



Introduction to the Centre and Mildmay Community Partnership

Trevor Mbatha Chief Executive, Mildmay Community Partnership

Newington Green has a rich and interesting history¹, but by the beginning of the 21st century the area had become impoverished and run down. The Mayville estate and the surrounding area are ranked in the 10% most deprived areas in London.

The Mayville Community Centre started life about 1890 as a tram generating shed for London's tram network. The massively constructed building was rescued from dereliction when in 1975 residents on the Mayville Housing Estate successfully petitioned Islington Council to have the tram power generator building converted into a community centre. In 2006 Mildmay Community Partnership took on the lease of the centre from Islington Council with the express intention to make the centre 'fit for purpose'.

The Mildmay Community Partnership (MCP) is a community regeneration membership organisation and a registered charity established in 2004. MCP's primary Object is to be of benefit to the inhabitants of Mildmay in the London Borough of Islington, in particular to relieve poverty and to develop the capacity and skills of local people to better identify and meet their needs, to participate more fully in society and improve their quality of life.



The cost of redeveloping the Mayville Community centre is approximately £2.3 million and funding has been received from the Big Lottery Community Building Funding, Energy Saving Trust, City Bridge Trust and Islington Council

Mayville Community Centre

The centre has been completely renovated and redesigned to Passivhaus standards, with a saving of over 90% of energy costs, exploiting passive solar gain, a ground source heat pump

¹ See "The Village that Changed the World. A History of Newington Green, London N16" by Alex Allardyce available through the Newington Green Action Group website <http://newingtongreen.org.uk/blogs/book-launch-village-changed-world-history-newington-green-london-n16>

and solar hot water, coupled with triple glazing and effective insulation. Following the conference the centre won a prestigious award: The Best Public Building at the 3R (Refurb, Rethink, Retrofit) awards.

At the time of the conference, the centre itself is almost finished. Future work will transform the garden areas to create a community orchard, food growing space, wildflower planting and a wildlife garden.



Rapt delegates staying awake because of the superb climate control in the Passivhaus building

Come back again next year, and see the progress we will have made!

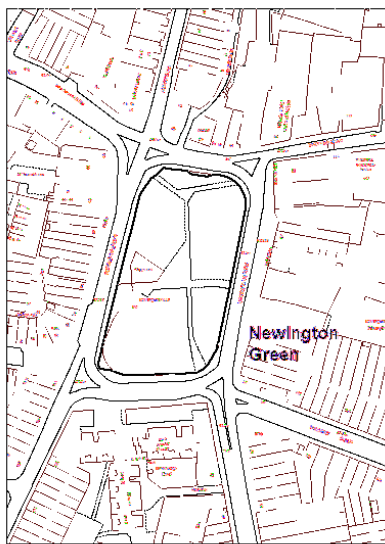
Urban Regeneration and Wildlife in Newington Green

Jenny Littlewood, Newington Green Action Group

Newington Green Action Group (NGAG) was formed in 1997 to bring about the regeneration of the historic, but by then dilapidated, Newington Green London N16 9PX, through local community effort. The area is historically important, with the oldest dissenters chapel in Europe (1708), and the oldest inhabited terrace houses in England (1658).



The most notable resident was Mary Wollstonecraft, pioneer author of “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” (1792) for whom we are raising money for a memorial sculpture.



NGAG helped to restore the Green to popular use as a natural focus for the area and it is once again being used like a village green, even though it lies within a very urban, Inner London location. NGAG has several subcommittees of which Wildlife In Newington Green (WING) is one.

Newington Green itself had a major refurbishment and opening-out in 2005, allowing reconsideration of the roles it played for local people, planting and wildlife. The project has won Green Flag and heritage awards in the past 10 years.

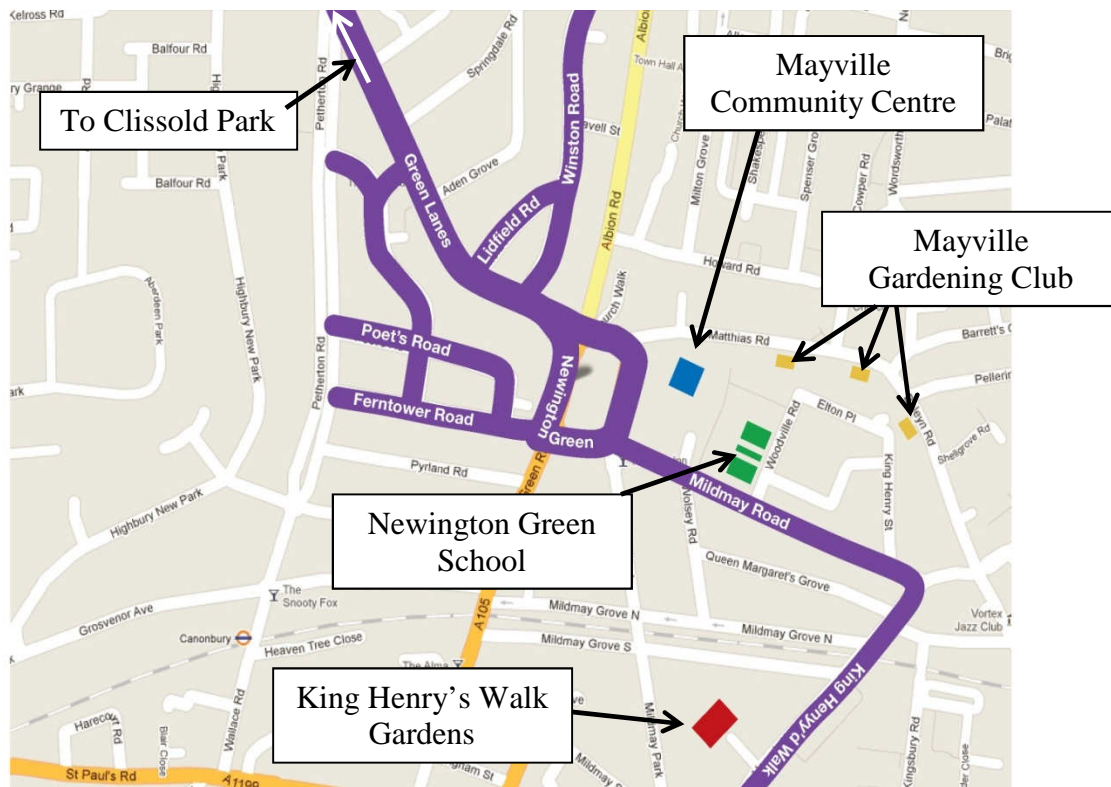
The Green is now very well used as a communal green space, with two big NGAG events every year, Jazz on the Green in the summer, and carols in December. Every day it is used by local residents, including family groups feeding the pigeons, making the effort and commitment to bring a bag of food, and gaining therapeutic pleasure in being near wildlife.

While the Green is much more attractive and popular with people, its improvements have reduced the food and shelter opportunities for wildlife, and, with its inner city environment, it suffers from noise and light pollution, and is without water. The only trees were plane trees, and there was an excess of feral pigeons and predatory magpies.

NGAG realised a strategy was needed to manage open access space, and encourage the sense of “ownership” that will engage support and commitment. After consideration NGAG concluded that campaigns and critical mass were needed to create:

- green corridors
- campaigns and workshops
- support local strengths (gardening clubs, green roofs)
- support use of small space (front gardens, balconies)

The map below shows the NGAG Green Corridor and some of the principal components.



The Green Corridor aims to link areas of greater wildlife value, as well as improving the net amount of habitat, plus improving the appearance of the area for people.

Associated projects started with “Plastic bag free Newington Green” which saw the traders around the Green abandon plastic bags, replacing them with cloth bags supplied by Islington Council.

The next suite of projects was aimed at increasing the number and variety of trees. Six new native trees were planted around Newington Green, four on the Green and 24 in ‘Green Corridor’ streets, supplemented by 40 more trees from “cross border” collaboration outside the NGAG remit.

Some planting was linked with historical events, such as the 300th anniversary of the church.





Planting on Newington Green:

Commemorative trees marking 300 years of the Unitarian Chapel



Local businesses, already engaged through the plastic bag campaign, were encouraged to adopt and plant young trees in tree pits, reducing vandalism and dog mess. Some traders also sponsored cycle racks.

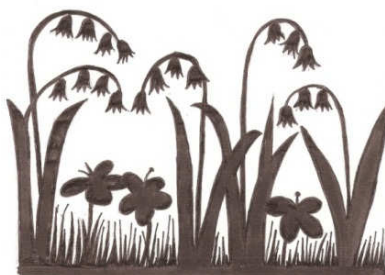


We support individual gardens to create a critical mass for wildlife, so efforts went in to promoting private and public planting-up with flowers attractive to insects, encouraged by plant and seed sales and exchanges. The photo to the left shows planting in suffragette colours linked to Mary Wollstonecraft’s association with the Green. The net effort led to the award of the RHS “In Bloom” urban communities award of High Merit.

Urban tree planting is not without unexpected problems. Each time a tree was sponsored for planting into pavement space, £500 was needed for special surveys to avoid damaging underground services and pipes. Nevertheless, with grant aid, over 500 further trees have been established:

- The National Lottery funded 60 native trees in Green Lanes, Lidfield Road and Winston Road
- The Woodland Trust sponsored 420 Saplings at the Mayville Community Centre: King Henry’s Walk Gardens, Newington Green Primary School and St Mary’s Church. Species included oaks , birch, blackthorn, hawthorn and hazel.
- The Orchard Project funded by Natural England and the Lottery has established a group of apple trees in the North Community Garden on the Mayville estate.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED
FOR
BULB PLANTING
ON
NEWINGTON
GREEN
2.00 PM SUNDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER
BRING A TROWEL, GARDEN FORK OR BULB PLANTER IF YOU HAVE ONE
COME & COLLECT A FREE WILDLIFE BOX - BE PART OF NGAG'S WING PROJECT
ORGANISED BY NEWINGTON GREEN ACTION GROUP
SUPPORTED BY LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON GREENSPACE
FURTHER INFORMATION WWW.NEWINGTONGREEN.ORG.UK



A bulb planting map was drawn up for the Green, and bulb and seed planting days attracted volunteers to establish daffodil, bluebell, crocus, wood anemone and snowdrop areas for spring, and many insect attracting flowering species in summer. It can still be an uphill struggle, as

street sweepers sometimes lift plants from tree surrounds, while autumnal leaf collecting and gathering disrupts insect life. Urban habitats tend always to represent a compromise, but in time city dwellers could develop a more relaxed attitude to “natural untidiness” as they come to appreciate the wildlife benefits.

There have been many successes, with increasing populations of sparrows and other birds, and more insects being encountered. The project has become very popular with local people, and the extent of vandalism of these open spaces is reassuringly low. Problems remain, not least the lack of water habitats, but much can be achieved by exciting the interests of private gardeners.

In summary the key points we have learned include:

- **Work collectively:** NGAG cannot work alone, we have the support of excellent council, foresters, various groups and the local school, winning an award for the corridor.
- **Build on strengths:** involve local people with lifelong interests, observational skills, education, local pride and energy.
- **Understand contested spaces:** be sensitive to political differences in promotion of needs and requirements, individuals and family needs and perceptions.
- **Historical areas still constantly change and adapt:** historic buildings exist in a changing setting, populations move and change, bringing cultural challenges and opportunities, deprivation and need can be valid drivers of improvement
- **Historical, social, economic sensitivity:** global changes in economy local socio-economic shifts and climate change all increase competitive tensions. We need to build community unity and inclusivity, while stressing affordability and sustainable realism.

Contact Jenny at drjlittlewood@btinternet.com,
and NGAG through www.newingtongreen.org.uk

Managing urban green spaces in partnership with commercial organisations

Richard Bashford and John Day RSPB

The stark statistic is that there has been a 71% (1976 – 2009) drop in urban and suburban house sparrow numbers since the 1970s, and this became particularly marked through the 1990s in urban habitats. Song thrushes also show a marked decline (48% - 1967 – 2008), and starlings have lost 85% (1967 – 2008) of their numbers².



Significant proportions of the populations of these species are found in gardens, so there is an opportunity to improve their status there through garden management. Reaching people is key. The RSPB runs a number of garden based activities, the largest of which is the Big Garden Birdwatch which has been running for 33 years, with 609,000 people involved last January. By linking these mass participation activities to their garden management programme called “Homes for Wildlife”³, which has over 170,000 people signed up since its launch in 2007.

When you register, you can describe your garden circumstances, ranging from a balcony to a large mature garden, as well as detailing rural/urban settings and the age of your house. Early questions find out more about wildlife features you already have or would consider installing, and what wildlife priorities you have in mind. This means only appropriate advice sheets will be provided to you – a tailor-made service!

After providing the usual compulsory personal data for future contacts, you have created a personal “Your Garden” zone on the website, which provides priority tasks from the tailored advice. Once a task is completed, a participant can update their garden actions in their personal area.

Richard Bashford has so far completed 99 out of 136 actions recommended for his garden, with family involvement in tasks like creating a wildlife pond. It is vital to provide continued communication to encourage action. Participants in Homes for Wildlife receive a monthly e-newsletter with a tip of the month and links to related gardening for wildlife blogs and forums


In 2009, the RSPB has started working with the Care Homes branch of the health organisation Bupa. The company contacted the RSPB for help in increasing wildlife around their residential facilities, and Homes for Wildlife was the perfect off-the-shelf product to form the backbone of the partnership. Following a successful pilot in the Midlands, Bupa were happy to role this partnership project out across their 306 care homes in the UK. The

² www.bto.org (Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside)
³ www.rspb.org.uk/hfw/

RSPB provided training for Bupa staff who then went back to manage their grounds according to the advice within Homes for Wildlife.

The partnership provides many benefits. Bupa are able to provide activities for their residents, the wildlife attracted (birds to feeders etc) provides extra stimulants for residents, visiting relatives are also exposed to the partnership. And of course, there are benefits for wildlife too. The garden's new planting is good for insects as well as older people, and residents have become very involved with all aspects including making nest boxes, and growing vegetables.




Another growing partnership is with the construction company  Kier Group plc, starting with the extension to a school, where nest provision was added into the design of the new building.

Simultaneously, the RSPB worked with the school to advise on improvements they could make to their existing grounds and wildlife garden and suggest ways in which this can involve the children, parents and the community. For example a wildlife stack can help achieve a number of key curricular

targets. It can help a child's understanding of habitats and the variety of shelter different invertebrates require in a garden. It can also help develop an understanding of design and art, and even recycling, as well as improve their social and interactive skills.



Homes for Wildlife has also been promoted to the public through awareness raising events about The London Parks House Sparrow project. This helps link what people can do to help wildlife in their own gardens with what their local authorities are doing in parks in their neighbourhood as a partner of the project. This project is supported by the SITA Trust - and one of the eight project partners are Islington Council within whose borough the conference was held 

Finally the RSPB is promoting Houses for Wildlife through sending out 3,500 information packs to all employees of Cemex, a leading global building materials company. This runs alongside work the charity is doing to help improve corporate sustainability, including the restoration of spent mineral extraction sites to high biodiversity habitats. The principle is involving all staff “from quarry to executive desk”, and allowing staff to carry the message of biodiversity enhancement out into local communities as well.

Contact Richard Bashford at Richard.Bashford@rspb.org.uk
and John Day at John.Day@rspb.org.uk

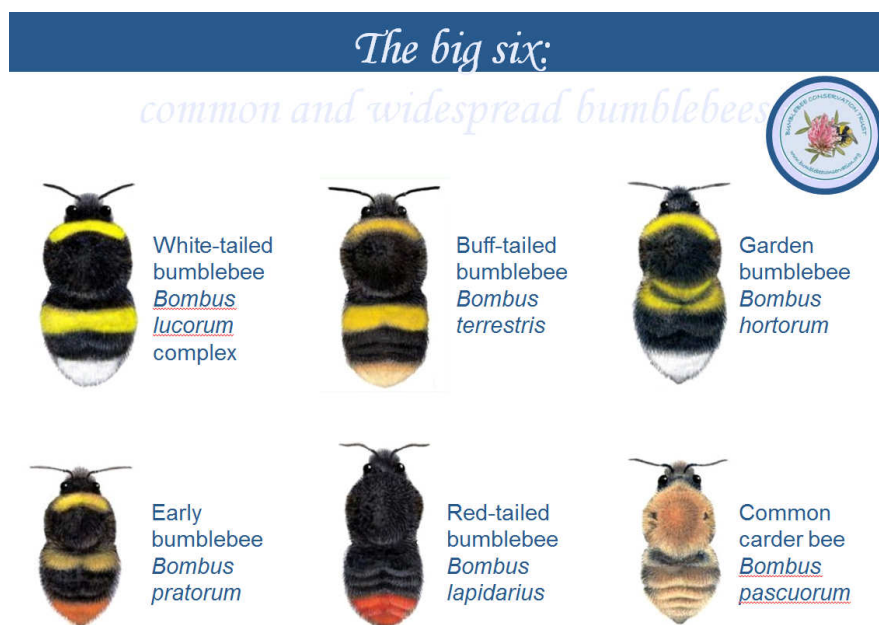
Gardening for Bumblebees

Kate Bradbury Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Bumblebees and honeybees are quite different, and they face different problems. Bumblebees are native, wild bees. There are 24 species in total. Nests are small, containing between 50 and 400 workers, and there is very little honey stored in the nest. In autumn the queen, workers and males die out. Only the mated daughter queens survive the winter, and they start a new nest in spring. The main cause for their decline is habitat loss.

By contrast, there is just one species of honeybee. Honeybees are probably native to the south of the UK, and are domesticated. Each colony survives for several years, and consists of around 50,000 workers at any one time. The honey is stored in large quantities in order to feed the bees over winter. They are affected by diseases and parasites. Honeybees dance to signal the distance and location of food resources. Bumblebees don't dance.

Because bumblebees don't store food, they have high energy requirements, meaning the workers have to go out foraging almost whatever the weather. They also forage earlier and later in the day than honeybees, making them very important pollinators.



Of the 24 UK bumblebee species, six are common in gardens, collectively known as the big six.

When learning to identify them, start with their bums, which can be red, orange, white, dirty orange or ginger. It's tricky at first but you soon get your eye in.

At the time of this conference in November most nests are dead and gone, while the daughter queens should be in hibernation. You may have seen large bees about lately, as they sometimes come out of hibernation on warm days. In spring, bumblebees wake up hungry. They forage from spring-flowering plants like crocus and pussy willow, then find a suitable nesting site (in old mouse holes, under sheds, in compost bins).

Once in the nest, the queen lays eggs and makes a beautiful little wax pot which she fills with a reserve of honey/nectar. She then sits on the eggs, like a bird on a nest, shivering her muscles to keep the eggs warm. After a few weeks the eggs hatch into little white larvae, and she resumes foraging – bringing back nectar and the very best quality pollen she can find, for them to eat. The larvae eventually pupate, to emerge as fully grown worker bumblebees. This first brood of workers go out foraging to bring in food for the nest, while the queen lays and broods more eggs.

All being well, the colony grows through this series of broods until autumn (in most species) when the queen starts to lay unfertilised eggs, which develop into males, and she encourages her workers to feed the female eggs more food. This triggers developmental changes in these larvae, which eventually hatch out as new daughter queens. The young queens and males leave the nest to mate. The colony does not survive the winter and dies off by late autumn. The males too soon die. The newly mated queens lay down fat reserves in their abdomens, and then hibernate, usually underground.

So why are some bumblebees endangered? Bumblebees forage from flowers, drinking nectar, which gives them energy to fly, and collecting pollen, which they take back to the nest, to feed the larvae. While nectar is pretty much sugar and water, and can be taken from most flowers, pollen varies in quality. The better the quality of pollen fed to the grubs, the healthier, larger and more robust the adults they become.

The best pollen is found in leguminous plants, such as clover, vetches and trefoils. Hay meadows and clover leys were formerly widespread throughout the UK, but the loss of these has been huge. The Grasslands Trust estimate that ~98% of lowland flower-rich habitats have been lost in the last 60 years. It's no surprise therefore that bumblebees and other insects which rely on these habitats have also declined. These declines force populations to exist in fragmented pockets across the UK. There are no corridors of flowers to travel along, so the bees are becoming inbred. This puts them at much higher risk of falling victim to parasites and other problems. It's all too late for the short-haired bumblebee, last seen at Dungeness in 1988, and now extinct in the UK⁴

So reversing the decline of bumblebees should be easy. We just need to grow some flowers. Gardens collectively cover a huge area, more than all of our nature reserves put together. So if we all grew the right plants, we could make a massive difference to bumblebees. Most gardens support 4 or 5 bee species but the very best can be visited by 10 or more.

Unfortunately, a lot of gardeners concentrate on annual bedding plants, most of which are highly cultivated varieties, of little or no use to insects. They frequently produce no nectar whatsoever, and pollen is often hidden away behind multiple layers of frilly petals.



Clockwise from top left we have useless primulas, petunias, pansies and bizzies lizzies.

⁴ The BBCT is setting up a reintroduction project at Dungeness, releasing Swedish stock in 2012.

Far better are single, open flowers, with plenty of nectar and pollen for bees.



Clockwise from top left:

Viper's bugloss with tall spires of blue long-lasting flowers which is great in the border
Sainfoin – understated and beautiful
Foxglove – very popular with the Garden Bumblebee
Red clover – a real favourite, if you can spare a corner for some wildflowers
Heathers – good for acidic soil
Teasel – a hit with both butterflies and bumblebees
Water Aven – good for damp areas
Cowslips – one of only a few flowers in early spring

Some gardeners regard these plants as wildflowers or worse, weeds, but they look fantastic in borders. Yet more favourites include:

- Willow/Sallow 'pussywillow' – providing much needed spring
- The beautiful and stately *Echinops*
- Borage (although this annual tends to self-seed everywhere)
- Rosemary, and many other herbs, such as angelica, chives, fennel, lavender, lemon balm, sage and thyme
- *Aquilegia* – a must!
- Comfrey – great for bees, but also good as a green manure, or for making liquid feed.
- Herbs are great, attracting both bees and butterflies

Elsewhere in the garden there's plenty of opportunity for pollen and nectar forage. A few examples include herb gardens, wildflower patches, longer lawns, window boxes, hedges and veg patches.

When gardening for bees, it's important to provide a long season of pollen and nectar from March to August, longer if you can. There are garden staples like lungwort and heather in March and April, foxgloves and geraniums in May and June, and hollyhocks, sunflowers and lavender in July and August. There's a more comprehensive list on the BBCT website.

Flowering time	Plant	
March and April	Bluebell Bugle Flowering Currant Lungwort	Pussy Willow Rosemary Dead-nettle <i>Erica carnea</i>
May and June	<i>Aquilegia</i> <i>Campanula</i> Chives Comfrey <i>Cotoneaster</i> Everlasting Pea	<i>Geranium</i> Foxglove Honeysuckle Laburnum Lupin Thyme
July and August	Buddleia Cornflower Hollyhock Lavender Marjoram,	Rock-rose Scabious Sunflower Heathers

In return, bumblebees pollinate your fruit and veg crops, increasing yields. Some crops, like broad beans and tomatoes, can *only* be pollinated by bumblebees. Broad beans require bees with long tongues, while tomatoes require so-called ‘buzz pollination’ the bees cause vibrations, helping dislodge the pollen on to the anthers.

Since 2006, the BBCT has been

- Raising awareness of bumblebees and why they need conservation
- Encouraging more people to grow more flowers
- Providing information and training
- Working with partners in priority areas
- Helping to get the best out of agri-environment schemes

BBCT is launching a new Heritage Lottery Funded project, called Bees for Everyone. This will support rare bumblebees throughout the UK through active conservation work, and raise public awareness of the importance of bumblebees and the problems that they face, inspiring individual action

With bees for everyone, the BBCT will be making a lot of noise. There will be lots of events promoting *Gardening for Bumblebees (and more besides)*, and opportunities for partnership work. The BBCT is keen to hear from anyone who would be interested in learning more about the project.

Contact Kate Bradbury at kate.bradbury@immediatemedias.co.uk and the BBCT at enquiries@bumblebeeconservation.org

Wildlife Gardening with learning-disabled children and young adults

Jan Miller Saith Ffynnon Wildlife Plants

I grew up with a brother with Down Syndrome, and have brought up a son with Asperger Syndrome (which is a high-functioning type of autism), so I have a lifelong interest in this subject. While much of this talk deals with working with learning-disabled children, it carries an important message to the many Wildlife Trusts and other organisations that help schools build wildlife gardens.

The term “learning-disabled” is quite different from “mentally ill”, although the two are often confused by members of the public. According to the National Autistic Society, autistic spectrum disorder now affects an estimated 1 in 100 of the UK population under 18 years old. This means all of us will come into contact with a person who has this ‘disorder’ at some time or other – we cannot ignore them.

There is even some discussion now about whether some of the autistic spectrum is a ‘disorder’ at all. Thom Hartmann⁵ has suggested that there may be an evolutionary clue to the apparent recent increase in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) which is an increasingly common diagnosis within the autistic spectrum. We know that there are two types of Dopamine flow to the brain– steady stream (which Hartmann says makes people more systematic and he calls ‘Farmers’) and peaks-and-troughs (which he says makes people with sudden inspiration and he calls ‘Hunters’); autistic spectrum people have the latter. Hartmann suggests that society has always needed both, and still needs both types of people. But because it was the ‘farmers’ who constructed the education system, the ‘hunters’ look ‘abnormal’ within it.

Humans were nomadic hunter gatherers for hundreds of thousands of years, but this changed rapidly as agriculture developed in most societies, and most people worldwide became farmers. Over many years, most humans adapted to farming cultures, but Hartmann speculates that people with ADHD retained some of the older hunter characteristics. For hunters, the "hyperfocus" aspect of ADHD is a gift or benefit. It is argued that in the hunter-gatherer cultures that preceded farming societies, hunters needed hyperfocus more than gatherers, but this strategy is maladaptive in the evolutionarily novel modern classroom⁶. This may be a specific example of society problems caused by the disparity between modern urban environments, and the natural environments to which our species adapted. We certainly don't have a world well suited to the “hunters” in society.



I discovered some years ago how a small urban garden can make a surprisingly diverse habitat for wildlife and a stimulating environment for people with a learning disability. I worked with my son on his own garden when we lived in The Hague. Some activities worked very well, but with some there were complications. Bright colours were a great attraction. We enjoyed digging out the hole for the pond, and got other kids to join in, taking care of course with sharp metal tools. But my son afterwards

⁵ ADD a Different Perception' and other books

⁶ Adapted from Wikipedia

worried about ‘destroying nature’ and holed the pond. Likewise we enjoyed managing hedges and creating topiary. He liked the trimming, but then worried about killing the bits cut off, so we made cuttings out of them. He didn’t like soil on hands, so he would wear marigolds. He loved dipping in the completed pond, but did not like worms, cockroaches and spiders.

As wildlife gardeners, we must ask ourselves this question. When we create school wildlife gardens, do we think our main objective is creating semi-permanent *habitat for wildlife* - or is it *education*? I think most of us would say ‘both’, but too much concern for the wildlife (eg banning digging in the beds once seeds have been sown) may stop kids enjoying the ‘now’ of interacting with the natural world. For example, I helped Ysgol (School) Owen Jones, Northop created a successful wildlife garden with a pond. This was subsequently colonised by great crested newts, so the children are now forbidden from accessing their own facility⁷, which is lost to them but a gain to the newts.

Even when we focus on the children, we can be very unimaginative in the ways we try to enrich the environment for children with learning difficulties. A expensively refitted special school locally had big chalk boards outside for free graphic expression of what the children could see, but in practice their only role was to serve as a windbreak behind which to park a wheelchair. Indeed, regardless of the facilities available, teachers & carers get through the day in tried and tested ways. The same old safe activities usually prevail without imaginative (outside) interference.

In my experience of children with Autism it usually means the child is inward-looking:

- Absorbed with their immediate surroundings
- Extra-sensitive to sound and light, especially colour, smell, movement and touch. These can initially be feared as a threat to self, but these stimuli can be used to get children to *interact*.
- Readily forget – so we need immediate results to retain interest



Wildlife is endlessly *different*, and full of movement; and it gets kids to look outside themselves. As an example view this extraordinary video of a grey squirrel overcoming an obstacle course to get at food⁸:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWU0bfo-bSY>

We don’t have to make an assault course as complicated as this to get a good effect – I have seen a simple one outside a forest classroom window, made with a few posts in the ground and thick rope slung between. Onto this rope you can invent different baffles made out of plastic bottles etc.

⁷ I believe the best indicator that a pond contains GCNs is that there is a supermarket trolley in it [Ed.]

⁸ Watch the first minute, which is what Jan showed, but the second clip is good value too. No squirrels were harmed in the course of making this film, but some may now be overweight.

When working with children with learning disabilities, we must bear in mind stimulating their senses in all we do. Here is a good wildlife garden activity, covering a Christmas tree with decorations edible by birds such as nuts in a fat ball on string, dried apricots, and bunches of colourful berries.



How about this pine cone with fat and seeds? Or a string of colourful Cheerios to hang on a twig?

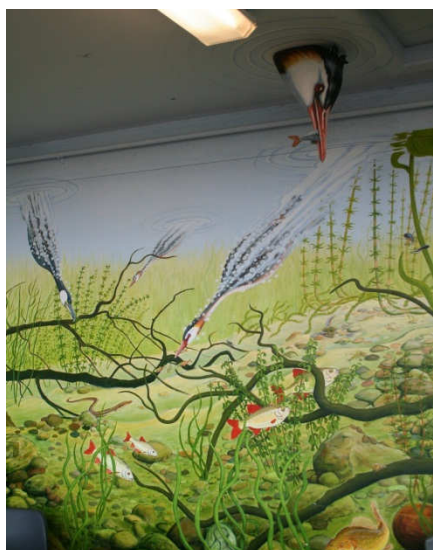
This activity stimulates children's senses of touch, smell and indeed taste, and lets them use their imagination. *Do* make sure all the components are safe for the kids to eat as well, because they *will* try them.



Living willow structures are trendy and popular, kids can get *in* them and *explore* them. A mature willow tunnel emphasises light and dark and the light at the end draws people in and through. If as most schools are, you are stuck with a secure but nasty metal perimeter fence, then hang bird feeders on it, and coloured streamers to swirl with the wind and provide movement.

How many tastefully designed sensory gardens don't get used because you can't get a wheelchair in? How many school ponds become disused because parents or teachers are afraid they may be dangerous? If absolutely necessary, think laterally and convert them to bog gardens, with shallow pools only a couple of centimetres deep⁹.

Indoors, corridor displays in schools are often depressingly static. Change them regularly, and use photos of the kids themselves exploring the garden. Or make a brilliantly coloured fabric rainbow for visually impaired children to feel, and appreciate with their limited vision.



How about this for decorating an "Underwater Classroom" in the Ranger Centre at Brickfields Pond, Rhyl. (but now apparently just used as the Rangers' office)



Maybe all schools need someone from outside to visit them regularly to challenge them and do *different* things. Here for example is an idea for working with sound. Play birdsong recordings outside, very loudly at first to get attention, over a number of days. Then turn down the volume until the children are listening to the real thing outside in same place. This works well, but you do need trees.

⁹ Which is where most of the biodiversity is anyway. You don't need deep water.

Working outside helps children to experience touch, smell and interact with the environment. Even a bare school playground can be made exciting with a flowering green roof on a shelter, coupled with bright colours and movement in the breeze.



At another level entirely, Glynllifon College, Caernafvon worked with Groundwork to create a model wildlife garden for an exhibition in Cardiff. With a mixed ability team, young adults with learning difficulties gained new skills, confidence and experience. Simple tasks like using tools builds confidence, while pushing wheelbarrows provides exercise and trains balance. Planning for the show, and how

to chart bulb growth helped build experience in anticipating future outcomes. For a blind student they made a bar-chart of different textures of fabric cut to the amount the daffodil had grown each week. Working as a team is important experience, as is using imagination and pooling ideas on ideas to attract wildlife. The garden exhibited many innovations, including:

- vertical water-feature made of plastic drinks bottles mounted on a plank.
- a bug house
- flowers for attracting butterflies.
- Scented plants for the blind student; (The gravel and dripping water in the feature also gave her textures, sounds and smells)

The take home message is that when we are helping create a wildlife garden for a school, much more than *making* the garden it matters more that teachers and carers are *trained how to use it afterwards*. And for learning-disabled students, the value of a wildlife garden designed with their needs in mind is very high. Maybe the Wildlife Gardening Forum could offer website ideas, case studies and visits to school projects to spread good practice?

Contact Jan Miller at jan@7wells.org

Natural estates – the opportunities and challenges for biodiversity within social housing

Mathew Frith London Wildlife Trust

This talk centres on the opportunities that could come for wildlife and people, if we used more imagination and care in planning and managing green infrastructure in cities, with special reference to the role of councils and other social landlords

London Wildlife Trust has been working for 3 years with Peabody, a major charity operating since 1862 which now owns and manages more than 19,000 homes across London including social housing, leasehold, shared ownership, supported housing, key-worker accommodation and commercial units¹⁰.

Social housing provides for the needs of 17% of households, and 8.2 million people in England. In London this amounts to 1 in 10 people. There are over 1400 Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), and over 150 local authority housing landlords managing 1.8 million local authority dwellings. There is a trend for local authority properties to be transferred to RSLs.



The culture of social landlords, especially RSLs, focuses around the design, construction and management of buildings, and the well-being of their resident communities. This includes providing necessary support and provision for people in their properties to give them a good quality of life. Most residents are on low incomes, and often have specific requirements that do not allow them to live without the support the social landlords can provide.



The environment agenda for social landlords has generally meant ‘low carbon’, how they make their buildings more energy efficient and mitigate for climate change. But the ‘environment,’ meaning our natural surroundings, is generally not part of the culture. The landscapes in which the buildings stand, and in which residents pass through are not really considered. It is as if they were invisible.

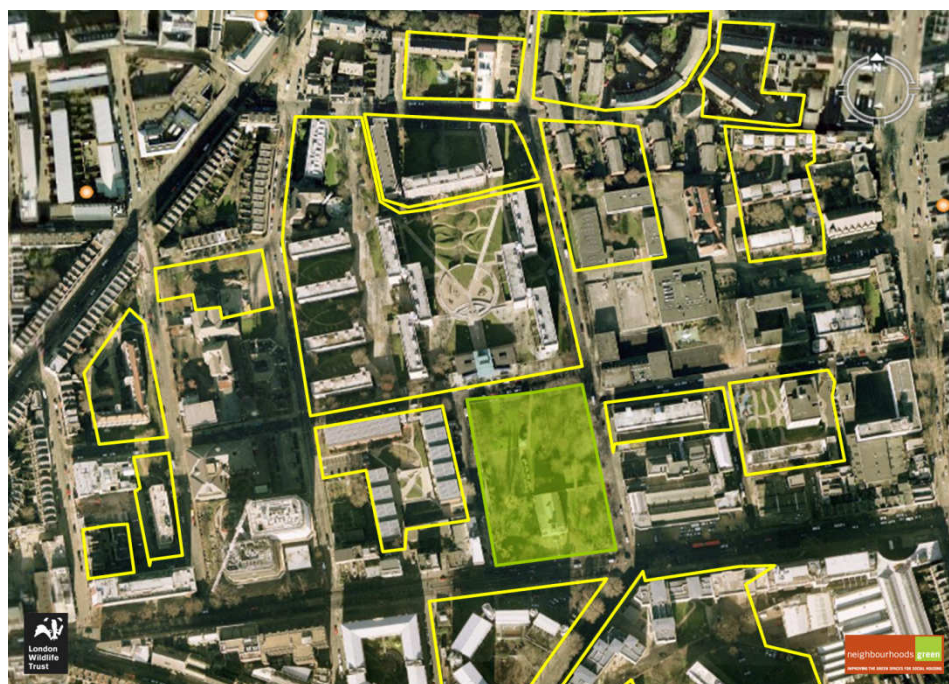
There’s hectares and hectares of the stuff, but do we notice it? Or rather, how do we see it?

In this case car-parks...



¹⁰ www.peabody.org.uk/about-us.aspx

In many parts of our cities there is a larger area of open space owned and managed by social landlords than within public parks. For example, Kings Cross, here: the green square is



Grimaldi Park, those outlined in yellow are housing estates – the combined green space of these easily exceeds that of the park.

In the case of Islington Council, there's more green space in their housing parks than within their parks.

“the deprivations that some of our public parks suffer are nothing compared to the poverty of spaces in and around much of social housing”

A quote from *Decent homes, decent spaces*¹¹, published by Neighbourhoods Green. These green (?) spaces may -in total- add to a large area, but most are appallingly badly planned and managed for people, let alone wildlife.

Most of these areas are fearful deserts, large expanses of dead greenery, largely devoid of interest and structure. ‘Dog-shit deserts’ is another term.



The problems include:

- significant legacy of poorly-designed and under-managed spaces
- accumulative disinvestment over many decades
- high fragmentation of green space (‘bitty’ compared to parks)
- significant contrasts in scale/layout
- ambiguous ownership for users
- increasing complexity of tenure
- isolation and ghetto-isation
- development pressure

¹¹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/decent-homes-need-decent-spaces.pdf>



Fragmentation is a characteristic feature – how on earth would you get a handle on these spaces – to manage, let alone use constructively? This is “Land left over after planning” and is mostly wasted.

How could these spaces cater for the very different needs/rights of the residents? Some people will have been there for years, others will be moving on after 6 months, others maybe leaseholders with rights/vetoes over what can be done. With the current disposition towards mixing up types of tenure on estates, this makes design and management much more complex, a much more difficult situation than in most parks.

Are patches like this public or private? There are many areas where it is not clear who owns the land, or indeed who it's for, especially the case with local authority housing. In many cases this is public-owned land, but earmarked for the residents of an estate. There is now the added challenge of invisible boundaries due to the growth of gang culture and post-code territories. How are these recognised, negotiated, accounted for?



Many thousands of these hidden corners abound. Again, they are *land left over after planning*, often limply tarted up without understanding how they are used, abused or viewed.

In this case, why pave, and build a bed in a shaded corner? Why not turn it to easier to manage lawn, or plant a shrubbery?

‘Secured by design’¹² has a lot to answer for, removing perceived problems from landscapes.

These shrubs were perceived as providing cover for muggers and the owners were asked to remove them.

So muggers don't hide behind cars, stairs, fencing or anything else that isn't green...?



¹² <http://www.securedbydesign.com/>

What's the point of the thousands of spaces left over after planning?



Countless purposeless spaces like this adorn estates. They can be viewed as liabilities rather than assets, with no recognition of their power and potential.

Housing estates have become car-parks with flats in them. They have dominated design and usage decisions, even where car-owners do not form the majority of residents.

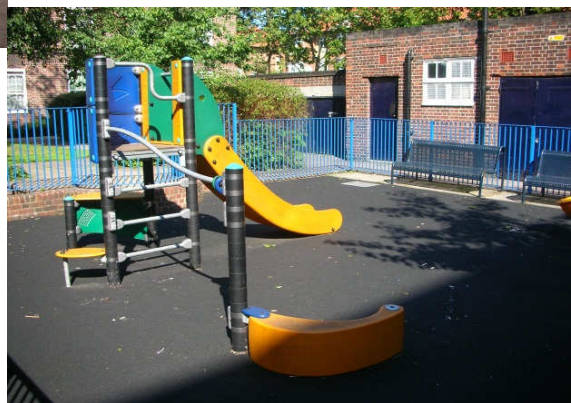
Controlled Parking Zones and status elements of car-ownership drive the debate in this issue, to the detriment of the quality of the landscape in which the estate sits.



There are clear issues of conflicting interests in confined spaces – for example the noise and activity of young people conflicting with those of older generations requiring tranquillity. Both are justified uses, but often difficult to reconcile for estate managers.

We promote the multi-functional use of spaces, but are we sure about the diversity of uses. And do we think of how spaces may be used once designed and in place...?

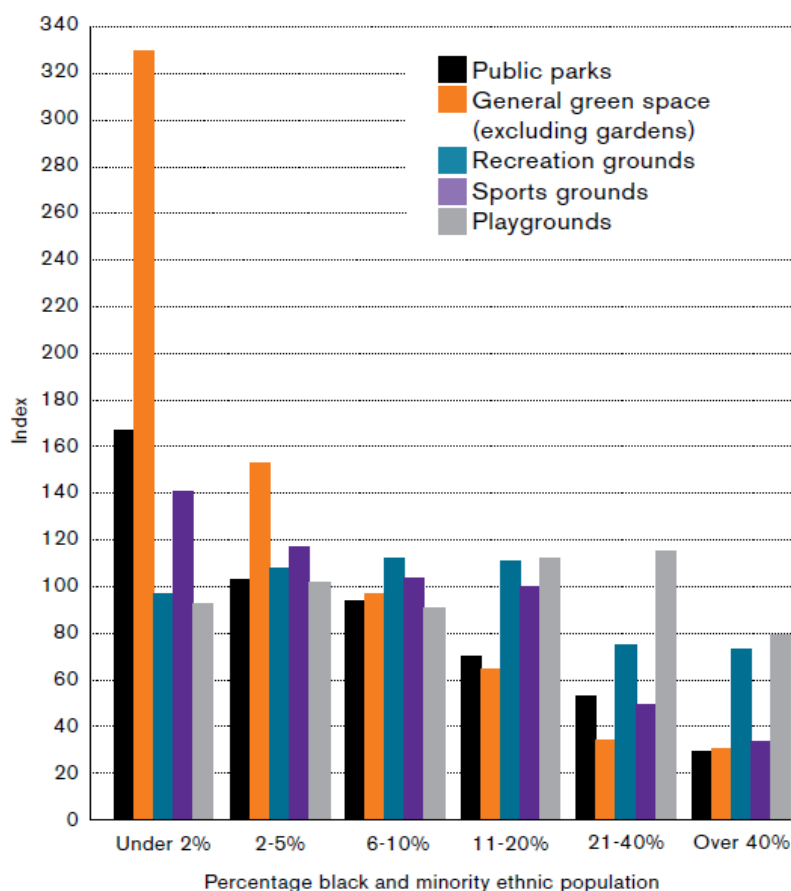
At night this play-space was used for dog-fighting.



It's too easy to dumb down green infrastructure, and go for an easy life, where liabilities are designed out, and management is driven to the lowest common denominator. Then perhaps chuck in statues of hippopotamus, donkey, camel etc dotted about as if on safari. What's that about?

How can the staff of a social landlord or the resident body of an estate understand what works? Can we make informed decisions about design? What do we base our decisions on? Landscapes are usually designed by landscape architects who may speak glowingly (with Latin names) about their schemes, but are often without experience of living or working in social housing, and presenting drawings to people who don't usually know what key questions to ask. How many Registers Social Landlords employ landscape architects, ecologists, play specialists etc. that can take an informed view for the client?

Then there is the issue of money. Public parks are paid for by all residents within the local authority through taxation. However, the spaces of social housing are also paid for by the residents on top of their council tax through service charges. When we consider the high proportion of social housing residents on low incomes and the fact that where they live the quality of public parks is generally much poorer, then there's a gross inequality emerging.



Social housing residents are predominantly low income, with a high proportion considered vulnerable.

The most affluent 20% of wards have five times the area of parks or general green space (excluding gardens) per person than the most deprived 10% of wards.

Wards that have almost no Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents have six times the number parks and eleven times the area of public green space as wards where more than 40% of the population are people from BME groups.

“It’s only social housing”
a quote that’s been heard many a time.

Many people both within the social housing profession and outside do not believe it’s worth bothering. This led to the development of Neighbourhoods Green, an initiative started by two officers, one at Peabody, the other at Notting Hill Housing, to raise the awareness of landscape, and to promote the issues to a broader base of professionals.

Neighbourhoods Green

This is a partnership initiative which highlights the importance of open space for residents of social housing and works with social landlords to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use. The project provides guidance, support and tools for housing associations, local authority housing departments, arms-length management organisations, resident associations, community groups and their partners.

Neighbourhoods Green¹³ (NG) began with a conference in 2003, publishing *Decent Homes Decent Spaces* in 2005, and carrying out research. *A natural estate*¹⁴ was a publication from

¹³ <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/>

2007, funded by Natural England, which led to a partnership bid to the Big Lottery Fund's Access to Nature programme now being delivered across 9 estates in London.

What does biodiversity mean to people in social housing? The flowers in their flats, in the garden, the animals on the TV, the pets they may have or the animals they might eat?



The biodiversity of many estates is often very poor, although they don't often get as bleak as this.

If biodiversity is there, then surely it's a nuisance?



Here are some genuine (and typical) resident's comments about biodiversity consequences:

- noise – birds singing, foxes at night
- mess – bird-shit and honeydew on cars
- dangerous – bees, wasps, and creepy-crawlies
- disease – vermin, flies, fox, 'trees'
- neglect – “*what does my service charge go on?*”
- scruffy – full of weeds and litter
- unsafe – places for muggers and thieves to hide
- dull – ‘out go the roses’, etc.
- difficult to manage – “*can't even manage it now...*”
- not appropriate – for the countryside

We need to understand and address these issues before a project is taken forward. Well-meant interventions can often set back a good idea, without proper preparation and buy-in.



*This is an image sent from a 'phone of an estate manager with the message, 'What the f**k's happened here? Have your guys forgotten it?'*

Staff had spoken with one resident who wanted 'wildlife' but hadn't discussed management changes with anyone else, let alone their colleagues.

There is some good news. There are hidden gems on many estates,

which could form the building blocks for further work.

¹⁴ <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/upload/documents/webpage/ANaturalEstate%20021006.pdf>



Here is an example at Countisbury House on Sydenham Hill, the largest colony of corky-fruited water-dropwort (a regionally uncommon plant) in the borough, and now flourishing because the manager recognises its value.

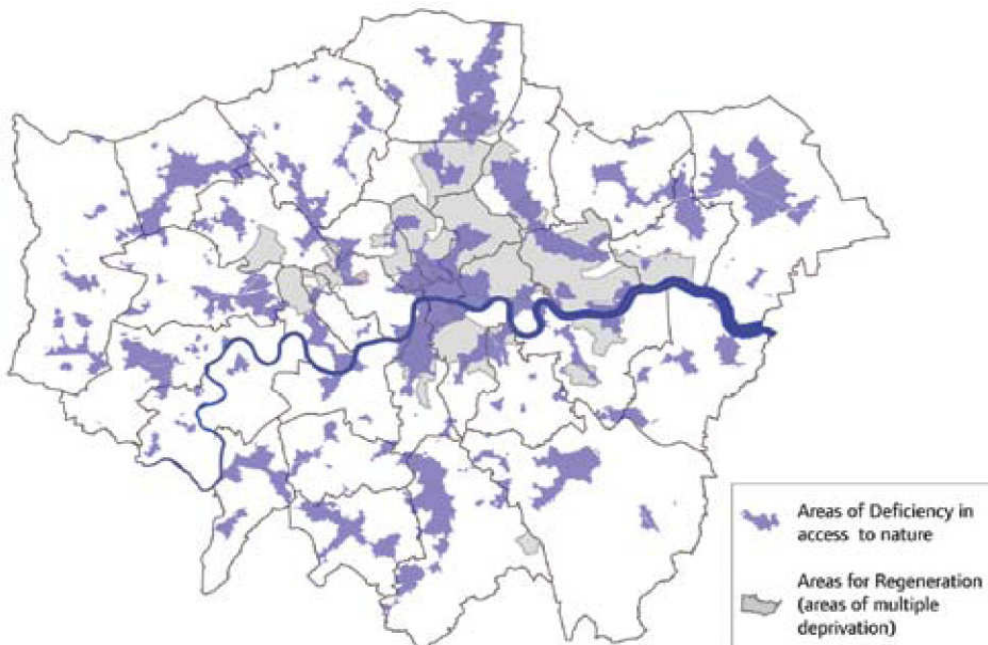


Right - a wren's nest on an estate by Borough station

The Natural Estates Project was formed when a group of pro-active social landlords joined forces with London Wildlife Trust and Groundwork London to develop an open space improvement programme for their residents.

The project has raised £288,000 from the BLF Access to Nature programme and will last three years. The project officers will help residents to develop community action plans, and engage people in activities to improve the green spaces as well as encouraging wildlife. A training and capacity building programme for staff and residents runs alongside so that improvements become embedded in the operational delivery and are sustained beyond the lifetime of the project.

The nature conservation sector's work in London has identified areas of deficiency (AoDs) – Mayoral guidance from 2008 highlighted a strong correlation between AoDs and areas of multiple social deprivation. Some of these priorities could be addressed by engaging with social landlords.



The Cockney Sparrow Project is a partnership between the LWT and Peabody, with Lottery backing, centred on the plight of the declining house sparrow. The activities include:

- planting hedgerow species such as hawthorn and blackthorn to create the ideal, bustle-friendly bird habitat
- planting grasses and flowers to attract the protein-rich aphids, caterpillars and weevils that nestlings love to feed on
- community workshops to make roosting boxes and feeders for species including bats, swifts, house martins and sparrows
- visits to wildlife reserves and green spaces in London to learn more about the capital's birds and wildlife.

Another factor is the role of climate change. Modelling suggests that the inner cities will become increasingly uncomfortable to live in and are less adaptable to the changes that will occur. Typical landscapes of social housing will not cope with the anticipated summer temperatures, but biodiversity has a role to help make estates fit for purpose. Tree planting can provide shade and moisture, amplified by enhanced vegetation structure with more shady shrubs and longer grass for cooling transpiration.



Much of the improvement needed can be started now with simple interventions, but we need to think about these projects carefully, as change is difficult for many people to navigate through.

But the benefits can be clear to see – an early example of such change is the work of John Little at Clapton Park in Hackney

Here is Knowsley in Merseyside, where such transformations, delivered by Landlife, are positively impacting on the residents of the tower blocks.



Thinking ahead, we need to build a vision of what estates could look like with some simple interventions. This is in Malmö in Sweden, now almost 10 years old redesigned on sustainable drainage principles. It has open water within two metres of people's front doors, and not behind any fencing. This is future proofed for climate change, but the benefits are apparent in other areas too, not least that it's become a highly desirable place to live.

Towards wilder estates:

- There are significant tracts of open space available mostly of poor quality
- There is a structured route through landlords to 'hard to reach' communities
- Social landlords currently lack the skills and expertise
- There are good examples already, but they are exceptions to the rule
- The key is influencing social landlords' behaviour to embed good practice

Contact Mathew Frith at mfrith@wildlondon.org.uk

During a short question and discussion session after this talk, delegates wondered how to get local authorities on board or even to listen. Even local authority rangers are often not very enlightened - "People like the grass cut neatly". Changing attitudes takes a lot of time and effort. From the Islington experience, be careful about use of language. "Increasing Biodiversity" doesn't work, but "Reducing mowing saves money" does work. Unfortunately, councils generally get more letters saying "tidy up that verge" than letters appreciating the wildflowers. We need to give them clear guidance and arguments, but also to seek local champions who can interpret and "sell" improvements in their local area. Another problem raised by Rose de Falbe was the competitive tendering process, which sees councils and RSLs effectively forced to accept the cheapest tender which delivers cheap and insensitive management.

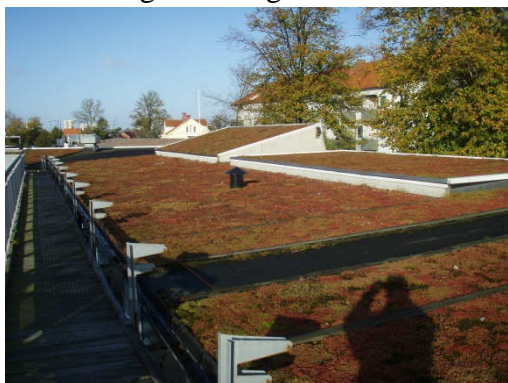
Ekostaden Augustenborg, Malmö Sweden

Pete Frost Countryside Council for Wales

Following Matthew Frith's mention of the exemplary urban greening project at Malmö, Pete volunteered to give this short "bonus" talk on the project which he visited recently.

Augustenborg started off in the 1950s as a brilliant new estate for workers from sub-standard city centre housing. Initially residents loved it because it had modern features like inside toilets in each flat! What it didn't have was a decent sewage system. The system took combined rain and foul water and soon got overloaded, flooding two or three times a year, with sewage backing up into communal facilities and businesses located in the basements of the blocks of flats. The estate entered a long spiral of decline as those who could, moved out, and only those in desperate need moved in. To cut a long story short, the city council and housing association worked with the residents to solve the many problems that had begun to affect the estate. To cure the flooding they got rid of the pipes! Rainwater drainage is now dealt with separately from the sewers in a modern Sustainable Urban Drainage System.

To understand how this work of genius functions it is best to follow a Swedish raindrop as it falls on Augustenborg.



It is likely to land on a green roof – where it is taken up by the vegetation and gradually released – absorbing pollution and reducing that first “pulse” of run-off.

It then runs down the pipe through a rain garden into what the



Swedes term a “canal”. The rain garden allows the water to soak into the ground – and looks beautiful too. The canal conveys the raindrop through the estate, looking attractive and allowing yet more water to evaporate on the way.

If the rain has not evaporated on the way down the canal and the storm is heavy enough, the canal overflows into a pond where fountains and marginal plants evaporate yet more water.



If the storm is *really* heavy, that pond overflows into a rill which takes it into yet another pond, which can in turn overflow onto the adjacent lawn which doubles as a flood storage area. If there is a *huge* storm then this combined area overflows into a further canal which takes it to a field behind the school down an infiltration trench. If the trench is overloaded and the field ever fills up then at the end is a pond with a big pipe in the middle which takes any overflow to the municipal sewers. I believe this overflow has only been used once!

This system was designed to cope with a once in fifteen year flood, but has already survived a one in 100 year event. It used to be that when Augustenborg flooded, the drains conveyed the run-off straight into the municipal sewers and that in turn helped flood the rest of the city. Now Augustenborg deals with its own rainwater at source – and looks great too.



In the UK we hide our rainfall away in pipes, in Sweden now they celebrate it in gardens and canals – and guess who gets flooded the most as a result?

However, there have been some unexpected consequences. The run-down and undesirable estate is now seen as the place to live, and turnover is very small, even though the flats are still smaller than average. After the changes the unemployment rate in Augustenborg fell from 30% to the city average of 6% and there is a waiting list to move onto the estate, where once there was a queue to leave. People are now participating positively in local elections, and starting businesses - including one which advises the rest of the city of Malmo how to install their own Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems.

Design for sustainability in the Mayville Community Centre

Justin Bere bere:architects¹⁵



The Mayville Community Centre is the first certified Passivhaus, non-domestic retrofit in the UK.

The old building was cold and draughty. One of the main objects of the project was to drastically reduce energy costs (originally over £10,000 per year) with the result that the centre now consumes over 90% less energy than previously, halting the drain of precious financial resources to large energy bills.

Key features of the improvements include 30cm of external insulation over the whole structure, including a new roof with 40cm insulation and external insulation also applied to below ground basement walls and basement slab. The windows are triple glazed, and create only 1°C temperature difference between the inner glazing and the insulated masonry structure. The interior is completely draught-free, so how is air quality maintained? The building has a sophisticated ventilation system, which detects the build-up of CO₂ from people breathing, and responds by pumping in fresh air through a heat exchanger that warms incoming air from the heat in the spent air. This system recycles 90% of the heat in the air and saves ten times the 200 watts of energy it uses to run the fans.

Normal air contains 390 parts per million (ppm) of CO₂ and when this rises to above 2,000 ppm, people feel irritable and sluggish. The Mayville Centre only pumps in fresh air if the CO₂ level exceeds 800 ppm, keeping the air constantly at high quality. In most schools, conventional buildings have CO₂ levels above 2,500 ppm, so it is no surprise that students are half asleep.¹⁶

The centre also saves water off its roof into an 11,500 litres tank, which supplies the toilets. Parts of the roof have been “greened”, following Justin’s extensive experience on his own green roof nearby which is diversely planted and popular with bumblebees, with advice from green roof expert Dusty Gedge. Justin has found common vetch proves immensely attractive to aphids, which are an important food source for the first brood of sparrow chicks. Justin’s green roof even includes an area of hazel coppice.



We visited a fine green roof at the Centre, which is only one season old, but already clearly diverse, with different ground heights giving a variety of root conditions, and not compromised by sharing space with photovoltaic panels.

We hope that Justin and his colleague Kim Wilkie can contribute to a future conference session on enhancing biodiversity through green roofs.

¹⁵ <http://bere.co.uk/>

¹⁶ Even at the end of the day the air quality was superb in the building, and everyone felt lively and positive - Ed

King Henry's Walk Gardens¹⁷

Nicola Freshwater Friends of King Henry's Walk Garden

King Henry's Walk Garden is a new green space in the Mildmay ward of Islington, which opened at the end of 2007, created by the local community, for the local community. It is open to the public on Saturdays between 12pm and 4pm, and, from May to September, also on Sundays between 12pm and 4pm. The garden is run by volunteers with support from Islington Council as the Friends of King Henry's Walk Garden (registered charity 1134481).

This once derelict site has been transformed by volunteers into a beautiful organic garden, providing an opportunity for local residents to grow their own vegetables and flowers, or just to come and relax in a peaceful oasis. The Friends group had to raise over £200,000 to carry out the hard landscaping work required, but now try to be as financially self-sustaining as possible, to reduce dependency on grants. Membership subscriptions, donations and fundraising events all raise money to cover the running costs of the garden and to subsidise our busy programme of workshops, where we deliver high quality at low cost in order to ensure they are accessible to all. If you would like to make a donation to the garden you can do so through our website: www.khwgarden.org.uk.

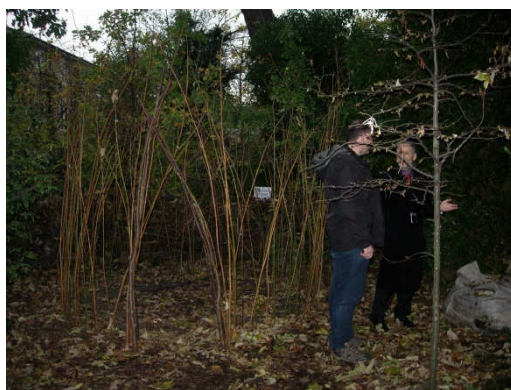


The garden is accessed via a specially commissioned gate designed by artist Heather Burrell, and contains a large raised bed area, along the south-facing wall, which is split into small community plots for allocation to local people. The sunny brick wall provides the perfect environment for our wall-trained fruit trees.

In addition, areas of communally-maintained planting around the lawn provide a space where members and visitors can sit and relax, and a low bridge across the pond gives children the chance to do some pond-dipping and observe the wildlife in the water at close hand.



Communal garden area, one delegate has a really good reflective jacket!



The layout has been designed with accessibility in mind and a number of large metal planters are particularly suitable for use by those in wheelchairs or who have difficulty bending down.

The site also includes a small area of woodland, Docwra's Wood, which is most unusual in this part of Islington. Work carried out in spring 2009 by volunteers, funded by the Forestry Commission,

¹⁷ The text here is adapted from the KHWG website www.khwgarden.org.uk Thanks to Hilary King from NGAG for taking the pictures during Nicola's guided walk

involved the removal of 17 dangerous or diseased trees, mainly sycamore and ash, and the planting of 37 new trees, including oak, rowan, silver birch, whitebeam and hornbeam, in order to improve the biodiversity of this area. Three skiploads of rubbish were taken away, and much more was recycled as hardcore to make foundations for the path.

Docwra's Wood will be managed as a protected area of wildlife habitat, and is now home to a couple of beehives. New trees planted in the garden and wood have been chosen because of their biodiversity value, and the communal planting as a whole has been designed to attract beneficial insects, as well as to create good visual impact. The pond is home to a good number of newts, and attracts many dragonflies in the summer.

The garden is run on sustainable principles, so all garden waste material is composted and reused on site, stored in 9 wooden compost bins built by volunteers. The raised beds and brick paths have been built using recycled materials. We also have water butts to collect as much rainwater as possible, and a custom-built system to harvest rainwater from the roofs of neighbouring buildings. As the site is very sunny and exposed, we have planted some trees to cast a bit of much-needed shade.

The community building, built from red cedar with an eco-friendly sedum roof and supplied by The Garden Escape¹⁸, provides a focus for social and educational activities, and useful facilities such as a small office, kitchenette and disabled toilet. The building is available to hire, and we can also rent out a computer, projector and screen for an extra cost. For details please contact info@khwgarden.org.uk.

¹⁸ <http://www.thegardenescape.co.uk/>