, often though not always cancer. Nurses offer in-patient and out-patient care and social workers give practical advice and counselling for patients and carers.

St Gemma's is situated in the Moortown district of Leeds, a pleasant suburb. Leeds as a whole has about 8% ethnic minority population. Moortown has a large Irish Catholic community and a significant Jewish community – the next largest in the UK after London, Manchester and Glasgow.

The building which houses the hospice was previously a school run by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, an order of Roman Catholic nuns. In the 1970s the nuns decided to change the focus of their work from education to hospice care. In 1982 a second building was erected, expanding the number of bed spaces from 9 to 32. The Prout conference centre was built in 1991 and opened by Princess Diana. In 1998 architects Jane Derbyshire and David Kendall (JDDK) were commissioned to reorganise the campus to create more appropriate patient care accommodation.

St Gemma's Chief Executive and Director of Nursing Excellence, Steve Kirk, has a strong vision for the role of the environment in healing and this is clearly reflected in the holistic design of the site. Refurbishment has taken 2 years in the planning and 3 years to achieve. Open plan wards were replaced by four bedded rooms on each of two floors; each room having either a balcony with a view of, or French windows opening onto, a healing garden.





### **Award winning environment**

The garden was formerly laid with a mix of trees and car parking areas, and was quite inaccessible to patients. Since the improvements, car parking has been 'disentangled' and removed to one side, and the garden has been walled off, creating a feeling of shelter, safety and privacy. The garden design, which incorporates elements of the original Victorian walled garden, is now organised around a central rill, with themed planting including bog plants, scented herbs and a Mediterranean garden. A network of paths allows access for people with every degree of mobility impairment, being suitable for wheelchairs and beds. A two storey conservatory alongside the garden serves as an all weather lounge space.

The scheme was completed in 2003 and received the 'Patient Environment Award' as part of the NHS Building Better Healthcare Awards, as well as winning public approval in an internet vote for the favourite healing hospital environment, organised by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

St Gemma's also provides day hospice facilities including the art room where art worker Clare works with patients to create beautiful, lasting artefacts such as ceramics, mosaics and painted glass, often using natural materials or taking their inspiration from the garden setting. Day facilities include complementary therapies and hairdressing, which are of real value to the wellbeing of those taking strong medication, particularly cancer patients.

### **Memory Garden**

The different parts of the building are linked by an accessible corridor overlooking an internal courtyard or 'light well' which the architects have used to create a special memory garden. According to St Gemma's web site:

"Our memory garden is situated in an oasis of calm by the Dales Ward. It provides a tranquil space where relatives, friends and carers can sit and reflect, receiving strength for the present and hope for the future. The Tree of Life is sculpted in steel and copper. It has detachable leaves which can be engraved in the memory of loved ones. The leaves are hung on the tree for one year. They are then safely stored to be hung on the anniversary day each subsequent year. Names are also entered in a memorial book which may be viewed in our chapel."

In an important interfaith gesture, Rabbi ? was invited to bless the memorial tree at the opening of the Memory Garden.



### **Leeds Hospices Ethnic Minority Project**

Meanwhile, in April 2001 the Health Action Zone Joint Leeds Hospices Ethnic Minority Project set out to address the palliative care needs and perceived inequalities of Black and minority ethnic communities. It was known that take up of palliative care services by people from BME groups was low. Sister Brigid Murphy, Director of Spiritual Excellence, explained to me that St Gemma's does not tend to have a very large BME patient population at any one time – at the time of my visit there was one Asian patient in residence - but often more BME out-patients are receiving care in the community.

The project aimed to bridge language barriers, increase care providers' knowledge of the needs of BME communities and to develop more inclusive methods of health care. Community link workers were appointed to reach out into the Bengali, Pakistani, Indian, African Caribbean, Chinese and Vietnamese communities, to raise awareness within those communities of hospice services and to help the palliative care providers in Leeds, including St Gemma's, to meet the cultural needs of each ethnic group. The project deliberately targeted 'visible minorities' rather than encompassing the Irish and Eastern European communities since there were 'greater concerns' about these groups accessing services. (It seems that these concerns are based on anecdotal evidence.)

A number of issues were identified and an action plan developed, covering areas such as wider recruitment; diversity training for senior staff to cascade to all hospice staff; improved patient monitoring; translation and interpretation services; improved facilities to cater for cultural needs. The project report states that, "policies should reflect diversity issues."

Cultural awareness training took place in 2003 covering  
Pakistani and Bangladeshi culture – history and attitudes to illness  
India – history and attitudes to illness  
Care of African Caribbean hair and skin

A conference is planned, to take place in the Prout Conference Centre at St Gemma's in October 2004 addressing "Attitudes to death and dying across cultures."

A resource base of books and multi-faith resources relating to ethnic minority care has been established at each of the Leeds hospices, including basic information about countries of origin, languages, health care and naming systems.

In the chapel of St Gemma's, Sister Brigid showed me one area with a Catholic shrine, reflecting the spiritual origins of St Gemma's; another icon-free area, with a lovely stained glass window depicting a peaceful seascape; and 2 quiet rooms for meditation or prayer. She pointed out that religious texts for each of the major faiths are available.

Positive action to improve staff recruitment from BME communities is on the agenda but is a slower process. Palliative care is of course a specialist branch of nursing and Sister Brigid referred to a trend for Asian people to go into medicine rather than nursing. She noted that St Gemma's has employed two Chinese nurses.

### **Linking holistic philosophy, access and diversity**

As previously mentioned, "policies should reflect diversity issues." This means that all that hospice's facilities need to be geared to providing a culturally appropriate health care setting.

I asked Graham Fox, Facilities Manager, about any multicultural influences upon the garden design at St Gemma's, and opportunities for ethnic communities to engage with the hospice through the garden. He told me that consultation during the several phases of development had been focussed internally, rather than reaching out to ethnic communities in Leeds. Hospice staff and volunteers had wanted the garden to provide a range of sensory experiences for patients and visitors to enjoy, so touch and smell have been considered alongside colour in the planting scheme. We discussed the challenges of 'retrofitting' diverse cultural features into an existing environmental design.

Mr Fox sees the garden as an evolving project, with a five year plan including a Victorian style glass house, for which a donation has recently been secured from a local trust fund. He acknowledges that the rill and other existing garden features are drawn from a rich multicultural history of garden design, and that the proposed glass house would provide a suitable environment for raising plants familiar to people from various countries of origin. He had not yet identified ways to develop the potential of these elements to provide culturally appropriate factors to meet the needs of BME patients and their families.



Garden maintenance and development is one possible avenue for increasing ethnic community awareness and understanding of the work of St Gemma's. The hospice currently employs only one full time gardener, with a part time post about to be advertised shortly. The garden also benefits from significant volunteer input, varying by the seasons. (When I visited Leeds in August 2004 the rain was so heavy, people were calling it the monsoon season!) The Halifax Building Society staff periodically send teams of 8-10 volunteers to help with gardening chores. Volunteer recruitment, like staff recruitment, operates on an equal opportunities basis, and at present there are no mechanisms for outreach to BME communities, although this is something Sr Brigid is hoping to address in the near future.

For more information visit: <http://www.st-gemma.co.uk>

Post Script - Leeds Hospices Woodland

St Gemma's Hospice provides an excellent palliative care service but this is a costly undertaking and the work is funded 35% by NHS, while St Gemma's have to find 65% of their budget through fundraising.

Leeds Hospices Woodland, in Meanwood Valley, is a partnership between Wheatfields and St. Gemma's Hospices and Leeds City Council, offering people a chance to sponsor the planting of trees in memory of loved ones, to mark occasions, celebrate anniversaries and so on. This helps to raise funds for the hospices, while improving the environment, reducing the effects of pollution, providing homes for wildlife and creating a place of beauty to be visited by generations to come.

**Surrey Docks Farm  
London**

**Contact; Surrey Docks Farm  
t: 013420 824181  
e: dockcityfarm@btconnect.com**

**For information about City Farms and Community Gardens and where the nearest one is to you,  
contact: Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens  
t: 0117 923 1800  
e: admin@farmgarden.org.uk**



The Surrey Dock Farm is a short bus ride from Peckham. It is a nice change from the inner city of Peckham. As you enter the farm gates you are transported to the countryside because of the noise and smells of the animals. The 2.2 acres of farm in the city is unexpected and dynamic, because as you approach the site there is no indication of what you are about to discover.

They give wonderful opportunities for people to learn about food production. They also allow active participation by visitors to the farm. All the animals are organically farmed, and they do produce a small amount of food for sale to the public. They have a local man who occasionally purchases a live chicken, possibly to eat as he always returns for more.

On 27th March 2002 HRH Prince of Wales Visited Surrey Docks Farm. The Prince is the Patron of the Federation of City Farms. The Prince was there to boost the cause of city farms, many of which were forced to close last year because of the difficulties resulting from foot and mouth disease.

The atmosphere in the farm is relaxed and friendly. The main area of the farmyard is designed split level, so that you can see the animals and the helpers as if you were in an arena. Within the farm there is a coffee shop and a class room.

The site has works of art which were produced by schools and trainees with learning difficulties. The trainees learn horticulture, beekeeping and craft skills. The classroom has a teacher on site who relates the activities to the National Curriculum for visiting schools. The Surrey Docks Farms has been recognised as one of the most innovative and successful city farm education projects in England.

### **Aims of the farm**

The farm aims to promote environmental education to both adults and children.

The farm feels that the animals are at the heart of the farm. Many of the farm's visitors appreciate the direct contact with the animals.

At the end of the year the management committee decided to undertake a strategic review for the next 3 to 5 years.

The farm gets its core grant from Southwark Council. It is essential to the running of the farm. Unfortunately Southwark Council recently made a 5% cut in voluntary sector grants.

It has been a difficult year for the Surrey Docks Farm because of foot and mouth. They did however receive compensation from two different sources, the Greater London Assembly distributed money around all London city farms, and also the National Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens raised funds and distributed the money nationally.

### **Future Plans**

The Farm hopes to offer a range of opportunities in activities on an ongoing basis.

With the continued support of Southwark Leisure the Farm will continue to offer exciting educational projects.

At the end of the year the farm hopes to produce an audit of the major maintenance work necessary for the coming year, to lay down the basis for future development.

### **Activities**

The Surrey Docks Farm is working with the Tate Modern Art Gallery and has taken part in four guided workshops.

Early Years Literacy trails are now run on site. For the Golden Jubilee a mobile Enchanted Garden was built.

The London Workshop company leaders joined children to explore the farm site and the environment of the Pumphouse Education Museum. The partnership integrates the use of computers with sponsorship from the North Southwark Environmental Trust, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, JP Morgan Flemming Educational Trust and WS Atkins.

## **Three Sisters - Good Road Community Garden Newcastle upon Tyne**

**Contact Steve Tinling**  
**t: 0191 278 1969**

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Native American tribe were the first to tell the story of Three Sisters, who grew up together in harmony – corn, beans and squash. It is a story that is shared by people in the Caribbean, and one we can learn from here in Britain. In Newcastle upon Tyne in the cold North East of England, an innovative project aims to investigate how different Native American cultures have developed sustainable horticultural methods and demonstrate how these principals can be applied over here.

Good Road community garden is an experiment in ecologically sound approaches to vegetable gardening, such as organic composting, companion planting and biological control of pests. This is a wonderful urban green space, which can be used as an inspiration and a resource by community groups interested in food growing or in cultural diversity.

Meanwhile, visits from Native American teachers introduce school children to accurate information about the lifestyles of First Nation peoples, who often lived in harmony with nature, and whom the children may otherwise never have the chance to meet. This project highlights the fact that interest in different cultures is not about focussing on the countries of origin of local ethnic minority groups. For there is no significant community of Native Americans living in Britain; yet through projects like Three Sisters, white children are able to learn about the richness of other cultures, and how this can be drawn upon to enrich their own culture.

‘The corn, the bean and the squash are three loving sisters who must always live together to be happy. The older sister is tall and graceful, the next younger loved to twine about her and lean for strength upon her. The youngest rambled at the feet of their sisters and protected them from prowling enemies. When the moon drops low and the summer night is lit only by the mysterious light of the stars, these three sister come forth in human form wearing their green garments and decked in blossoms. They have been seen dancing in the shadows, singing to their mother earth, praising their father sun and whispering words of comfort to mankind. And women and men, to show gratitude, call the three sisters Dyonheyko, “they who sustain our lives”’.

### **Haudenosaunee (Iroquois ‘Longhouse’ people) legend**

I first heard this story when I lived in South London, it was told to me by my elderly neighbour, Uri Peart, who in his youth had been a farmer in Jamaica. He did not mention mother earth and father sun. He was a devout Seventh Day Adventist. But he did explain to me that people in the Caribbean have long since practised companion planting – growing certain plants together, so that they support and protect one another. He recalled being taught as a boy to put the three seeds – corn, bean and squash – side by side in one small hole in the soil, so that they would grow up together.

First the corn would sprout and grow up tall and strong; then the bean would twine around it's stem, so there is no need to build a ‘tipi’ of bamboo canes as gardeners in Europe tend to do. In return for this support, the bean converts nitrogen from the air into food for the roots of the growing corn, so the gardener does not need to apply fertiliser. Then the squash will spread as ground cover, its broad leaves shading the soil to preserve moisture and protect the roots of the taller plants, while preventing weeds from taking hold, so again the gardener need not apply mulch.

Mind you, Mr Peart also told me about how he used to pick a banana from the wayside tree to eat on his way to school, or pick up a ripe avocado fallen from a tree as big as the Horse Chestnut which grew opposite our

block of flats. It all sounded rather exotic and I was not confident that it would work over here where the climate is very different.

### **Inspiration for organic gardeners in England and Wales**

We had a tiny pocket handkerchief of shared garden surrounding our building, in those days, and those who were fit enough and had some spare time would share responsibility for tending it. At the front our English neighbours kept a neat lawn and straight rows of flowerbeds in red, white and blue. But out the back my partner and I experimented with growing food. Our Ghanaian neighbours laughed heartily at our first small crop of potatoes, suggesting we should take them to the supermarket to sell. When we grew pumpkins, however, there were plenty to share with all our friends and we distributed seeds widely among our women's group and across the South London Permaculture network. Pumpkins are surely one of the most fertile kinds of squash we can grow.

Then when I heard about the Good Road project, I was very keen to visit and see for myself how companion planting was working successfully in the Jesmond Dene district of Newcastle upon Tyne, way up in the cold North East of England. Steve Tinling is the man behind the project. I met him on a cold winter's day, in his little port-a-cabin office alongside the council's plant nursery. Steve runs the Home Composting Project from here, distributing big plastic compost bins to encourage people to recycle kitchen waste in their own gardens. His office is beautifully decorated with garlands of colourful cobs of corn, such as you might see in the USA around Hallowe'en and Thanksgiving time. Steve told me how, very often people who have just come to pick up a compost bin will spot this display and comment, opening up conversations about the wider issues around sustainable horticulture.

In 1997, the Home Composting Project together with friends, colleagues and interested customers set up Good Road Community Garden to investigate traditional plant uses and historic growing methods of various Native American cultures. There is a demonstration garden, where you can see three sisters growing in the summertime, together with various wild or semi-domesticated plants. Sometimes visitors are surprised to see such an informal arrangement of plants in a garden. Well, that was the reaction of the first Europeans arriving in the New World. Native American agriculture was rather different from European methods, so the settlers did not recognise what they saw as farming.

### **Sustainable agriculture of the Original People**

The indigenous peoples often practised forage-harvesting for their food, medicine and amenity plants, alongside farming which worked with, not against, natural ecosystems. Only small areas of forest were felled for farming. The three sisters were planted on small mounds, not rows. Planting in rows can cause soil erosion whereas mounds help to retain moisture and soil fertility, encouraging strong, healthy plant growth. Healthy plants are more disease resistant. And grown together, they attract beneficial insects, which prey on those that are destructive. This system is known today as biological control.

A key partner in this project is the International North American Indian Association, who have a base in Edinburgh. They hold the view that all peoples share one Earth and so have a responsibility to keep abreast of environmental issues which affect us all. They monitor the effects of industry on wildlife in America, and the introduction of beaver and other species into the UK. The project is also closely linked to the Lenni Lenape Resource Centre UK, which provides information and advice about specific Native American cultures to schools and community groups; and the Lenni Lenape Historical Society / Museum of Indian Culture in Pennsylvania USA.

The Lenape people occupied an area of Turtle Island (as America is known to them) stretching from Delaware to Long Island New York. Named the Delaware Indians by white people, their own name for themselves, Lenni Lenape means 'original people' in Algonquin dialect. For 15,000 years before the arrival



of Columbus they lived in small villages connected by a criss-cross of footpaths. They farmed, fished and hunted many species of animals and birds. To read the sad story of what became of the Lenni Lenape, please visit the website

### **Bringing the lessons home**

Carla Messenger, Director of the Museum of Indian Culture, visited Newcastle in July 2002 to show an exhibition and give a series of talks to local school children about Native American sustainable lifestyles. The talks were held at Good Road in a polytunnel (polythene covered, tunnel shaped, plant-growing greenhouse) not unlike a Haudenosaunee Longhouse in construction. Carla talked about Native American technologies and cultures, including the re-use and recycling of plant and animal materials.

Steve Tinling showed me some artefacts of the type used by American Indians, including gardening tools made from a deer's jawbone and antlers. The antlers would be used for digging and the jawbone, complete with teeth, for removing grains of maize from the cob. He also showed me a great many varieties of seeds from the types of corn, beans and squash grown traditionally by the Lenni Lenape and other tribes.

### **Seeds of Heritage, Seeds of Diversity**

These are heritage seeds, in that they are not registered in seed catalogues and so cannot legally be sold in Europe; but they can be shared and grown quite happily. And many people consider it increasingly important to do so, saving seed each year and keeping these ancient, rare varieties alive for the benefit of future generations.

I am starting to notice seed-swapping events cropping up around the UK in early spring. Perhaps we can hope to see exciting varieties like these become more readily available. Networks are beginning to emerge of people keen to share not just the seeds of special plant varieties but also the heritage of stories that go with them – stories about how the plants grow and what they mean to us.

For as well as complementing each other in the garden, the three sisters have for centuries lived in harmony in the kitchen. Corn gives us energy food, and some protein to help us grow strong like her. But when eaten together with beans, the protein from the beans combines with that of the corn to produce maximum benefit in our diet. (Think of tortilla and refried beans – they go together just like rice and peas, dahl and rice or bean or toast!) Now add some juicy squash, full of vitamins, and you have the perfect balanced meal.

### **And it works in Wales too!**

Since moving to Wales and getting a bigger garden, last year I decided to have a serious go at growing the three sisters. I did not have success starting the three seeds together in each pot. But I did manage to start off first the corn, then the beans and finally courgettes – a kind of squash familiar to Europe. I used ordinary packet seed from the shops. And they did very well together. We were lucky to have a lingering 'Indian' summer so the corn eventually ripened in September, and my family enjoyed a harvest festival feast of the sweetest corn you could imagine. I am sure my old Jamaican neighbour, Mr Peart, would be so proud of me, if only he were still alive to see my little raised beds, home-made organic compost and fine healthy crop of food.

Next year I hope to get hold of some heritage seed and contribute to the growing movement for conservation of plant diversity. You can get more information about plant diversity in an information sheet from Steve Tinling at Good Road.

**Other contacts and resources**

International Native American Indian Association , 9/2 Dunsyre House (North), 33 Calder Crescent,  
Edinburgh, EH11 4JH, Scotland t: 0121 453 1046

Native Peoples Arts and Lifeways magazine Jan/Feb 2003 carries an article about ethno-botanical gardens in USA, showing Native ways with horticulture and cookery, including a recipe for fish baked in corn husks.

Earthly Joys and Virgin Earth, both books by Philippa Gregory, tell the story of John Tradescant and his son by the same name, English plant collectors in Virginia, and their encounters with the Native peoples. Published by Harper Collins.

## **Twigs Swindon**

**Contact: Alan Holland, Project Manager**  
**t: 01793 523294**  
**e: [Twigs@richmondfellowship.org.uk](mailto:Twigs@richmondfellowship.org.uk)**

### **Introduction**

In England's smaller towns, where Black and minority ethnic communities make up a smaller proportion of the population, it can be harder for green space projects to achieve representative levels of ethnic community participation. The Twigs project in Swindon, Wiltshire, is making good progress towards improving BME participation levels because there is genuine commitment to multicultural approaches and sustained effort embedded at every level throughout the organisation. White staff volunteers and service users are all willing to support one another in learning about the diverse cultures within their area. They are prepared to try out different ways of working in order to make their service relevant and appealing to Swindon's various ethnic community groups. Slowly but surely, they are building the foundations for lasting cross-cultural relationships, to support the well-being of all Swindon's communities. Therapeutic gardening in context

Therapeutic Work in Gardening in Swindon is an excellent project providing opportunities in therapeutic horticulture for people with mental health problems. Twigs, as it is called for short, is part of Richmond Fellowship Employment and Training Services and is a member of Thrive, the network of therapeutic horticulture projects in the UK. Other Thrive projects may cater for various client groups such as the elderly, people with learning difficulties or those with physical disabilities or sensory impairments. Twigs specifically focuses on supporting people who are experiencing mental health problems, providing a stepping stone to recovery and opportunities for integration in the community by linking with various businesses, voluntary organisations and community groups. 109 clients from all over Swindon were involved in Twigs during 2003-2004, in the role of 'supported volunteer'. Supported volunteers usually stay with Twigs for up to two years, after which they may continue as 'independent volunteers' if they wish. There were 18 independent volunteers during last year, also including people from the wider community who wish to support the project.

### **Richmond Fellowship support**

Richmond Fellowship is a mental health charity with several projects throughout England and a headquarters in London. Twigs Project Manager Alan Holland is able to draw inspiration from a culturally diverse staff team representative of the multicultural population of London. Richmond Fellowship has a key operational objective to identify services where the service profile doesn't reflect the local demographic profile, to agree and implement action plans, and to include diversity targets in business plans.

### **Training**

Nicola Carruthers, Chief Executive of Thrive, told me that BEN's training officer, Henry Adomako, is working with Twigs, training staff in new approaches to working with ethnic minorities in environmental projects.

Manager Alan Holland also attended a Black Development Agency event in Bristol in 2001, where delegates from voluntary and community sector groups throughout the South West gathered to discuss ways of tackling barriers to BME volunteering. A report entitled 'Room for Growth: Patterns and Potential in Black and Minority Ethnic Volunteering', notes that in the South West, "many mainstream (or white-led) organisations have very little or no contact with BME communities when advertising or raising awareness of the volunteering work of their organisation." The main barriers to recruiting BME volunteers were due to a lack of positive action on this issue. They were often perceived as white, middle class organisations and did little to promote themselves as anything other than that.

### **Thrive research**

Thrive is a national charity promoting gardening for therapy and health, training and employment. It has four of its own projects and co-ordinates a network of 1500 projects nationally.

Supported by a small grant from the Henry Smith Charity, in 2001, Thrive conducted a research project with help from the University of West England. The report, 'Making our network more diverse: Black and Minority Ethnic Groups' involvement with gardening projects' (see below for more details) focuses on perceived barriers to BME inclusion, and proposes strategies to tackle these barriers. Researchers found that often,

white workers believe that Black people do not enjoy horticulture and prefer to deal with mental health problems within their own communities. Yet we know that BME groups face “significant unmet health needs and that many organisations fail to provide an equitable service”. This lack of congruence has tended to shield service providers from their own responsibility to proactively seek out and address BME health care needs.

The first step is to recognise that equal sometimes means different, and a more flexible approach is sometimes called for if projects are to overcome institutional racism. Projects that achieved a high degree of BME participation were specific, targeted projects aimed at particular BME communities or at one section of a community eg women. The Thrive report makes a number of recommendations including the suggestion that projects can network with each other to spread examples of good practice and encourage innovation.

Twigs participated in this research, and admitted that the project is “all-white”. “We need role models among the staff, volunteers and service users, and more appropriate publicity aimed at BME groups. We are certainly looking to recruit from BME groups in the near future.”

### **Diversity Pilot Project**

A student worked with Twigs to develop a Diversity Pilot Project. She helped project staff to take a ‘snapshot’ of their successes and challenges in terms of diversity, including a definition of diversity (just BME communities, or extending to age, disability, sexual orientation?), an audit of the demographic context, any action to date, aims, ideas for the future and an action plan.

Swindon, unlike London, is not characterised by large minority ethnic communities – the BME population is about 4.8% of the whole. The main visible minority communities are South Asian, Chinese and African Caribbean with significant white minority communities of Polish and Italian speaking people. At Twigs, client monitoring shows 3.7% of referrals from BME communities, and although this is not a drastic shortfall, the project staff all take very seriously their commitment to achieve representative BME participation. Their action plan seeks to realistically represent the percentage of BME populations using the service, to contact and visit BME groups and invite them to visit Twigs, to research the feasibility of funding a community outreach worker to draw in BME groups and to investigate ways to ensure the service is accessible to all BME groups, eg by looking into translating leaflets.

### **A guided tour of the Twigs project**

The Twigs project has been established five years and is situated next to Manor Garden Centre on the Cheney Manor Industrial Estate in Swindon, Wiltshire. Outside the front of the building a number of attractive mosaics depicting images of wildlife give an inviting signal to new arrivals. On entering the lobby area, shelves can be seen displaying quality craft items made by Twigs participants. These are on sale to generate some income for the project.

Entering the office and reception area, visitors are immediately greeted with posters on the wall showing faces of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, which creates a welcoming atmosphere for all. On the notice board there are flyers about interfaith ecology events taking place in the region, which also help to indicate that this is an inclusive and tolerant environment.

### **Quality crafts**

Alan showed me through into the craft room, where three women were busy making peg dolls reflecting their personal identities, for an upcoming exhibition of community crafts. When Alan mentioned my interest in ethnic participation in therapeutic horticulture, one of the women asked if I was from the Women's Environmental Network. She had read an article by Shanaz Begum, WEN's Community Environment Worker, in the Thrive newsletter, about the Gardening for Health project with Bangladeshi origin women in Bradford, and was very interested to learn about their successes in organic growing.

Phillida Richards, Senior Supervisor, pointed out some of the artefacts clients have been producing – inspired by nature and increasingly using natural, organic materials produced on site. The craft room is decorated with many lovely things which the supported volunteers have made here, such as a beaded curtain, beautiful mobiles and a collage pelmet bearing words that the group feel embody the values of the project – individuality, recycling, natural inspiration, organics, balance, quality, harmony, gorgeousness and acceptance of each other.

Other creations on view include hand made paper items, felt covered note books and juggling balls made from the wool of Jacob's sheep – a heritage breed with lovely dark brown wool. Different craft materials are

used including clay, textiles, metal, paper and card, paints and dyes, willow 'withies', dried flowers and plants – the list goes on.

I discussed with Phillida ideas for encouraging ethnic participation in nature based arts and crafts. She has been inspired by a book about multicultural crafts and is on a steep learning curve, looking out for ideas of craft projects which will reflect the cultures of the ethnic community groups to whom Twigs is trying to reach out. BEN is able to draw on the experience of over 650 members comprising ethnic community groups and environmental, health, housing and heritage organisations working together on participatory projects. I made a note to network Phillida to the knowledge and expertise she needs to support and empower ethnic groups to play a part in the Twigs project.

### **Healing environment**

We moved to the courtyard at the rear of the main building, which offers a shady, relaxing place for clients, staff and volunteers to gather for meetings or meal breaks. A central fountain splashes cool water on smooth round stones while brightly coloured flowers, sweet scented herbs, humming insects and lovely works of art stimulate the senses and refresh the spirit. We agreed that contact with nature is the greatest healer, and benefits everyone, not just those who are unwell. Passing time quietly in the garden helps to reduce stress and promote wellbeing for all. And of course, organic gardens of this kind are good for nature too. Julia Drown, Labour MP for Swindon, recognised the importance of good relationships between people and nature when she mentioned Twigs in her speech at the launch of the local biodiversity action plan:

“Groups like TWIGS have shown us how nature and wildlife can play a really important part in the health and social well-being of communities by providing rehabilitation opportunities through horticulture and craft activities for people who are experiencing emotional stress or mental ill health.”

In the gently supportive atmosphere at Twigs, tasks are selected according to aptitude. Alan showed me where the protective clothing is stored for the use of volunteers. There is a list of jobs up on the wall and each day, the supported volunteers can choose what activity they would like to join in with.

### **Working with wood**

In the carpentry workshop, one man was working quietly to make a chisel rack and another was building a dovecot for a local school. I could see other wooden garden artefacts in various stages of completion, such as bird tables and nesting boxes. We chatted about BEN's work and the idea of ethnic community involvement in Twigs, swapping stories of our growing cultural awareness and supporting one another as white people preparing to open out our work to embrace greater cultural diversity.

### **Down the garden path**

The land at Twigs is divided into several plots and the supported volunteers have decided on different themes for each plot, such as the contemplative Japanese garden and the pottager, where a mix of herbs and flowers grow together. There is one area set aside for service users to tend in whatever way they wish, with no set theme, and scope for each volunteer to use their plot in their own unique way.

In the garden, Denise O'Sullivan supervises volunteers. She told me about some of the activities enjoyed by the public who attended a recent open day event. These regular events have not yet attracted many people from the ethnic communities in Swindon so Denise had specifically reached out to Asian women, through a link worker Nan. The women offered henna body painting and rangoli floor painting workshops, free of charge. They really enjoyed sharing their skills with the white visitors and adding to the celebratory feel of the day. Musicians from the African Caribbean community also contributed to make the event an all round cultural celebration and sensory experience. However, the events still did not succeed in attracting any BME 'members of public'.

Denise is now thinking that the Twigs minibus might be used to bring members of the Asian women's group, for example, to join in future events. Again, drawing on experience of the BEN network, I made a note to link Denise to the London 21 Network, who very successfully used a similar approach for their recent Multicultural Green Fair. She is also planning to attend events organised by ethnic community groups, to help raise awareness of Twigs and as a way to learn to understand more about the different cultures and how to make Twigs more relevant to each community.

### **Path of Life**



The 'Path of Life garden', a special garden design created by the volunteers, leads you on a journey along a winding path representing the emotional journey through life as experienced by people with mental health problems. The path starts with two rather bleak and barren looking areas – a slate garden, where spiky grasses cling to the base of a charred driftwood log, and a garden made of shingle and sand, where the bleached bone of an animal's skull and a pale stone carving of a crouched figure in despair are the prominent features. The path itself is made from shredded car tyres and has a very distinctive feel underfoot. As you progress along the path, the scenes gradually become less hostile, more green and lush and life-affirming, until your journey culminates in a garden of happiness and joy, under a leafy bower, bathed in beauty and sunlight.

The idea is to use this path as a way for people to evaluate their progress with the Twigs project, by indicating their position along the path on arrival and revisiting at intervals to assess how they are feeling now. It's a good alternative channel of communication for people who may feel shy, due to the social stigma and isolation associated with mental illness, or those who lack the self esteem, confidence or trust that would enable them to share their feelings with others.

### **Growing wholesome food**

A short walk alongside the neighbouring lake and through some woodland leads to a nearby allotment site, which Twigs has leased from the council. Here I met some of the independent volunteers, who have moved on from supported volunteering and are more confident to tend a plot of their own, growing tasty, health-giving fruit, vegetables, herbs and attractive flowers for their own pleasure, and to go into the organic vegetable box scheme, which brings healthful benefits to the wider community and in return generates part of the project's income.

An important aim of the project is to provide training and skills to help people recovering from mental illness to get back to work and regain their confidence and independence. But the atmosphere at Twigs is very calm and soothing, not at all pressurised, as work environments can sometimes be. In the potting shed there is a wood burning stove and a storm kettle so that volunteers and workers can gather together in bad weather and share a hot drink while warming their bones. Here I saw baskets full of seeds such as the savoury herb lovage, which Twigs produce for sale at the local health food shop. In the polytunnel they were growing wheat-grass to make a body-building drink. Adjacent to the allotments a plot of fast growing willow provides withies for making hurdle fencing, sculptures and basketware. A new woodland crafts area is being created, to equip people with skills in using the pole lathe and other traditional tools and materials. This will be a pleasant alternative for those who prefer not to use sharp, noisy power tools. Other plans for the future include another low-impact structure in the form of a straw bale building, to provide more office space.

### **Built by our own hands**

Returning to the main site, Alan took me to sit in the 'iron age' roundhouse which volunteers have built from on-site materials – stick frame, cob walls, reed thatched roof. He told me what fun the staff and volunteers had together creating this safe haven with their own hands, and he shared with me some insights into his motivation for making Twigs more inclusive of Swindon's ethnic communities. He has always been interested in a multicultural way, and has been slowly but surely making links with ethnic communities, beginning to build trust and explore possible 'entry points' for greater community involvement in Twigs. He does not expect success to come overnight, but is prepared to continue steadily plugging away, learning what works and what does not, until eventually deep and lasting change can be brought about.

[www.moredon99.freesevice.co.uk](http://www.moredon99.freesevice.co.uk)  
[www.richmondfellowship.org.uk](http://www.richmondfellowship.org.uk)  
[www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)

for a copy of the report by Anita Kamat, entitled 'Room for Growth: Patterns and Potential in Black and Minority Ethnic Volunteering'.

'Multicultural gardening – using plants to reflect community cultural origins' leaflet available from Thrive. The report about Thrive, 'Making our network more diverse: Black and Minority Ethnic Groups' involvement with gardening projects' by Jennie Naidoo, Nick de Viggiani and Matthew Jones, is published by the Faculty of Social Care at UWE Bristol, tel 0117 958 5655.

**Viewfinder Project  
Sheffield**

**Contact: Claire Rishbeth**  
**t: 0114 222 0606**  
**e: c.rishbeth@sheffield.ac.uk**



The Viewfinder project combined a basic course in photography with research into refugees' perception and experiences of urban green spaces. It took place in Sheffield in 2004 and was a collaboration between the Department of Landscape, Sheffield University and Positive Negatives, a community based training organisation.

The aims of the research were to find out how refugees and asylum seekers perceive and use public open space, including how this relates to their homeland experiences and memories, and to look into what designers and managers can do to encourage use of public space by this population group.

A group of Sheffield resident refugees and asylum seekers, ranging in age from 17 to 45 and originating from Afghanistan, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia and Zimbabwe visited and photographed ten green spaces around the city over a twelve week period. They compared notes on their responses to a range of different green space environments, including formal public gardens, heritage parks, community parks, semi-natural cultural landscapes and parks festivals.

**First Impressions**

The initial response to the green spaces was very positive, and produced feelings of novelty and nostalgia. Elements such as bird boxes and play equipment were new to the course participants and they were surprised to discover that Britain in a place where pleasure and beauty can be publicly shared. More familiar elements such as the scent of eucalyptus in the botanic garden or woodland on the urban fringe conjured childhood memories of Africa and unlocked expert plant knowledge, helping the migrants to integrate past and present locations and make sense of their situation.



### Engagement or detachment?

The researchers found that people need to be able to envisage realistic possibilities for life benefits if they are to engage with green spaces. Benefits may include chances to relax, socialise, play sport or enjoy plants. But individuals' life circumstances and cultural concepts can prove barriers to engagement. Is a site safe? How should one behave in the new surroundings? The daily struggle to meet basic needs leaves little time for exploring, and there may not be a tradition of visiting green spaces in the homeland.

High quality, well managed spaces came out on top for this group; whereas semi-natural landscapes were seen as more puzzling or challenging. Limited resources for travel meant that 'near home' spaces in the city centre were favoured for their ease of access. Communal entertainment was particularly important. Other welcome features included free sports facilities, providing opportunities to make friends.

Trainees were very interested to learn about the history of Sheffield through the medium of green spaces, and reported that, as well as the immediate benefits to their physical and mental health from exercise and relaxation, green spaces offered a means for them to integrate into the life of the host community.

In order to make the most of the opportunities, refugees and asylum seekers would benefit from provision of information about the types of spaces available and appropriate activities to do there. They would also welcome assistance in overcoming physical and psychological barriers to participation, such as help in interpreting the cultural idea of parks. Their open, free and inclusive nature needs to be stressed, so that this group can be seen as part of the local community.

At the end of the photography course an exhibition was mounted and is touring both locally and nationally. The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.





## **A range of views from ethnic communities**

Various methods were used to seek the views of a range of community groups and individuals, including focus groups, workshops and a structured interview. The focus groups were run using a standard pattern for comparability, and carefully tailored in each instance to address relevant cultural and organisational factors. We felt that it was important to involve a range of members of ethnic groups that were at very different stages of development in terms of awareness and contact with green spaces. Bearing this in mind, judgment as to the quality of input is less important than insight into the context of their specific needs. Follow up actions should therefore seek to address the situation holistically. A summary of the outcomes is given here.

### **F1. Al Hilal Mosque and community centre, Cheetham Hill, Manchester**

- Structured interview

### **F2. Balsall Heath Forum, Birmingham - Focus Group**

### **F3. Barnhill, Moss Side, Manchester - Focus Group**

### **F4. BEM Network Conference, Liverpool - Workshop**

### **F5. Concrete to Coriander group, Small Heath, Birmingham - Focus Group**

### **F6. Cottingley Springs Gypsy site, Leeds - Workshop**

### **F7. Green Pepys Fair, Deptford, London - Informal Survey and Workshop**

### **F8. Nottingham Sikh Ladies Group, Nottingham - Focus Group**



## **F1. Al Hilal Mosque and community centre, Cheetham Hill, Manchester**

Structured interview with Sandra Wong, Co-ordinator. December 2003

*See the example of good practice 'Al Hilal' for background to this focus group.*

Sandra Wong spoke on behalf of the Parents' and Toddlers' group at Al Hilal.

### **How is the space used and by whom?**

The service users of the Hilal Project as well as the users of the community centre and the mosque use the space. The Mothers and Toddlers group have benefited because in good weather conditions we are able to carry out childcare and learning activities in the open space, including picnics. Other visitors and callers from time to time use the open space as a chill out area and for holding short meetings.

I have also had discussions with the mothers and their family members to take an active part in using and maintaining the developed site and its relevance to open space. I hope to encourage members of the Mothers and Toddlers group to use the open space more in good weather and particularly in the summer time. I would also like to encourage other service users to use the area for chilling out, to have lunch, and possibly to generate some income by selling light snacks / food prepared by my group for raising funds for service users and for the local community.

### **How was the space created?**

I have been involved right from the outset, together with the Mothers and Toddlers group. The mothers were also involved and were delighted to see their children competing and taking part in what they considered to be a major development and improvement in their immediate environment. As the Co-ordinator my role involved encouraging young children in design work, creating new elements to improve the garden and encouraging service users, including local people, to be more active and involved.

There have been many other people involved: Groundwork Manchester, local councillors, Red Rose Forest, Black Environment Network, Manchester City Council in relation to re-cycling, my Mothers and Toddlers group, including the parents, children and other users of the centre, the homework club, community groups within the Hilal building, local groups and service users.

### **How is the space maintained?**

The service users and the local communities have assisted in maintaining the open green space by cleaning, watering, and tidying the grounds when required. The professional organisations have provided support, advice, guidance, and funding as well as practical help in relation to developing ideas and implementing the overall designs and specific features in line with our needs and requirements. They have also given assistance with conducting consultations with service users and the local communities, and provided advice on maintaining the open green space.

Groundwork Manchester has provided contractual managerial agreements with workers, drawings, plans, and by promoting the open space internally / externally within their own organisation and in their newsletter.

Red Rose Forest has provided the funding from their Viridor Community Action Fund for the palm trees as well as information and research on the most suitable trees according to the U.K climate.

Black Environment Network suggested the original idea in the first place in terms of design, palm trees and bringing all the relevant organisations together to make this project successful. Without



the overall support and encouragement and funding from BEN this project may not have taken place.

**What puts people off being involved?**

Overall I have had support from my colleagues, from my group and from the management committee, and I feel that the project would benefit all who wish to use the space for whatever purposes. Initially when the work was being carried out I noticed that there were health and safety concerns for my group and other services users, because materials and equipment were left around the building, causing a potential hazard and limiting access to some areas. Maybe these issues could have been thought through prior to the work being carried out. Sometimes the funding applied for projects takes a long time to come through, and that can put people off.

**What would encourage people to be more involved?**

Quicker decisions and responses from the funders as to whether the project has been approved or not, so that we are able to consider alternative methods of fund raising.

**Does your group's involvement give members opportunities to express their culture?**

Yes, definitely. The children and their parents were involved right from the outset in designing and planning the mosaic project. The children did designs in class and at home encouraged by their parents. The theme was set around Islamic culture based on art, drawings, colours, images, geometrical features and its relevance to Eastern and Western cultures.

The palm trees idea when first introduced was a strange concept, as I understood that here in UK we did not have the appropriate climate to grow them, but when Saleem from the Black Environment Network explained the type of palms and conditions for them to grow successfully and become acclimatised, it began to make sense. The significance of the palms is of great importance in relation to Islam and the Muslim world and a great feature within the local community and the environment

As a result of this the management team has decided to implement a further project next to the existing palms trees, an extension of 6 more planting of similar palms along the main Cheetham Hill Road. The management team themselves raised the necessary funds to carry out the work.

**Are there any implications of being linked to a religious building?**

(e.g. in terms of funding etc)

Yes, for religious organisations the funders may have pre-conceived ideas, images, stereotypes and from a political perspective this may make it difficult to fund such community type projects. I understand that funders do not grant funding to organisations that have religious connotations and practices. Therefore Al Hilal Project, which was and is seen as a community group was able to apply for such funding.

Since 11<sup>th</sup> September I feel people in the Muslim community have suffered personally and professionally. The media could have helped more.

**What has been achieved overall?**

A relaxing, calming and a pleasant open green space has been created, which I believe is unique to the North West and certainly to the Cheetham Hill area. I feel the space created has made a massive impact on the local environment and the community and a positive development in terms of regeneration.

I also believe the various partnerships that were involved worked hard with the centre and with the local community to achieve the objective to benefit Cheetham Hill Road. This is a main road

and a gateway to the city of Manchester and the location of the Hilal Project is on a busy road, which is easily accessible and viewable by walkers, cyclists and the on- going traffic.

The project has also provided further opportunities to highlight and debate environmental issues in relation to recycling, tipping, and waste management. As a result of the project BEN has requested if the Hilal Project would be in a position to consider forming a local forum panel comprising of local people to highlight and debate local environmental issues. This is something that I would consider seriously and discuss with colleagues.

I would also like to promote the green space to all communities in the area, developing interaction between local people and communities and be in an advisory position should other community groups or organisations want to develop similar projects.

## **F2. Focus Group at Balsall Heath Forum, Birmingham**

15<sup>th</sup> January 2003

*See the example of good practice Confused Spaces for background to this focus group*

Balsall Heath lies 2 miles South of Birmingham City Centre in an area which has become home to a succession of immigrant communities including Irish, Pakistani and the African-Caribbean community. Balsall Heath Forum was set up in mid 90's to address a number of local concerns about the areas decline .It acts as an umbrella for over 50 residents groups, faith and voluntary organisations in the area.

A wide range of community activities have been developed initiated by the local community under the forum's banner including a number of environmental projects. This has included an annual spring clean, parks improvement and new street furniture. The Environmental Task Force was set up to lead on this in Balsall Heath and inspire the local community. The Forum has also been a regional and national winner in the Urban Britain in Bloom and Britain in Bloom competition.

The group consisted of staff and trainees from the forums' environmental and area maintenance team with varying degrees of knowledge. The questions were framed both to look at their ideas as trainees and as members of the Balsall Heath community. Contributions came from the whole group. The ideas initially were about green space within their immediate area, but as they opened up so the countryside and other formal and informal spaces were referred to. There was recognition that all these spaces have some impact on their lives and those of the communities in which they live both real and aspirational.

"Green spaces are used more and more by the community as they see us cleaning up the area, and we have talked to them about why we are doing it"

The group felt that though there was a changing attitude towards green space in the local area, people were still not really making use of other green spaces elsewhere unless they were linked to a community event. They identified a number of ways that green space was being used. They were:

Picnics, sports, taking brother for a walk, social events – carnival, fireworks display, communal space – used for protest meeting over loss of green space, growing fruit & vegetables, walking the dog, providing spaces to meet friends.

"We have organised football tournaments for the kids in Balsall Heath"

"We have planted flowers and trees on some of the bits of land nobody wanted. People asked us why and we told them. Now they are coming to us to ask if we can do the same for them"

Examples of work done by the groups:

- Worked on planting flowers and other plants in the parks
- Developing recycling facilities in George Street Park
- Organising picnics & barbecues for the local community
- Training & teaching others horticulture, gardening skills & grounds maintenance
- Developing sports activities
- Developed 'confused' spaces' project – tidying up and replanting of pieces of land in the area with no clear ownership.

### **Barriers and how to tackle them**

A number of barriers to using and improving green spaces were highlighted:

Fear of abuse, dirty, muddy, drugs, dumping – this has improved but people are still wary, do not feel safe, poor lighting, rats – due to people dumping food or feeding birds, lack of space for organising own activities.

“The biggest barrier was the feeling that no one cared about the parks and so they were not safe places to go. This is changing with the work we are doing and people are more interested”

“People see this sort of work as not having high status. Digging and cleaning up after someone is the job of someone else”

This is strengthened further by the image of volunteering – pressure from friends, image – thought (at least initially) to be community service by locals – seen as criminals. But with continued presence and talking to people, perceptions are changing.

Within the area the issue is more about any land being available to create more green space.

What would encourage you to get more involved?

- Personal and social factors such as making links with health and fitness issues, personal benefit – jobs, money, variety of opportunities and work. Also plants & flowers that are representative of the culture and history of the people living locally.
- Community factor like working with schools – get them when they are young; incentives, appreciation – people will then develop a sense of responsibility; local competitions- 5 parks in the area – use local pride to encourage people; actively encouraging people to input their ideas and seeing them happen.
- Facilities/Resources e.g. park furniture built locally; More planters around the area

“Interest in the parks has been generated by what we have been doing – residents have requested things to be done in their own area, or in their gardens”

“Park wardens and community wardens have made the place feel safer so people are coming out and using the park and green spaces.

“People will get involved if someone has provided the starting point”

The group showed a real enthusiasm for what they were doing, and there was feeling of pride in the comments and support that local people were showing in their work. Through their involvement with improving green spaces they had seen a change of attitude and feel that people recognise the benefits. However the work needs to be formally recognised by outside bodies such as the council and others, as much of the work should fall under their remit, and resources need to be made available for the work to continue and expand.

### **F3. Focus group at Barnhill Childcare Centre, Moss Side, Manchester**

16th December 2002

A small group of environmentally aware community workers and activists were selected for their ability to comment on ethnic participation in green spaces.

There were various contributions from the group about the types of green spaces. Half of the group gave examples of urban green spaces from their immediate surroundings, whilst others referred to green spaces in the countryside and around the urban fringe.

The group defined green spaces as open spaces with greenery and trees. All of them agreed that when talking about green spaces, urban ones as well as those further afield should be included. This is because as a whole, they can give a related range of experiences to urban ethnic communities and benefit their quality of life in different ways.

#### **F4. BEM Network Conference, Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, Liverpool**

Workshops. 7<sup>th</sup> October 2004

The BEM Network Community Conference, a day-long, free event open to all, was aimed particularly at those active in the voluntary and community sector and people who are interested in issues that affect BME communities.

The BEM Network is actively seeking to address barriers to inclusion and see this as an opportunity for voluntary and community organisations to engage with them and let them know what issues are of concern and what ideas they have for development. Information from the day will be used to feed into on-going strategies and lobbying on issues that affect Liverpool's diverse communities.

Workshops at the event included: BEM Sports Northwest, exploring approaches to developing effective partnerships; 1NW Regional Network for BME, influencing regional policy; CEMVO capacity building and operating for sustainability; and BEN, tackling barriers to inclusion in green space. There was also a powerful poetry performance by Ann Lopez.

#### **WHAT WE KNOW AND THINK ABOUT GREEN SPACES**

##### **How many of you were interested in green spaces before you were invited to this workshop?**

6 out of 9. One participant said she was not sure what we meant by green spaces, so she was not sure whether she had been interested before. So we looked at questions 2 and 3 first, and then came back to question 1. She had been involved in trying to create an adventure playground and go-karting project, and lobbying for activities for young people in the park. The consensus was that these were green space issues.

##### **What is a green space?**

The environment – fighting for it, Food growing, It's associated with life, Grass, Parks – Sefton Park, Princes Park, Allotments, Woods, Botanic gardens, Street corners – open spaces, waste ground, Playing fields, Beaches – Southport, Formby, Ainsdale, West Kirby, New Brighton

#### **USE AND IMPROVEMENT OF GREEN SPACES**

##### **How have you used green spaces?**

- Meadows and wild flower areas on playing fields have been created and used with communities as outdoor venues for events and to promote walking.
- Nursery visits to beaches and parks, taking sporting equipment and barbeques.
- Green Acres art projects in disused gardens – cleaned up and planted up gardens, created a sports pitch for kids.
- Trips to Wales, Colwyn Bay.
- Day trips to the countryside for recreation – to get away from the inner city.
- Visit to an integrated / interactive farm where children have contact with animals – Canning Place and Rice Lane Farm (some participants were aware that these projects were members of FCFCG)
- Cycle paths – Liverpool Loopline (Sustrans) school parties to the Wildlife Centre and family / group events with the cycling network.

##### **Examples of Green Spaces**

At this stage I showed the group a flipchart prompt sheet of examples of types of green spaces, taken from the examples of good practice on the Green Space of the Month web pages (which is



linked to the typology in Green Spaces, Better Places) and I showed them the Green Spaces leaflet with 8 examples of specific projects.

The group agreed that many of the types of green spaces suggested they had already identified (Q2, parks, allotments, woodlands, playing fields, and botanic gardens) (Q3, gardens, sports pitches, skate parks, footpaths, cycle paths, city farms).

They expressly wanted to add adventure playgrounds as a type of green space not on my list. I would also note that semi-natural meadows and beaches were two further types of green spaces / civic spaces mentioned by the group under Q3.

It is noteworthy that the group had not thought of the following types of green spaces before: forests, rivers, ponds, nature reserves, picnic sites, hospital grounds, and community centre yards.

### **What would you like to do or see in green spaces?**

- The L8 area of Liverpool needs an adventure playground – campaigning since 1980s, land available in Speke Garston, suppliers ready but no council permission due to previous accident.
- Good walking and cycling routes from L8 to waterfront.
- One participant reported that a Kenyan family she met 10 years ago would have liked simply to go into Sefton Park, but they felt unsafe to do so.
- Sculpture park.
- Play environments, variety of types of play space, better quality, and play strategy for older children 10-18 age group.
- Skate park – but there is local opposition.
- Better maintenance of existing green spaces.
- Good facilities – café, toilets.
- Safety in parks – feel exposed, improved approach roads, better access, lights, no cars, no drug dealers, security guards (e.g. in Palm House in Sefton Park) other people, people mixing more.
- Festivals, Mardi Gras.
- Cycling, running, look at wildlife.
- Personal safety – wouldn't go alone, wouldn't go at night.
- Participants also named a number of good examples they have seen in parks in other cities / countries (Central Park in New York, Holland, Paris, Manchester and London) of activities they would like to see or do in Liverpool, such as:
  - Boule
  - Chess
  - Boating
  - Art projects
  - Educational activities
  - Circus

### **Have you been involved in the use, improvement or creation of green spaces?**

#### **USE**

- Bike workshop.
- Dog walking and training lessons
- Football – Saturday and Sunday Leagues are “massive”.
- A Save the Children Fund group funded by Merseyside Youth Challenge Trust had been involved in orienteering at Alton Towers and were described as “fired up beyond all

comprehension" by this simple activity. As a result the children were interested in going on to become professionals in the field of outdoor activities.

### **IMPROVEMENT**

Participants had not been directly involved in any successful projects to improve green spaces but were aware of one example of improvements which had positively impacted BME communities: Calderstones Park, in a suburban area accessible to BME groups, where the tennis facilities had been improved.

Also they voiced views in support of a bid to improve the swimming pool at Picton Sports Centre, increasing it to Olympic size. This high profile campaign has celebrities on board.

### **CREATION**

One participant had been involved in a project attempting to start a go-karting track, but this had not yet proved successful.

The group was very enthusiastic about developments in the area of the docks, the waterfront, otter's pool and new plans for the Festival Gardens. They missed the Chinese garden, Japanese garden and the nature garden, which have been removed. The waterfront is seen as a particularly democratic / multicultural space.

### **Examples of care and involvement**

At this stage I showed the group a flip chart prompt sheet listing examples of the types of activity groups may be involved in to care for or improve green spaces.

The list included: Tree planting, Organising Walks, Picnics, Litter picking, Designing mosaics, seating, fencing, paths, Survey / monitor wildlife, Join 'Friends' group or management group, Become a warden or ranger.

- I asked whether they were aware of any BME community involvement in activities of this kind in Liverpool.
- The local newspaper recently carried a competition for suggestions to improve the area of council owned amenity grassland next to the Kuumba Imani centre.
- One member of the group had been involved in organising rounders matches in the park.
- It was noted that the cycle loop has wardens and police patrol on horseback. Some instances were given of community skips being organised, and it was felt that improved recycling facilities were needed.

The group was aware of the Environmental Wardens in L8. They have been in place for 3-4 years and are paid by the city council through either New Deal for Communities or Safer Cities / Safer Places. The group welcomed the wardens and wanted to see them in the parks too. They felt it was good to see local people working, after having suffered high levels of unemployment for so long.

### **BARRIERS AND WAYS FORWARD**

Participants were asked to bear in mind that barriers and solutions may be considered in three categories

- Personal / Social
- Facilities - quality available
- Knowledge, support and resources

### **What puts you off using green spaces?**

- Litigation

- Culture in Britain – not very laid back (people don't relax much)
- Poor maintenance, shabby appearance, under-funded, mismanaged?
- Not just green spaces, the wider environment / built environment too.
- Dog mess

**What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?**

- Fragmented communities, lack of motivation – need to get “armies” of people involved.
- “Young people have grown up where green space is trashed space”.

**What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?**

Conservation / planning inhibits development, bureaucracy, jargon, bad consultation – innovation is not captured, risk of vandalism / graffiti

**WAYS FORWARD**

**What will encourage us to become more involved?**

- Funding, Clearer information to grassroots, better networking, Master plan – cluster management.
- There is lots of scope – a “blank canvas” and lots of resources, a good knowledge base exists but it's about knowing how to tap into it.
- Need to change attitudes e.g. land art is temporary but increases the sense of ownership
- Promise of employment for local people – as part of sustainability agenda
  - Modern apprenticeships
  - Training element / skills exchange e.g. Landlife / Eden Project

**F5. Focus group at Concrete to Coriander group, Small Heath, Birmingham**  
27<sup>th</sup> June 2003

*See the example of good practice Concrete to Coriander for background to this focus group.*

The group had varying levels of English language skills (oral and written) so they decided to answer the questions verbally while their answers were written onto flipcharts, ensuring that everyone had a chance to take part.

The women saw green space as formal and informal spaces including farmland, fields, gardens, parks, woods, forests, islands/ roadside verges, Allotments and botanical gardens. There was a general feeling that having access to green space was very important for them and their families, particularly children.

“ It's nice to be able to take the children out and see the flowers and the trees.”

Green Spaces were used by the group for getting fresh air, taking their children out to play, planting flowers and vegetables, playing sport and games, picnics, enjoying the beauty of the space, seeing plants and flowers from all over the world. The group saw parks as important, but they needed to be safe and clean so that they could use them more for activities without worrying.

They said they would like more flowers, designated picnic and sports areas, cleaner and tidier parks – less rubbish, better looked after with good facilities – toilets, telephones, benches, opportunity to do activities like cycling, walking and outdoor sports.

The group have all been very active in improving the green space within the local area both in their own homes and within the community. They have worked on allotments in the local park and in other locations across the area (Small Heath Park, Bordesley Green allotments). They have taken part in gardening competitions – both in their homes and as part of a group, developed a community garden and joined a healthy walks programme linking local green spaces.

The need to build relationships with other organisations in order to share knowledge and skills was seen as important. Transport was a particular problem. If the family had a car it was usually in use and there is a lack of confidence in using public transport for long distances (More a safety issue than a reliability issue)

Issues arose around isolation and the need to build relationships with organisations working with green spaces to tackle the lack of accessible information about what there is to do and how they can get involved.

Are there any cultural barriers? This response was illuminating, as this group have been active for 2-3 years. It was felt that the younger generation particularly the women have more opportunities to be active and get involved. Issues arose around expectations of women within the community, as involvement in green space is seen as something that is not part of the routine, suspicion – it's easier for the younger generation, and information – language is occasionally an issue.

Would information in community languages be useful in making access easier?

Although the group had a range of abilities in English it was felt that plain English was generally sufficient with community languages for information such as welcome signs and contact details. A visual interpretation also helps – and is universal.

Plain straightforward English is often sufficient as someone can usually translate. Key messages in community languages and information in places the community uses – libraries, community centres, sent to community organisations, would improve access. Telephone nos, dates & addresses in English. Use of pictures/images rather than words.

Organisations need to work with communities to ensure they are culturally aware and sensitive to quality of experience. There need to be resources identified to support activities and partnership between organisations and communities from which both can learn.

## **F6. Cottingley Springs Gypsy site, 'B' Site Office, Leeds**

17<sup>th</sup> November 2004

*See the example of good practice for background to this focus group.*

The methodology of BEN green space workshops is based on a standard pattern, for comparability, and carefully tailored in each instance to address relevant cultural factors.

We conducted a green spaces workshop as part of a Residents of Cottingley monthly site meeting. The workshop was advertised well in advance in the residents' newsletter, although most of the adults do not read very well, so this message was backed up with face-to-face reminders. On the morning of the workshop, a leaflet inviting people to the workshop was distributed by BEN staff to all residents, who were offered a free plant for their gardens to encourage participation.

During this canvassing, a number of the residents asked what questions would be addressed, and mentioned points in response to the questions. Come the time of the workshop, seven people attended, all of who were women. They participated on a drop-in basis, calling by in ones and twos in succession, rather than all gathering simultaneously, so the conversation flowed around the topic rather progressing in a linear way.

It is noteworthy that no men attended the workshop, although they had made a number of pertinent comments during canvassing. For this reason, their comments have been included in the findings.

### **How many of you were interested in green spaces before you were invited to this workshop?**

7/7

### **What is a green space?**

Fields, hillsides, mountainsides, open country, in the city a patch of grass surrounded by houses? This site – is this what you mean by green space? The woodland alongside the site, parks, transit sites, the piece of land round the back  
My garden, football pitches.

### **How have you used green spaces?**

- I love all green spaces, scenery, I'm a countryside person, I love fields, animals and trees.
- Camping in the summertime, in Hull, Bath, Brighton, Liverpool, Manchester, Scotland – wherever we can make a living.
- We visit other sites in Doncaster, Derby, Wakefield.
- The children use the park near the swimming baths, but it's two and a half miles away, there are no buses, it's a long walk, too far for me with my arthritis.
- We keep an eye on each other's kids.
- Dog walking, Hare coursing, Photography.
- I'm a Yorkshire lass, I travel to all the sites round the county.
- The kids all ride motorbikes.

My kids used to play round the back. There was grass with a park and swings, I've got photos I could show you, but now there's nowhere for them to play. The council sliced off a bit of my plot to improve the next-door plot. They tarmac-ed over the park. I wanted an outdoor pool for the kids. Instead they (New Deal) left a pile of muck outside for me to shovel myself. They put grass seed down. It's half grass. They improved the sheds but they're not finishing it. People are



shifting because they're not happy about the state of the site. They'd prefer to stay on site, of course they would, but they move into housing because the site's not clean.

**What would you like to do or see in green spaces?**

- We need a bit of green on each slab; it's no good having it outside people's plot because it will only get tipped on.
- I'd like to grow more plants but they don't do very well.
- I'd like a bigger piece of land so I could keep horses.
- I'd like to see the strip of land next to our site cleaned up. It's become just a tip. It spoils our view and it gives a bad impression to other people. The council have blocked it off, but too late. It's covered in all sorts of rubbish that's been dumped. Some of it Gill (liaison worker) will burn, but lots of it you can't burn. It's toxic.
- I'd like to improve the view from my slab.
- When someone dies, the men like to gather and talk through the night about the person's life. They stand round a fire to keep warm. It doesn't have to be on the ground like it was at one time. They can do it in an oil drum. We wouldn't want just one spot to do it in, you find a different place each time, otherwise it would remind you every time you see it.
- We need a place for the children to play but not right on our doorstep.
- I'd like to see more trees.
- I'd like to hang up a bird feeder, but I haven't got a washing line.
- The compound is a waste of space. No one uses it. They should put two more families on there.
- I'd like to see a play area for the kids on site, but not a park, the equipment is too dangerous, children would fight over it and get pushed off. A basketball pitch would be safer; they could take turns to throw the ball.
- We need a motorbike track. All the kids have got motorbikes but they just ride them on the road round the site. It's not safe. There were plans to put one on the strip of land beside the site. Most people agreed to that idea but it didn't happen, and now there's a load of rubbish over there. Part of the problem is that the people with pitches at the front wouldn't like it. They would object to the noise.
- We need more sites. This site is all right, but what about the rest of the Travellers?
- People need toilets and showers for health reasons. They need a decent bit of hard standing. It's OK in the summer, but what about in the winter? The site needs to be kept clean. We pay our council tax but the road sweepers don't do their job properly and the council don't empty our bins. Where does the money go? The gardening work needs finishing. The sheds need heating. There's a play area but we can't use it.

**Have you been involved in the use, improvement or creation of green spaces?**

- No, that's a job for the men.
- I have had help to create my garden, but I need help to maintain it.
- I've put in some shrubs, but my holly bushes are not growing, I don't know why.
- Harjinda had funds but she just took us to Wales somewhere, or was it Chester. They piled all the kids into a minibus and drove us for miles until we were tired and felt sick. Then the kids played in a big boat they had there and a load of tree houses. They've got play workers there, like we've got here. But we thought it was so we could choose what play equipment we wanted and they said it was just so we could see what other people had got. They did the same survey 20 years ago. Now they're asking my kids. But they never do anything. People don't stick in the job. I feel very strongly about this.

**What puts you off using green spaces?**

- In our culture, women do the indoor jobs. We keep fit and we work very hard doing indoor jobs, cleaning the trailers until they are spotless. If we did dirty jobs outside, people would say we were not real women. They would call us names and say we were like men
- I can't go to the park because of my arthritis. It's made worse by the damp.
- I've had help to lay a lawn, and I've planted some conifers, but kids jump over the fence. How can I stop them?
- I've no idea what we would need to do to get the motorbike track to happen.
- Fly tipping.
- I can't step outside my own front door for dog mess. Other people on site let their dogs run loose and they come into my garden to mess. I haven't got any dogs. All I can do is hose it down. Now I've got a garden, they mess on the lawn. I'm sick of picking it up. I can't cope. It's disgusting. The dog wardens come round and take away the dogs, but people just get them back again. There's nowhere to walk dogs, just up the hill and back. There's no park to go to.
- I agree. Dogs are a big problem. I've got two dogs. I keep them for protection if the bailiffs come. I try to keep them chained up but you can't always. Some of the men take their dogs coursing round here, the greyhounds, but farmers don't want you in their fields. They shoot the dogs.
- I don't know anything about gardening. It's a man's job. It's OK for the kids to help, up to a certain age, but when the girls are fourteen, they'll want to find a man.

#### **What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?**

- There's no money. Gill (the Gypsy liaison officer) cleans up.
- There's no room for trees in our garden, it's just turf on top of concrete, it's got very poor drainage.
- I've got nowhere to stand a pot plant. I can't put up a hanging basket, it's too windy.
- Some people put flowers in old tyres, but if we did that here, they'd only get burned.
- At the end of the day, it's only a council shed. People don't feel it's their own.
- We want to improve the strip of woodland next to our site, but we just don't know where to start.
- I need some help to mow my lawn. I can't do it because I'm a woman. I've got no man around.
- Health problems – but I might feel more motivated if someone could work with me, give me some encouragement.
- I'd like to see the site cleaned up but the problem is too big, there's loads of mess.
- There was a hiccup from the start with these two sites. It's a long way back now but it still causes problems.
- A transit site would do more harm than good. What I'd like to see is small family sites, say for 6–8 caravans, permanent sites, dotted around Leeds.
- New Deal left about 20 tonnes of soil in front of my caravan. They come to do the job but they don't finish it off.
- I'm afraid the site will be closed down if everyone moves off. People are going into houses because they can't stand the hassle. (Police harassment, council neglect etc.)
- Road sweepers come. They sweep the roads but they leave the drains blocked. I'm still paying off the bill for the water meter from when I was away in the summer and they used the water supply from my shed to supply the road sweeper.
- The line manager is too remote. Residents meetings should pick up problems like this, but those responsible do not help. We think it's because they don't like us. They are prejudiced.

#### **What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?**

- They've got 4 transit sites in Doncaster and five permanent sites. Why are there none in Leeds?

- I'd have no idea how to find pieces of land for sites. I'm not educated. I'm not an architect or anything.
- It's hard to find land, and then it's hard to get planning permission. It's a big issue on the telly now. They keep evicting people, even in the winter, even if you've got babies. They're not trained how to do it safely. Sometimes the police are really racist towards us. You should hear the names they call us. It's racist and sexist. It's very insulting. And people get injured, including children.
- We bought a piece of land. It was in a derelict area. We spent lots of money putting up fences and a gate, planting trees. We tried to get planning permission to build our own site but we were turned down. Now that field is just standing empty. It's the same everywhere.
- Yes, it happened to some people I know in Coventry, I think that's where it was. They put up chalets, but local people complained and got up a petition. The chalets have all been demolished now. They're just prejudiced against Travellers.
- The plots near Wakefield, Gypsies bought them and sold them to other Gypsies who built sheds on them. Then the council evicted them. Now it's a Millennium Garden. It's green belt, that's the reason they gave. But they've since built a load of houses opposite!
- When the council were renovating the site here, they put 8-10 families on the compound. It's built on an old swamp. There was a coalmine here before and this was the slagheap. So the tarmac, which is too thin, cracked up and there were maggots coming up through it!
- I've heard that the Police are taking over Traveller sites and running them. There are six sites. You can ask Helen where (Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange). I wouldn't live on a site run by police.

#### **What will encourage us to become more involved?**

- The kids could help. They could be good at gardening, up to a certain age. But they are away during the summer. Old people are on site all year round, but younger people, they come and go.
- I would like some advice about how to look after my lawn and encourage my shrubs to grow.
- I need help with developing my gardening skills.
- If the ground belongs to Gypsies, other Travellers have more respect. If it belongs to the council, they just think they can do their own thing. Young people come on and start playing their radio really loud outside my plot. On our sites, if you don't get on with someone, you just move to the other end. You can't do that here.
- They've got CCTV in Doncaster and Wakefield. I can't see the harm in it. Wakefield site is right next to the park. It's got a big fence round it and cameras to stop people causing damage to the site fly tipping and dangerous driving. The people there all agree to it. Here, people wouldn't like it. They think it's for the police to spy on them, but it's not. You need to build trust and get people's agreement. If the majority agree, the others would have to accept it. It would help us to feel safe when we go away, that stuff won't get stolen from out of our shed. Travellers can't complain to the police, it's not something we do, but the housing workers could monitor it, and they would only check the tapes if an incident were reported.

#### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

- It's racism. We used to get tortured by the Police and insulted. They think of us as aliens but we're not, we're people the same as anyone else. There are good and bad in all races. We tried to give them some training but they didn't understand.
- My daughter went to a job interview but when she told them her address, they refused her the job.
- Our children are bullied in schools. They're afraid to tell their parents. They are brought up to defend themselves. It's the only way we can survive.
- I've heard on the radio that the Government are considering a Bill for more caravan sites but the public are very surprised. They don't know anything about us Travellers.
- The council and the Police have made Travellers wary and untrusting of them.

- I tried living in a house for a while but I got claustrophobic and depressed. I never used to have trouble with my nerves but now I do. I'm under the doctor for it. I had to just go out walking at night, to breath fresh air and feel a sense of freedom.
- "You talk to me about Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor, well listen because I'm only going to tell you this once. Johnny Delaney was a Gypsy boy. He was thirteen years old when he went to Liverpool. He went across the road from the site with his little brother and sisters to buy sweets. On the way back they were set about by local lads aged sixteen and seventeen. They killed him. Johnny Delaney was murdered, and his killers got three years each in prison. Three years for a life. If a Gypsy had ever done a thing like that they would throw away the key. We went to a memorial service in Derby for Johnny Delaney. It was very moving. Now you tell me, what are the authorities going to do about that?"

## **F7. Informal survey and focus group at Green Pepys Fair, Deptford, London**

12<sup>th</sup> September 2004

The Green Pepys Fair took place in Pepys Park, Grove Street, Deptford, London, SE8. BEN attended with an information stall and interactive display, offering the public an opportunity to feed in their comments on the question “**What would you like to do or see in green spaces?**” The results of this informal survey are:

- Fruit trees
- Green spaces in a glimpse of virgin nature. I'd like to see urban green spaces designed to be more interactive with visitors.
- Local artists installations, on a rotational basis
- More emphasis on wildlife
- Play area for older children and adults. Climbing walls, games etc.
- Allotments
- Vegetarian cafés, nice cups of tea.
- Set aside areas for wildlife
- Anybody who thinks about building on green spaces should be sacked on the spot!
- Benches
- Pagodas
- Fountains
- Gardens
- Statues
- Ponds
- Space for sunbathing

We invited members of the public and stallholders to this workshop on ethnic community participation in green spaces. 6 people attended. Participants were not monitored for ethnicity, but I was able to establish incidentally that ethnic backgrounds included Irish, Kenyan Asian and French. The other three members of the group were from ‘visible’ ethnic minorities, quite probably Central African and Kurdish. There were equal numbers of men and women.

### **What is a green space?**

Parks, nature in the city, place where people and nature meet, safe place for children to play, flowers, picnic areas, woodland, places to promote ethnic communities presence,

“It’s a recreation area where there is an open field with a very good earthy atmosphere”

### **How have you used green spaces?**

Picnics, lunch break, lie down, relax, enjoy the sunshine, have a nap, play football, cricket, sports, community fairs, circus.

### **What would you like to do or see in green spaces?**

Festival, organise sports, more games for children, wardens for safety, climb trees, wild flowers, watching wildlife, increasing wildlife, fruit trees, walking, eating, fun fare, promote multiculturalism

### **Have you been involved in the use, improvement or creation of green spaces?**

Conservation volunteering, building conservatories, making pots to plant flowers, signed petitions to save green spaces, tried to introduce green spaces in school playground, painted mural, put in picnic bench

### **What puts you off using green spaces?**

Dirty, dogs, rubbish, if grass is not cut, if grass is too short, people – fighting, fear for my safety, need to protect our children from bad people, rain, bad weather, need to pay to book sports facilities, traffic noise, don't know when the gates will be open or closed

**What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?**

Childcare responsibilities, no opportunity, not asked, too busy, need more notice

**What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?**

Administration, paperwork, red tape, lack of money, fundraising, time, lack of opportunity, demoralisation – some people support us, some oppose us, vandalism

**What will encourage us to become more involved?**

Put hands together, work as a team, good ideas, inspiration, local authority support e.g. equipment, protective clothing, clear plans and aims, expertise, skills e.g. building, landscaping, fundraising, keep the environment tidy and clean, nice atmosphere, good maintenance, fresh air, respect and support, acknowledgement for our contribution, not to feel side-lined, cultural relevance e.g. mandala, plants from different countries (like Eden project), listening to our comments increases our zeal, respond to our comments, role models, initiators



**F8. Focus group with Nottingham Sikh Ladies group**  
**Radford Community Complex**  
25<sup>th</sup> September 2003

*See the Khalsa Wood example of good practice for background to this focus group.*

The Sikh Ladies have used local parks, country parks, countryside and play areas for picnics, days out, walking, feeding ducks, cricket, sight seeing, fresh air, de-stressing, meditation, socialising, festivals, poetry and drama events, camping, letting kids run around freely, photos, horse riding and enjoying wildlife. They say:

“We would prefer it if parks and green spaces were safe and clean, free of litter. Some parks have been improved but many still need attention. There are dense bushes and dark corners where problems may lurk. These need to be addressed urgently.”

“We would like to see more attractions and activities in green spaces, to keep children from getting bored, things for people to see and do such as poetry, dancing (traditional Sikh dances and English country dancing), horse riding, martial arts, fruit picking.”

“There could be more attractive features like footpaths, way-markers, benches, colourful blossom trees. There could also be better safety features such as fences and gates, security cameras at car parks. More / better bins.”

“We would like to do more horse riding, because that links to our heritage. The guru fought on horseback, and his devotees would donate the best quality horses. Young people would learn to fight with sticks and swords, first on foot and then on horseback.”

“We have planted an orchard of fruit trees and we are looking forward to when they mature and bear fruit, so that people can come and pick the fruit.”

“During the Vaisakhi festival in 2000 the Sikh community celebrated by planting 300 commemorative oak trees. We also planted fruit trees. I believe that people go back individually and in family groups to tend the trees, although this is impossible to monitor.”

Young people have been involved in learning woodcarving to create an attractive gateway and way markers. Participation in this activity depends of skill and aptitude.

**What puts you off using green spaces?**

**How have you used green spaces?**

“Ethnic minorities are not using green spaces very much because of concerns about safety and security. In the Sikh community, parents go with children to play areas. They would like to let them go unsupervised but it is not safe. There is too much litter and vandalism. People are afraid of exposing their children to the risk of racism.”

“There is a serious problem with drug use in urban parks. Contaminated needles are discarded on the ground and in the rubbish bins. It could be extremely dangerous for a small child to pick up a used needle, but you cannot easily explain the dangers to young children, so they have to be supervised very closely. School age children are at risk of falling in with drug users and dealers who frequent the parks. The answer is not simply to push the problem elsewhere. Children who are excluded from school for using drugs need support to overcome their problems. They need help to admit to their problems and tackle them. Referrals to support agencies come by word of mouth through the community.”

“Some ethnic communities might be poor and might not be able to afford transport to get to the country park. The bus service is not very good. Most people in the Sikh community have

their own cars and are able to go to the country park individually or as a family, but one problem is no car park. There should be free parking, not parking meters.”

**What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?**

Many of us have a hectic lifestyle. We do not have much spare time. We have other commitments with family, work, study and community responsibilities. Vandalism is a problem, and fear of racist attacks. People are afraid of bullying, mugging and crime. People get demoralised when their voluntary efforts are undermined by vandalism, arson and racist graffiti.

**What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?** Publicity for environmental projects does not target the Sikh community. We would need support to create more green spaces. If we would could expect our projects to be better protected by security in the form of policing, park rangers or surveillance systems, we would feel more confident that it would be worthwhile to create new green spaces or new elements of existing green spaces.

**What will encourage us to be more involved?**

Better information. Opportunities need to be properly promoted by the use of relevant, appropriate leaflets and more importantly by talking to people. There needs to be a wide range of different activities on offer to suit different types of people within the community – for instance older people may have different interests and needs than young people. Need more choice. Group outings are good, because women and children may feel unsafe to go out alone but if you go together, you can enjoy the company and support. The Sikh ladies of the Focus Group would like to develop further involvement in Health Walks, Bike riding, trips to the Country parks, the zoos etc.

## **Useful Information and Further Reading**

### **For general information on ethnic environmental participation:**

*The Resources section of the BEN website has a constantly updated collection of resources from BEN and other organisations. All items are downloadable free on [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)*

### **Articles, publications and resources of particular interest on the BEN website include:**

- Ethnic Environmental Participation Volumes 1-5 BEN
- Roots Culturfest BEN
- Ethnic Environmental Youth Work BEN
- "Who We Are - Interpreting Cultural Identity" and "Maximising Community Contribution to Biodiversity through Urban Green Spaces" Both appear in Ethnic Environmental Participation Volume 4. BEN
- "Working with disadvantaged groups on environmental projects - some guidelines" Countryside Council for Wales
- Rishbeth, Claire, (2001) "Ethnic Minority Groups and the Design of Public Open Space: an inclusive landscape?" Landscape Research
- Johnston, Mark and Shimada, Lia D., 'Forestry in a Multicultural Society'
- Muller Dr Christa (2004) Intercultural Gardens
- Rishbeth, Claire (2002)? 'The Landscape of the Global Village', Landscape Design, May 2002

### **Articles, publications and resources of particular interest on other organisations' websites include:**

- BTCV Environments for All Project, email Richard Williams at [r.williams@btcv.org.uk](mailto:r.williams@btcv.org.uk)
- Green Spaces, Better Places: final report of the Urban Taskforce available from ODPM [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)
- Plants for Wildlife project, Countryside Council for Wales [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)
- Institute for Earth Education, email: [ieeuk@aol.com](mailto:ieeuk@aol.com)
- Eden Project: [www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)
- Common Ground's ABC project - a springboard for involving any community group to discover and map the local distinctiveness of their local environment [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk)

### **Training and consultancy**

- Training and consultancy Information pack on the BEN website [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk).
- There are many courses relating to community development and building relationships with target groups, e.g. look at the training programmes of NCVO. [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)
- Diversity UK Ltd. can advise on accessing a range of diversity and equality trainers and consultants. Tel 01234 881 380
- Training programmes of the Community Development Foundation [www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk)
- Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation offer 'Planning for Real' training [www.nif.org.uk](http://www.nif.org.uk)

### **Participatory appraisal, consultation and evaluation**

- Evaluation Trust has a useful toolkit on their website [www.evaluationtrust.org.uk](http://www.evaluationtrust.org.uk) plus they offer consultancy services and facilitation of workshops
- NCVO can advise on a range of consultants. Helpline 0800 2 798 798

### **Funding**

There are funding bodies that will give grants for training that strengthens the organisation in its ability to engage with communities. These include:

- Baring Foundation's "Strengthening the Voluntary Sector scheme" [www.baringfoundation.co.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.co.uk)

- Charities Aid Foundation's fund for consultancies aiding organisational development [www.CAF-online.org](http://www.CAF-online.org). NCVO can help with identifying others [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk). Freephone for information 0800 2 798 798
- A computer programme called "Funderfinder" is really useful. [www.funderfinder.org.uk](http://www.funderfinder.org.uk) It costs a voluntary group £150 to buy the software. Just type in the subject matter and the amount needed and it will print out possible funding sources. You do not need to buy your own. Many local authorities and libraries have this. Their web site also has some useful free software in relation to finding funding.