



Wildspace! in action

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Wildspace! in action

In 2001 the Big Lottery Fund (BIG - formerly the New Opportunities Fund) selected Natural England (then English Nature) to be an award partner for the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme. The result was Wildspace!, which has distributed nearly £7 million to local authorities, wildlife trusts and charitable groups to support work on Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in England. Disadvantaged areas that lacked access to natural open space were a particular focus.

LNRs are living greenspaces that form part of our towns, cities and villages. They are significant both for the wildlife habitat and species that they support and for the way they improve people's quality of life. LNRs provide a green lung where people can go to unwind, leading to less stress and a healthier feeling.

An LNR is a legal, statutory designation declared by a principal local authority. Natural England provides advice on the potential of sites for nature and people.

Wildspace! in Action is a series of themed case studies that share the knowledge, expertise and experience collected over the life of Wildspace! They're inspirational, practical examples that people can use to benefit their own Local Nature Reserve (LNR) projects.

Wildspace! legacy

Wildspace set out to:

- **Encourage local authorities to declare more LNRs.** At the close of the scheme, more than 330 new LNRs have been declared.
- **Enable local communities to play a leading role in managing and developing LNRs.** More than 450 new friends groups have been formed and more than 300 Wildspace! projects have initiated junior groups.
- **Improve access for all.** Physical improvements to LNRs have made many sites accessible to local people with mobility or learning difficulties. New entrance signs, interpretation panels, benches and sculptures have improved the appearance and understanding of LNRs.
- **Realise the potential of LNRs for education.** Since 2001, 4,500 primary school, 935 secondary and 425 further education groups have been involved with LNRs. More than 201,000 schoolchildren and youth groups now have a greater appreciation of their local environment. We had a target of giving grants to develop two LNRs per region as centres of excellence for environmental education – we doubled that target.
- **Increase local community use and appreciation of LNRs.** More than 9,700 community events have involved more than 300,000 people.
- **Provide for local communities deprived of access to natural open space.** More than 90 projects employed Community Liaison Officers to help raise people's awareness of and long-term involvement in LNRs. Without these dedicated people, it would have been impossible to achieve what has been done.
- **Contribute to local and national strategies on issues such as community, health, best value, sustainable development and biodiversity.** More than 314 health initiatives are now taking place on LNRs, including Green Gyms and Health Walks. More than 8,600 people have been offered skills development training to improve their employment opportunities. More than 600 LNRs, covering around 14,000ha, were involved in Wildspace! projects. As a result, we have got nearer to the target of a hectare of greenspace per 1,000 people. And more than 77,000 volunteers are involved in conserving wildlife – 23,000 of whom are new since Wildspace! began.
- **Enhance the biodiversity values of LNRs.** 445 Wildspace! projects helped to deliver local Biodiversity Action Plan targets, including work with newts, red squirrels, bats, bittern and many more.

Wildspace! themes

Community participation

Involving the local community in their LNRs was central to Wildspace!. Projects achieved this by organising events to attract people to the reserves. Friends groups have proved a great success in helping to make LNRs sustainable.

Visitor friendly LNRs

Wildspace! projects used a variety of innovative ways to raise the profile of LNRs, making them attractive places for more people to visit.

Environmental Education

Wildspace! developed an array of ways to engage with young people – from the Samantha Snail road show for Surestart toddlers in Middlesbrough to night hikes in Sheffield and kestrel-cam in Halton.

Targeting areas of high Urban and Rural Deprivation

The Wildspace! programme aimed to reinvigorate local wildlife areas by designating them as LNRs to provide invaluable green lungs in both urban and rural areas.

Working with Disability

Allowing people of all abilities to experience nature has been at the heart of many Wildspace! projects. Improvements can be as straightforward as gates for wheelchairs and flat paths. And, by providing appropriate activities, many more have had a chance to get involved in the environment.

Fund-raising

Fund-raising involved a variety of people, including friends groups and local authorities. Although the scale ranged from raising a few hundred pounds to several hundred thousand pounds, it was clear that structured, organised and sustained campaigns worked best.

Celebrating Diversity

Our urban areas are becoming more culturally diverse. Wildspace! wanted to introduce the natural environment to a wide range of people, many of whom didn't have a history of involvement in the environment here in the UK.

Biodiversity

Projects were encouraged to link their activities to local Biodiversity Action Plan targets, and most included work to enhance biodiversity – things such as eradicating invasive species and restoring habitats. Some of the LNRs have had great success in increasing populations of locally rare species.

Environmental Art

Traditional methods of involving communities in wildlife issues are not always successful. Wildspace! used art and crafts to make wildlife more 'sexy', especially for younger people.

Health and Wellbeing

Being outside in the fresh air is good for you. In fact, doctors can now prescribe a programme of walks under the 'Walking the Way to Health' scheme or a morning at the Green Gym®. Many LNRs hosted schemes such as these – fantastic ways of incorporating health benefits into the outdoors experience.

Wildspace!

Biodiversity – 1



Volunteers laid hedges to encourage wildlife

South Gloucestershire Wildspace!

Wick Golden Valley and Three Brooks LNRs, Gloucestershire

Grant applicant – South Gloucestershire Council

Background

South Gloucestershire Council wanted to make conditions on their Local Nature Reserves more hospitable to wildlife. In the process, they also wanted to involve as wide a cross-section of people in the biodiversity work as possible and increase public enthusiasm for, and understanding of, wildlife. Wildspace! money was directed towards work at two LNRs – Three Brooks and Wick Golden Valley.

Bradley Stoke's woodlands have existed since 1760, and today provide the relatively new community (the housing estate celebrates 20 years in 2007) with a highly valued green lung, the newly-declared Three Brooks LNR. The woods and surrounding semi-improved rough grassland are valuable for wildlife, including butterflies, small mammals and birds such as skylarks. At Wick

Golden Valley LNR, nesting peregrines in a nearby quarry had drawn people to the site for years.

Achieving goals

On both LNRs, there was the potential for real gains for wildlife to be made from improvements to the management regime and to the habitats.

At Three Brooks LNR, a programme of rotational coppicing is now under way in all three woodlands. Working with BTCV, volunteers have opened up the tree canopy, and the extra light is increasing diversity and producing a spectacular carpet of spring flowering plants such as bluebells, wood anemone and yellow archangel. The coppicing in new areas of the wood is generating timber and income for a community project funded by Prudential. Grass-cutting using traditional methods has enabled volunteers to use

“The South Gloucestershire Wildspaces Project is exemplary in its delivery of community based projects.”

– Dr Andy Brown, former English Nature Chief Executive

hand tools like scythes to improve species diversity. A conservation group has been established to help manage the new LNR and it is growing in confidence and competence.

On both LNRs projects have been devised and implemented by working closely with local businesses and organisations, schools and community groups, ensuring a sense of ownership across a wide area of the population.

At Wick Golden Valley LNR, bats and peregrine falcons have caused excitement. The number of known bat species has risen from one to seven, including the rare greater and lesser horseshoe bats following the creation of a bat hibernaculum and the installation of more than 20 bat boxes. For years, people have been drawn to the LNR to see a pair of peregrine falcons nesting in the active limestone quarry that borders the site. Under Wildspace!, a CCTV-style web-enabled camera was set up close to the rock-face nest to allow round-the-clock, worldwide viewing via the internet at www.wickperegrinewatch.info. By the end of the first year, a staggering 25,000 people had visited the website.

A partnership of the Community Liaison Officer, the quarry operator Cemex (formerly RMC Aggregates), the Hawk and Owl Trust, Natural England and the Friends of Wick Golden Valley devised the project and secured funding through the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. Among others, children from Wick Primary School studied the nest daily and were able to see the birds' behaviour at first hand.

Successes

At Three Brooks, opening up the woodland has benefited not only ground flora but birdlife. Small birds like long-tailed, blue and great tits and robins have thrived.

BTCV's Green Gym has established a regular work party in the LNR. The conservation group

South Gloucestershire Wildspace!



People of all ages were able to get involved

continues to grow in confidence and in numbers. At Wick Golden Valley LNR, regular bat walks and a partnership involving the Avon Bat Group and the Heritage Lottery Fund Batscapes project has led to four volunteers becoming parish 'bat wardens'. Bat detectors and recording equipment bought by a friends group is helping their work in monitoring roosts and discovering new ones. Partnership working has seen a broad spectrum of people contributing a variety of beneficial skills and expertise. Those involved have included web designers, ecologists, teachers and volunteers.

The future

The Three Brooks conservation group continues to grow and will be applying for further grants to continue its conservation work, and increase the site's biodiversity interest. At Wick Golden Valley, the bat wardens will continue to lead walks and information events. The peregrines' website will continue to be supported.

Further information

John Morris – 01454 863581 or johnv.morris@southglos.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Biodiversity – 2



Hedgerow planting and dormouse surveys were some of the activities undertaken

Derby BTCV

Allestree Park, Chaddesden Wood, Chellaston Brickworks, Sunnydale Park, West Park Meadows LNRs, Derby

Grant applicant – Derby British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

Background

By linking into the Lowland Derbyshire Biodiversity Action Plan, which covers most of the county and city, Wildspace! in Derby has maximised benefits for wildlife.

The county's LNRs contain habitats and species of conservation importance, including ancient woodland and harvest mice, and a carefully structured programme of LNR activity led by BTCV has contributing towards achieving BAP targets.

Achieving goals

Work to improve the biodiversity has followed recommendations set out in the LNR management plan. Action has included the clearance of invasive rhododendron and sycamore to restore woodland character.

At Allestree Park LNR, the lowland woodland's bluebell stock has been significantly improved by cutting back invasive shrubs so that more light reaches the woodland floor. Other activity to increase biodiversity has included excavating ponds at Chellaston Brickworks LNR to extend wetland rushes, reduction of rank grassland and creation of 30 metres of hedge at Sunnydale Park.

Biodiversity work has led to the strengthening of the local skills base. BTCV Institute for Environmental Conservation accredited training courses were run on skills such as hedgelaying, wildlife gardening, green woodworking, pond construction, map reading and tree and wildflower identification. Local tutors were brought in to teach local people and, in all, there were nine types of course.

“As well as gains for biodiversity, the Wildspace! project has shown people living nearby what a commitment to the care of the local area can do.”

– Alf Bousie, City Council Principal Landscape Assistant

At Allestree Park, control of Himalayan balsam has improved water edges to encourage re-colonisation by water voles. At Chaddesden, species-rich grassland has been improved by removal of hawthorn scrub. This keeps the grassland clear of shade to encourage butterflies such as the white letter hairstreak.

Wildflower interest has been further increased by cutting and raking vegetation and clearing brambles – encouraging Calcareous grassland, which has restricted distribution within the city and includes downy oat grass, mouse ear, hawkweed, rough hawkbit, fairy flax, burnet saxifrage, agrimony and common spotted orchid.

Local residents have played a part in surveying for harvest mice by searching for abandoned winter nests at Allestree Park LNR. A number of nests were found, reconfirming findings from the 1970s. This information has been passed onto partner organisations, including the Wildlife Trust, for database recording.

Successes

Lasting benefits of the project are the involvement of ‘friends’ groups in drawing up management plans – they are now consulted and have a voice in LNR matters. In turn, this has stimulated their interest in biodiversity issues and ensured good turnouts on task days.

In the three years of the project, an estimated 900-plus volunteer days have been spent on LNRs. Those involved have included not only friends groups but other community groups, Green Gyms, local schools, conservation volunteer teams and local residents.

The future

Formally and informally, local people have picked up a variety of practical conservation skills and



Peter Wakely/Natural England

Common spotted orchid is one of the plants to have benefited from the work

knowledge which will benefit the future management of the LNRs. This sustainable source of skilled conservationists has created a band of people with a real interest and pride in the LNRs who are willing to continue after Wildspace!

Further information

Leon Hayward, Community Liaison Officer, BTCV
– 01332 348591 or lhayward@btcv.org.uk



Wildspace! Celebrating diversity – 1



Cultural diversity is the spice of life in Hackney

Abney Park Cemetery Trust

Abney Park LNR, Hackney

Grant applicant – Abney Park Cemetery Trust, Borough of Hackney, London

Background

Walking through Hackney in London's East End you can hear any of 244 different languages – and that's just among the residents. So how do you encourage such a mixed bunch to discover their local nature reserve and learn how to care for it?

At Abney Park, the Wildspace! officer keeps the visitor centre and environmental classroom open and active, with a programme of free workshops that offer something for everyone. Open days make the most of the area's cultural diversity and usually kick off with inviting local people to help with the advertising and artwork in things like banner-making workshops. The LNR has also raised cash to pay groups of local musicians to supply the entertainment. In more than 20 events, there's been everything from Jewish klezmer to Greek bouzouki; from ceilidh music to break-beat.

Achieving goals

At this reserve, it's the sheer number and variety of events that keep people interested. The Wildspace! officer reinvigorated the Friends of Abney Park's newsletter to create a bright format packed with information about nature walks and talks, free workshops and craft skills courses, ranging from wildflowers and history to children's treasure trails and stone masonry. The friends are made up mainly of local parents with an interest in the environment, but there are also members who live further away and who want to keep in touch. So the Trust also produces posters, leaflets and displays to ensure that as many people as possible know that the nature reserve is open every day of the week and is a free green resource for everyone. They also take a stall with plenty of maps and leaflets to events such as health promotions in schools and youth conferences –

“Nature Trails and looking for bugs are the best things we did this summer. Wish we had a garden like Abney Park.”

– Ellie, aged 8

and have found it a great way of bringing new people to the park. David Osman of the Stamford Hill Centre for Jewish Day Care, was one who recognised what the Park had to offer. “We had a great guided walk organised by the Trust. Some of our group have disabilities and we managed to take part in a workshop which catered for this,” he said.

Fund-raising and organisation for the annual open day begins 12 months in advance. It’s not just the event itself that’s important for getting a wide range of people involved. The Trust works with local teenagers on volunteer placements, volunteering forums and local environmental action groups to create banners and giant creatures from recycled materials to display just before the ‘happening’. There are also costume-making workshops and drawing competitions for schoolchildren.

Everyone lends a hand – including local artists, musicians and environmental organisations – in putting together a programme of activities and a map to hand out on the day.

Successes

Abney Park’s success is really measured by the fantastic response they get – both locally and from further afield. Fun and education go hand-in-hand at the LNR. A range of teaching resources is available at the open day and all open events. Eye-spy clues, trails and maps help to show points of wildlife interest so that parents and children can interact with the environment without damaging it. The outdoor classroom and indoor environmental classroom, created by teenagers, have become a great way of getting people in to explore the LNR. Close by, volunteers have helped to make a children’s area with a bog garden, willow tunnel and chair, storytelling zone and space to picnic. What’s remarkable about Abney Park is how events, promotions for the reserve and increasing community involvement, have been woven seamlessly together. For



Abney Park Cemetery Trust

Tree hugging has been much enjoyed

example, the informative displays used in the visitor centre and environmental classroom have been made by youngsters visiting from schools. Giant bugs, made by local schoolchildren, were hung from trees along with posters advertising open events.

There are the strong links to women’s groups, wild bird experts, history clubs, herbalists, gardening projects for older people, arts groups, organic growers...the list goes on.

The future

Monitoring and documenting events and activities has been very important for the Trust – this tangible evidence proves useful for future fund-raising and promotion.

The LNR was the first nature reserve in Hackney and takes a lead in environmental education for anyone and everyone. With that sort of approach, and the energy of the people involved, they’re working hard to keep the 32-acre site open and accessible to the public.

Further information

Kirsty Peterken, Abney Park Cemetery Trust
– 020 7275 7557 or abneypark@dsl.pipex.com



Wildspace! Celebrating diversity – 2



A Sammy Snail event at Berwick Hills Library inspiring families to explore the countryside

John's Studio

Stainton Quarry, Linthorpe Cemetery and Berwick Hills LNRs, Middlesbrough

Grant applicant – Middlesbrough Council Unitary Authority

Background

In urban Middlesbrough, the local Wildspace! Community Liaison Officer (CLO) found that, just as important as creating the town's first LNRs, was ensuring these wild places were used, valued and respected by the local communities. By carrying out surveys, Middlesbrough Wildspace! found that many people living in the most deprived wards had no, or limited, experience of visiting countryside sites.

Achieving goals

Seeking to bring the countryside to town, the Middlesbrough Wildspace! project organised a varied programme of wildlife events on its newly designated LNRs. Although these were very popular, the CLO realised that these opportunities were seldom taken up by the more disadvantaged sectors of the communities. Looking at ways to

widen participation, the Wildspace! project sought to identify and break down the barriers that prevented some people from accessing their local wildlife sites. By visiting community groups and listening to people, the CLO found that often people's knowledge of what was available was sketchy. What's more, they were often deterred by a long-held negative image of green spaces as rundown wasteland.

To challenge these perceptions, the project organised taster visits tailor-made to the needs and interests of the various groups. These included mother and toddler groups, women's groups, pensioners' groups and mental health support groups.

To inspire them, a couple of wildlife-themed indoor events, such as bird box making, mosaic

“This was really popular with families, for many it was their first visit since childhood to these sites, and some felt confident in returning under their own steam.”

– Joanne Tickle, Hemlington Surestart
Community Manager

making and willow-weaving, were held at the groups' meeting places. These had the added benefit of helping the CLO build a relationship with the group members.

A common issue for many was transport. Providing a minibus meant people could take part with friends without having to make special arrangements. A picnic or afternoon tea also proved an attraction, as did help with providing suitable weatherproof clothing and footwear.

Successes

The Gresham Gardening Club is just one example of the groups who have rediscovered the LNRs. Club members, who had festooned their terraced streets with colourful hanging baskets and window boxes, visited Stainton Quarry LNR and Fairy Dell for summer picnics and short nature rambles. Another example was the Linthorpe Women's Institute, who enjoyed a visit followed by a cream tea, and picked up ideas and tips on sharing nature with their grandchildren.

By joining forces with Sure Start and Middlesbrough Libraries, the Wildspace! project was able to introduce wildlife-themed storytime and craft sessions. These coaxed some families to take part in pram and toddler walks and activities that linked the local environment to early learning.

Working with Hemlington Sure Start, 'Going on a Bear Hunt' involved 38 families with young children in a woodland walk, finding rainbow bears hidden in the foliage. Sure Start collected parents' experiences, which revealed that, for many, it was their first visit since childhood to these sites. Afterwards, some felt confident enough to return on their own.

At Berwick Hills LNR, it was antisocial and criminal behaviour that was deterring youth and



John's Studio

Going on a bear hunt

community groups from visiting. Despite massive improvements in the landscaping, the site was still plagued by arson, under-age drinking and drug taking – even in the daytime. In summer 2006, Middlesbrough Wildspace! organised a site meeting of all interested parties, including police, street wardens, fire and rescue services, the housing agency, Wildlife Trust and local residents. The initial results of this are promising.

The future

Local residents and visitors have been given a list of key contacts so that they can report problems. The law enforcement agencies have prioritised the area for extra wardening and have responded rapidly to calls. Wildspace! and the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust have started weekly conservation and litter clearing sessions, creating a presence and an opportunity for local people to join in. This has built greater trust and confidence among local people. So much so that the first meeting of the Friends of Berwick Hills has just taken place!

Further information

Sue Antrobus, Wildspace! Officer – 01642 515611 or
sue_antrobus@middlesbrough.gov.uk



Community participation – 1



The Friends of Scadbury Park have embraced the biodiversity aspect of the LNR

London Borough of Bromley

High Elms, Scadbury Park and Jubilee Park LNRs, Bromley

Grant applicant – London Borough of Bromley

Background

The challenge in the London Borough of Bromley lay in how to encourage local people to play a part in managing their LNRs. The Borough realised that, by helping residents set up 'friends' groups, they could manage the reserves together – a highly sustainable approach that should yield long-term benefits. Today, the 'friends' groups are going from strength to strength in a variety of directions such as biodiversity and fundraising, depending on the interests of the members.

Achieving goals

Local people were encouraged to become more involved with their LNR by a keen Community Liaison Officer (CLO), who mounted an awareness-raising campaign, leafleting houses close to each reserve and advertising in local libraries. She gave talks and promoted the project in the community and then held initial meetings to spark

enthusiasm and structure committees for 'friends' groups in each LNR. Because the groups needed help, guidance and encouragement in the early stages, having a CLO specifically employed to work with them was essential to the success of the project.

Successes

Working alongside the London Borough of Bromley staff, people from all three 'friends' groups attend regular conservation work parties, learning skills such as hedge-laying and coppicing. They have really improved the standard of the LNRs, both in terms of conservation value and as pleasant places for visitors. The 'friends' groups have a sense of ownership of the parks and enjoy showing their handiwork to passing dog walkers and other visitors, which again helps raise awareness of site management issues.

“Everyone pulls together and it makes you realise your own potential, I never imagined I'd be building boardwalks and laying hedges.”

– Jennie Randall, Chairwoman of Friends of Jubilee Country Park LNR

Friends of Scadbury Park have embraced the biodiversity aspect of their LNR and are busy recording several Biodiversity Action Plan species, including butterflies and newts. They explain their survey work to the public and also organise walks and children's events. They have created a website for the park with details of what people can see at the LNRs and information on forthcoming events. Some members also attend the Healthy Lifestyle walks that run through the LNR. By joining in the walks, they can give a wildlife perspective to other walkers – a 'service' that has proved very popular.

Friends of Jubilee Park raised more than £1,000 from local grant-giving bodies to buy tools, and have started researching the local history of their LNR. In fact, they even featured on Channel 4's Timeteam programme, looking into the site's use as a gun emplacement in World War II.

Chair of the Friends of Jubilee Country Park, Jennie Randall reflected on how it has changed thinking locally: “It has heightened our awareness about the importance of our LNR. Many people didn't even know it was there, or thought ‘it's a park, so the council deal with it. It's nothing to do with me’”.

The third LNR, at High Elms, already had a volunteer group, and members continue to be actively engaged in managing their reserve.

One of reasons for the success of these groups has been the proximity of the LNRs – they are on people's doorsteps and are easily accessible. At all three LNRs, there's always a friend or two out and about on the reserve, looking out for issues that need sorting, talking to visitors and updating posters.



London Borough of Bromley

Friends of Jubilee Park are busy recording the local wildlife

The future

Bromley Borough has realised the great potential for community involvement in its 149 parks and open spaces and has appointed two 'friends' officers to co-ordinate the work of existing groups and set up new ones. There is also a Friends Forum, which helps groups to meet and share ideas.

The three 'friends' groups should go from strength to strength. The ongoing support from London Borough of Bromley staff and the enthusiasm of current committee members is ensuring an increase in membership and a programme of activities in the local community.

Further information

London Borough of Bromley Countryside Ranger Service – 01689 862815



Wildspace!

Community participation – 2



Pond dipping fascinates all ages

Leeds City Council

Townclose Hills LNR, Leeds

Grant applicants – Leeds City Council and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Background

The beautiful wildflower meadows of Townclose Hills LNR in East Leeds were little known when the Wildspace! project began in 2002. But Leeds City Council and the RSPB were keen to involve the local community in caring for their LNR and wanted to create a sustainable group of volunteers

The value of the reserve was promoted through talks to local community groups and politicians, school visits, teacher training sessions, guided nature walks, media coverage and fun days. As a result, a thriving 'friends' group is now working closely with the City Council to ensure that the benefits brought through the initial Wildspace! project continue to be enjoyed and built upon for generations to come.

Achieving goals

One of the things that really put Townclose Hills on the map was the rediscovery of glow-worms. Glow-worms had been seen there in the past, but not for many years. The Community Liaison Officer recruited a group of volunteers willing to visit the site after 11pm in midsummer and much to their amazement, they discovered a thriving colony of the rare beetles.

Plenty of media coverage followed, which helped make people aware of how special Townclose Hills really was. The glow-worms quickly became part of the local village identity. The reserve is also valuable for other wildlife, particularly its beautiful limestone grassland, which supports cowslips in spring and clustered bellflower, harebell, field scabious and greater knapweed in summer.

“There has been a reduction in the amount of vandalism on the site since the interpretation signs were installed, and since the group started working regularly on the site.”

– Harry Bratley, Chair, Friends Group

Through Wildspace! events, a list was drawn up of local people interested in helping to manage the habitats. Volunteer activity days were publicised through the local media and on posters. Though most volunteers lived locally, others travelled from all over Leeds to play a part. After six months of these increasingly popular conservation days, a public meeting was held to establish an official community group. The first meeting exceeded all expectations. Seventeen people attended, including two local councillors, and they unanimously agreed to set up the 'Friends of Billy Wood' – the local name for the reserve. The group was constituted in May 2005.

Successes

Since May 2005, the Friends have made a huge contribution to nature conservation on the reserve – planting hedges, clearing scrub, removing hay, building fences and coppicing.

Local schoolchildren designed a glow-worm logo for the waymarkers and signs around the site. One of the Friends holds regular health walks on the site, which attract up to 30 people interested in improving their own health, meeting like-minded walkers and learning more about local wildlife. Butterfly and a glow-worm surveys have been run by volunteers and have provided valuable ecological data on the impact of the management regime at Townclose.

In less than four years, the CLO has encouraged strong community pride in the site and promoted it as a great place to visit from further afield.

The future

A friends group bank account has been set up. They hope to raise funds to install benches and signage around the reserve, and to buy group insurance so that they can run their own walks and activities. Funds will also go towards website design, publicity materials and resources for



Leeds City Council

Children have loved water-orientated activity days

public events, such as badgemaking kits, gazebos, arts and craft materials and tables.

The website – www.fobw.leedslearning.org – is already live and the group regularly inputs into a local village newsletter, which keeps the local community up-to-date with their work and encourages new volunteers to come along. The Friends of Billy Wood just keep getting stronger, and it's hoped they will be protecting and promoting the reserve well into the future.

Further information

Mandy Spry or Emma Trickett, Leeds City Council – 0113 2375324 or emma.trickett@leeds.gov.uk and mandy.spry@leeds.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Fund raising – 1



There are a series of ponds for both wildlife and fishing

Darlington Borough Council

Maidendale LNR, Darlington

Grant applicant – Darlington Borough Council

Background

Maidendale Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is one of the most heavily developed in Darlington. It is a six hectare grassland site on the edge of a large deprived estate with a central pond, fished by local children.

Initially, a conflict existed between those who wished to fish and illegally stocked the pond and those who wished to preserve the pond for great crested newts. On the day that fishing line was seen wrapped around the overhead 33KW electricity line, the need to act quickly to resolve the situation was apparent! Community consultation identified fishing as the number one recreation of local children and this led to the setting up of a steering group trust for the Maidendale Fishing & Nature Reserve.

A multi-faceted fund-raising campaign was launched, led by the community and assisted by the local council and external funding team. The Community Liaison Officer also encouraged the steering group to play an active part in running and managing the site.

Achieving goals

The project was split into two phases. Phase 1, running from 2001-05, concentrated on the infrastructure of the site. A series of new ponds was created for wildlife, together with two large fishing ponds. This enabled multiple uses of the site without conflict.

Material from excavating the ponds was used to create raised footpaths, together with disabled access features – two-metre wide surfaced footpaths with gentle slopes, kissing gates with

“This is a living project that is brightening and opening up a wasted piece of land for all the town.”

– Dave Preston, Maidendale Fishing and Nature Reserve Trust

‘radar’ looks for the increasing demand by users of scooters as well as wheelchairs. The last piece of the phase 1 puzzle was completed with the recruitment of an on-site ranger employed by Darlington Borough Council (DBC) to help look after the site and provide links with local schools and residents. Phase 2 was earmarked to start by 2006, and, at the time of writing, was seeking the final quarter of the funding necessary.

Successes

The project costs for phase 1 were nearly £100,000. Raising this level of money was ambitious for an LNR. The CLO helped identify and complete suitable grant applications and was in regular contact with staff at the funding bodies for advice and guidance. Funding for phase 1 was secured from a variety of sources including – building developer S106 contributions from new estate houses being built next to the reserve, money from the Children’s Fund, Woodland Improvement Grant, Peoples Places, Single Regeneration Budget and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as match funding.

The applications and management of the funding was undertaken by the Trust steering group with support from DBC. DBC’s external funding team helped with European funding bids, as these can be complex and demanding for a voluntary community group to secure. The burden of putting together a large funding package for a project benefits greatly from having regular meetings with a range of partners, such as land owners, local people, user groups and funders.

The fishing element of the project was one of the keys to securing the monies. Angling has been proven to be a diversionary activity to crime and anti-social behaviour and the Trust already have a healthy representation of young members. The Trust has partnered a new Youth Fishing Club with an established local fishing club, the Darlington Anglers, which has secured more funds and



Darlington Borough Council

Links with local schools were important

expertise for prizes on competition days and for teaching younger members both the skills to fish and the value of nature.

The future

Phase 2 is estimated at a further £150-200k, which will include a ‘green’ sustainable visitor centre, a complex of wildlife ponds, interpretation and community artwork projects. So far, £167,000 has been secured from the County Durham Environment Trust, the Environment Agency and ERDF. It is the diversification of wildlife, natural recreation, community ownership and young people within the project, directly inspired by community consultation, that has brought so many partners and funders to this LNR.

Further information

Phil Roxby, Local Nature Reserve Officer,
Darlington Borough Council – 01325 388728 or
philip.roxby@darlington.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Fund raising – 2



A programme of 22 events, including practical conservation work and community events like archery, needed funding

Salford City Council

Kersal Dale LNR, Salford

Grant applicant – Salford City Council

Background

The Friends of Kersal Dale Local Nature Reserve and their Wildspace! Community Liaison Officer (CLO) wanted to organise activities that could involve everyone in the community and encourage people to appreciate the environment.

But the programme of 22 events – including clean-ups, practical conservation work, outdoor pursuits and environmental arts and crafts – needed cash. The CLO secured £5,000 from the East Salford Community Committee, an organisation made up of local people and supported by the city council's Neighbourhood Management Team. The Community Committee has the responsibility of distributing local authority money to help projects in East Salford. The committee was extremely efficient in its job – the application process took just three weeks

from time of filling in the forms to receiving confirmation of funding.

Achieving goals

The project had to meet the criteria set out in the East Salford Community Action Plan, developed by local people to help meet their needs and expectations. It also had to fulfil various City Council pledges. On that basis, the project's activities were shaped to improve people's health, reduce crime, encourage learning, involve young people, promote inclusion, and generally enhance the lives of local residents.

Successes

Winning the money meant the CLO could buy materials to run conservation days, including building benches, cleaning up the river, constructing bat boxes and planting hedges.

“It's the first time I've ever had a go at climbing and it was great, I was a bit scared that I'd fall but could see my house from the top.”

– Climbing wall participant

Arts and craft activities, aimed at six- to 12-year-olds, ranged from making homes for mini-beasts to using recycled materials for musical instruments. There was also a teddy bears' picnic, tracks and trails and mask-making. The CLO made sure that the children could have fun with their creativity, while learning about the environment.

Young people between 12 and 18 had the chance to try archery or rock-climbing on a mobile climbing wall. Because of the health and safety risks, these activities couldn't be run as drop-in sessions, so they were offered to organised youth groups through the Youth Service and Groundwork.

Everything else, though, was open to the whole of East Salford, and events were advertised in the 'Salford On' magazine, on posters and on the web.

The local committee funding meant that the planned activities were wider-ranging and more ambitious. Had the funding application been unsuccessful, the programme would have been much scaled down. The CLO would have run orienteering sessions with young people and action days, all of which would have been free of costs except for officer time. However, lack of funding would have meant no refreshments for participants, making events less enjoyable.

The future

The CLO has been able to continue the practical conservation tasks with minimal funding from the Community Committee. The CLO is working to secure future funding for even more activities that appeal to young people.



Salford City Council

Community events included wall-climbing challenges

Further information

Jo Regan, Community Liaison Officer, Salford City Council – 0161 607 1759 or jo.regan@salford.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Environmental art – 1



Volunteer abseiling specialists put up a banner which acted as a giant signpost to the LNR

Bristol City Council

Royate Hill LNR, Bristol

Grant applicant – Bristol City Council

Background

People in inner-city Bristol can easily miss their unique Local Nature Reserve – unless they look up! Royate Hill LNR sits on top of a 19th century seven-span railway viaduct, and passers-by often use the busy road underneath without ever

knowing about the wildlife treasures above their heads. Bristol City Council wanted to raise the profile of their unusual LNR and encourage new visitors from the local communities. Their solution was a community event that would not only draw people onto the reserve, but would involve them

“This highly successful multi-cultural project was enormous fun for everyone involved.”

– Sally Oldfield, Community Liaison Officer

in creating eye-catching artwork to make the LNR unmissable.

Achieving goals

The artwork had to be something that could be created in just one afternoon, but which could also be displayed in a prominent place afterwards. Bristol City Council, the Avon Wildlife Trust and LNR Friends group, the Royate Hill Volunteers, organised a summer fete and the routes into the reserve were decorated to capture the attention of local people and passers-by.

The attention-grabbing entrances to the LNR were created by children from the local primary school. They made traditional Indian door hangings called torans – a fitting choice as there is a large Indian community in the area. The decorations also linked neatly to an embroidery and textiles exhibition that was taking place at Bristol Museum. Funding for both the half-term event and the fete was found from within Bristol City Council.

Children created the torans by cutting stencils of animals and plants found at Royate Hill and using inks to transfer the patterns onto squares of fabric. Instead of the mirrors traditionally used in this type of textile work, the children attached CDs to the squares. Adult volunteers helped sew the squares to form the finished hangings.

Successes

The torans, put up on the day of the fete, worked well in terms of drawing in people who, as previous experience had shown, were unlikely to respond to other types of publicity.

Entertainment was provided by a kora player, visiting Bristol from Senegal. And many of the visitors contributed to the giant community artwork – a triangular picture of some of the reserve’s wildlife created from hot air balloon material that had been kindly prepared by a local balloon company. After the event, volunteers from a company specialising in working at heights



Bristol City Council

Children created the torans by cutting stencils of animals and plants found at Royate Hill

abseiled off the Royate Hill viaduct and attached the artwork to the wall – an event that attracted the attention of TV and newspapers. The banner continued to be a talking point and certainly led to greater awareness of the LNR. The involvement of local people in creating the artwork also helped generate a positive feeling of community ownership towards the site.

The future

One tangible and highly valued outcome of the exercise has been that Royate Hill now has a much lower incidence of vandalism than other sites in the area.

The well established Royate Hill Volunteers meet once a month to carry out practical conservation tasks. And a programme of wildlife events for all Bristol LNRs offers something for everyone, from bat detecting to storytelling and plant folklore.

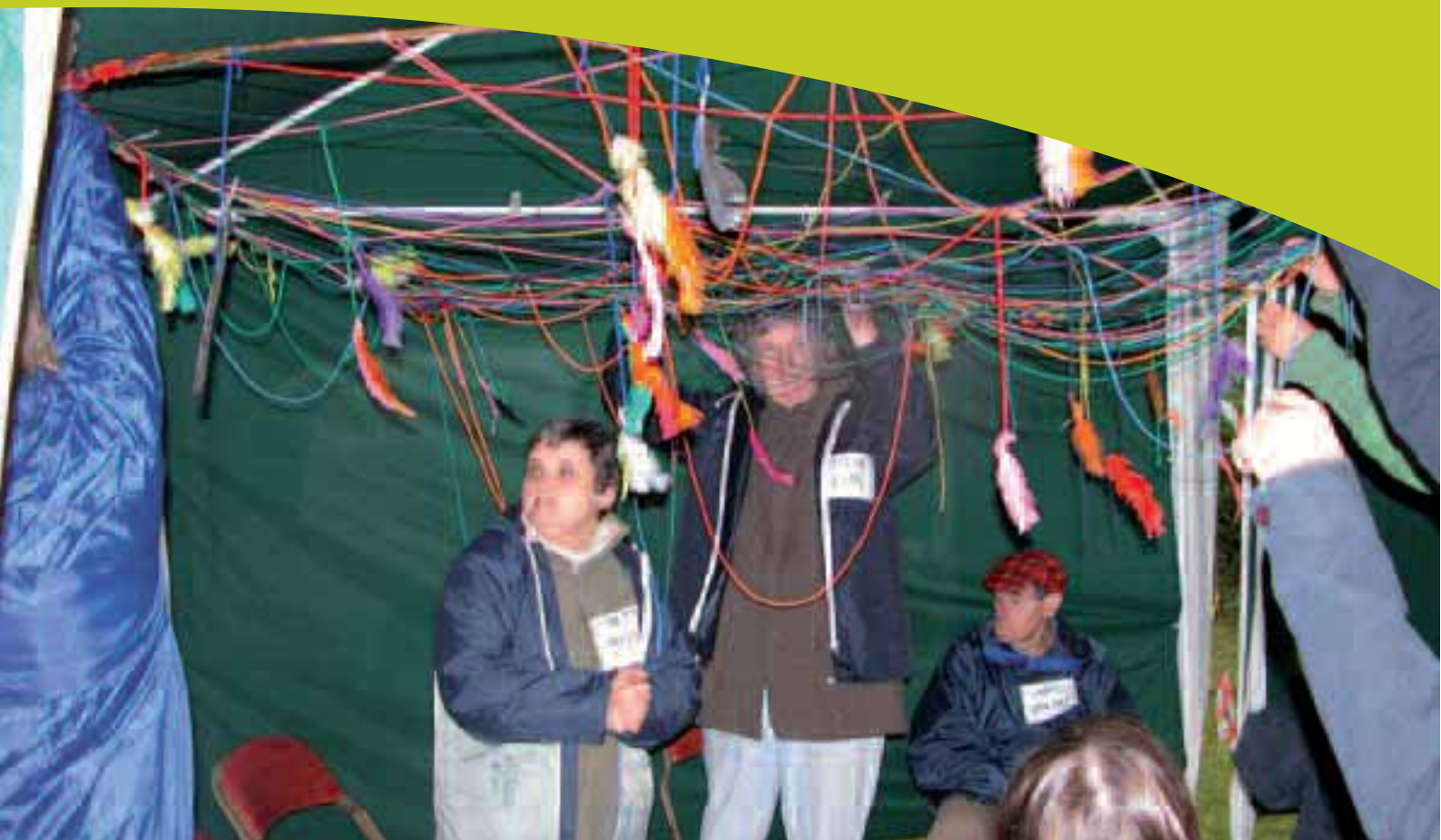
Further information

Sally Oldfield, Community Liaison Officer – 0117 9224429 or sally_oldfield@bristol-city.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Environmental art – 2



Making a dream-catcher enabled everyone to get to know each other

Worcestershire County Council

Kingsford Forest Park LNR, Worcestershire

Grant applicant – Worcestershire County Council

Background

Experience had shown Worcestershire Countryside Service that people who got involved in fun educational activities on local reserves tended to come back again and again.

The Service wanted to promote their urban green spaces and create a sense of ownership of – rather than exclusion from – the local environment. They came up with a project that would help them make links with an under-represented community group – adults with learning disabilities.

Achieving goals

The project, funded by English Nature (now Natural England) and the Council's Corporate Equalities Board, involved creating artworks with an artist who had experience of working with

people with learning disabilities. Ellie Reynish, a Birmingham-based ceramics artist, was chosen because of her previous experience and because her work involved mosaics incorporating tactile materials.

Because this was the first time the Countryside Service had worked with this sector of the community, they turned to the Wyre Forest Leisure Sub Group for guidance. The group was formed in 2002 and its members include service users, parents, representatives of local day centres and staff from Wyre Forest District Council and the British Institute for Learning Disabilities (BILD).

Over two summer months, eight adults with learning disabilities took part in the project at Kingsford Forest Park. Their inspiration for the pieces came from watching local birds in the park



“I liked everything about the project, from making the dreamcatcher to making my very own siskin.”

– Kim Scriven, participant

The mosaics went onto a toilet block which had been singularly drab (inset right) until staff enlivened it with a mural



– a theme that also linked to four new trails on the site, named after birds. People were encouraged to interpret their ideas on paper, experimenting with colour. They were then asked to transfer these into mosaic pieces for display in the park alongside a wildlife mural painted by countryside staff.

Successes

The artist, participants and staff built up a great relationship during the project and there was a feeling that everyone got far more from the experience than the artworks alone.

Day Centre Manager Margaret Borkowski was delighted as it was the first time her members had been involved in a community project that was ‘real’. “There was so much pride shown by the participants, and now we, with family and friends, visit the site regularly to enjoy the artwork,” she said.

The then Chair of Worcestershire County Council, Councillor Derek Prodder MBE, unveiled the artwork in front of the artists, their family and friends, staff and the local press. Not only were the participants delighted that their work was

being acknowledged and commended, there was also positive feedback from the local residents around Kingsford Forest Park.

The future

Work continues alongside the Wyre Forest Leisure Sub Group, and various guided walks are organised. The art project was such a success that many of the participants, their families and friends, are now regular visitors to the Kingsford Forest Park and other local green spaces. The experience has given them the extra confidence and interest that they needed to visit countryside sites unaccompanied.

Further information

Hema Kasi-Patel, Community Liaison Officer – 01905 768218 or hkasi-patel@worcestershire.gov.uk



Environmental Education – 1



High schools have used Halton to study its copious wildlife and even made music inspired by a visit to the LNR

Halton Borough Council

Oxmoor, Clinton Wood, Dorchester Park and Wigg Island LNRs, Halton

Grant applicant – Halton Borough Council

Background

With an industrial legacy of dereliction and contamination, it was unsurprising to learn that schools in Runcorn and Widnes always went out of the area for their nature studies. The Wild about Halton project had to reverse decades of negativity about the local natural environment.

Today, Halton is again a place of biological richness. It has 10 local nature reserves and stands in the top 1% of all UK local authorities for the number of hectares of LNR per person. But even so, schools were finding it difficult to make the most of the opportunity. This Wildspace! project worked hard to identify the obstacles for teachers and then found ways around them.

Achieving goals

Before trying to recruit schools, LNRs were assessed for their suitability for school visits, including things like toilet facilities and parking.

Lesson plans were then developed with the help of Key Stage 3 and 4 advisors from the Local Education Authority. In tandem, other preparations were made to support the educational options. These included installing wildlife web cams, including a camera focused on the kestrel box in Oxmoor LNR.

The Wildspace! officer for Halton visited all the area's high schools to promote the potential of the LNRs and persuade heads of department that the reserves could deliver curriculum-based field studies to the highest standard.

Funding arrangements for schools, and the way the national curriculum is organised, presented a number of hurdles to field studies. Firstly the cost of transport to an LNR was too much for many schools. The cost of covering teachers who were on field trips was another stumbling block. The schemes of work at many schools didn't fit

with nature's cycles and several schools had to be talked into switching their study periods to more appropriate times of year.

For many teachers, the idea of visiting a nature reserve in Halton had less appeal than taking students to neighbouring areas, such as the Wirral, North Wales or the Lake District. The only way to persuade them to change their minds was to prove that the quality of education provided by the project would match, or surpass, anything that could be delivered outside the authority.

Schools also proved to be so risk-averse that any venue with a perceived hazard would be seen as a nightmare of potential litigation and paperwork. Even today, some schools prioritise 'risk avoidance' over 'risk management' when deciding whether to visit an LNR.

Successes

In late September 2002, the first high school visits began with the 'Predators and Prey' lesson. Oxmoor LNR was chosen as the main reserve for the visits. Small mammals were live trapped and shown to the students, who could study their physical adaptations to the environment, in particular the features which help them to avoid being eaten. They then studied their predators, including kestrels and common buzzards.

The lessons were an immediate success with pupils and teachers – but it was clear that something still wasn't quite right. The Wildspace! officer was continually having to chase schools to encourage them to come out and there was also a worrying trend for schools to cancel at the last second, often while the Wildspace! officer was at the reserve with 20 mammals in the traps! The most common reasons were that a teacher was ill or that there were no funds for transport. Finding money to help schools with transport proved to be a turning point. Initially, funding was available from Halton Borough Council and once its necessity and effectiveness were proved, then the costs became part of an award from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

All school bookings begin with a visit to the teacher to cover risk assessment and lesson planning. The teachers are then advised about downloading supplementary material such as ID cards and maps from the Halton website. At this



Kestrel watching via CCTV

Halton Borough Council

stage, there is an agreement about which equipment 'Wild about Halton' will provide for students – personal digital assistants (PDAs) and binoculars, for example – and the items the school should provide. The team also ensures transport arrangements are made.

The future

Today the 'Wild about Halton' project has tackled most of the problems and is getting stronger. The team has forged powerful links with the City Learning Centres (CLCs) and continues to extend its range of lessons and educational themes. High schools from Halton have visited LNRs for music, geography, English and maths, as well as the more traditional environmental science. The link with the CLCs gives the project access to sophisticated recording equipment such as data loggers and PDAs that have allowed the team to broaden the scope of the lessons.

All this puts 'Wild about Halton' at the leading edge of environmental education for high schools. In fact – in a wonderful twist – schools from outside the area are now starting to come into Halton's LNRs, something that was unthinkable at the start of the project.

Further information

Jeff Clarke, Community Liaison Officer, Halton Borough Council – 01928 583905 or jeff.clarke@halton.gov.uk



Wildspace!

Environmental Education – 2



Tree climbing is fun and a favourite forest school activity

Nottingham City Council

Beeston Sidings LNR, Nottingham

Grant applicant – Nottingham City Council

Background

Building a shelter in the woods sounds like great fun for any child – but it can also be a fantastic way of building self-esteem and awareness of nature. Forest schooling is based on the principles of child-led learning.

It gives children a chance to experiment with the outdoor environment in a safe setting. As a result, children interact with the world around them in a way that builds their confidence and challenges their preconceptions.

In the summer of 2005, Merrivale Nursery in Nottingham, which already ran forest school sessions on a local community allotment garden, needed other sites within easy reach of the nursery. The Local Nature Reserve of Beeston Sidings proved ideal.

Achieving goals

Sessions are run and organised by independent playworkers with help from teachers and, importantly, parents from Merrivale.

The site doesn't suffer from too much antisocial behaviour, so no special preparation was needed before the events could go ahead. Activities include earth education and outdoor play – and the children are encouraged to assess the risks of the site or activity at the beginning of each session. For example, if children spotted rubbish, they might create their own hazard tape and fence it off.

A typical Forest School programme kicks off with the Forest School leader talking to the parents or carers about the programme and then finding and

“I loved the hot soup and exploring but I liked sawing wood to make a medallion best – I’ve still got it.”

– Benjamin, aged 7, Forest School participant

ensuring the safety of an appropriate local woodland site. Karen Orgill and her family took part in a forest school taster session. She was delighted to be able to stand back and let her son experience the woods without having to say “no, don’t touch and don’t climb”.

The Forest School leaders get to know the participants and gain their confidence before taking them to the woodland for the first time.

The group – typically up to around 12 – visits the same local woodland site on a regular basis, perhaps once a week or fortnightly, throughout the year.

Tasks like building a shelter are broken down into smaller sessions such as learning how to tie knots or collecting suitable materials. Since the sessions are led by the learners themselves, they go at the pace of the learners. Everyone is included and no-one is left to fail.

Forestry Commission education officers are either Forest School leaders already or are training to become leaders. They get experience of different Forest School programmes for participants of all ages, and have a good knowledge of potential sites in the area.

“The kids adore the site and have a real sense of ownership. The real bonus to Beeston Sidings is its location – being able to walk there makes the project sustainable,” said Forest School leader Iain Dimmock.

Successes

Merrivale Nursery now uses the site on a weekly basis for a range of forest school activities such as den-building and exploring.

Visiting the site regularly through the different seasons gives the children, who are all under five, an intimate understanding of how habitats change as the year goes by. They have formed a close bond with the reserve.



Nottingham City Council

The forest school taster session with a pupil sawing wood to make a medallion

Once forest schooling became established at Beeston Sidings, the CLO worked with the forest school leaders to bring this style of outdoor education to a wider audience. They held a forest school taster session to coincide with the National Lottery Day Celebrations in 2005, and families were encouraged to come along to see forest schooling in action. A year on, forest schooling in Nottingham is thriving.

The future

The CLO is working with forest school leaders to assess other sites in Nottingham with the hope that other schools in the city could benefit from regular contact with their LNRs.

Further information

Paul Owen – 0115 9152746 or paul.owen@nottinghamcity.gov.uk





Derwent Green Gym's Charlie Brassington sets about scrub removal on Chaddesden Wood LNR .

Derby BTCV

Chaddesden Wood LNR, Derby

Grant applicant – British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Derby

Background

Local Nature Reserves are inspiring, stimulating places to visit and Wildspace! offered the ideal opportunity to prove it.

In Derby, the BTCV has been busy developing links between the Local Nature Reserves and schemes such as Walking to Health and Green Gyms®. Better physical health and a sense of well-being for those who take part should be the result.

Achieving goals

Initially, the project focused on the Walking to Health initiative (WHI). WHI provided advice and Wildspace! staff and volunteers trained as health walk leaders.

Walks on Chaddesden Wood LNR were offered to community groups – and the response was great.

People taking part get some good cardiovascular exercise, but the benefits are psychological too. Often people living in urban areas – and especially older people – can feel isolated. The walks are a chance to meet up with like-minded people.

Green Gyms®, set up by BTCV, use horticultural and conservation tasks to improve people's level of fitness and to promote healthy living.

A Green Gym was established on an allotment in the Derwent area, and was aimed specifically at people with mental and physical health problems who were referred by health professionals.

Wildspace! worked with the Green Gym officer to look at ways of getting the Chaddesden Wood LNR involved in the project too. As a result,

“We have participated in tasks we would not normally run on the allotments – things like felling trees. This allowed different muscle groups to be exercised.”

– Derwent Green Gym Project Officer Jane Smith

occasional away days were organised on the nature reserve – popular events that included health walks and practical tasks such as footpath maintenance and tree-felling.

Jane Smith, Derwent Green Gym Project Officer, has found that working on LNRs has given clients the opportunity to experience new environments and help them achieve a number of health benefits.

“We have participated in tasks we would not normally run on the allotments – things like felling trees. This allowed different muscle groups to be exercised,” said Jane.

Successes

Health walks are still held every three months at Chaddesden and at other sites.

Over the course of the Derwent Green Gym project, people with health problems contributed almost 100 volunteer work-days on the site. As Chaddesden Wood LNR doesn't have a 'friends' group, the Derwent Green Gym has become the unofficial group for the site and have made a big impact on improving the biodiversity of the wood.

The future

In September 2005, a second Green Gym was set up in the Osmaston area, this time linked to Elm Wood, a potential LNR in a deprived part of the city.

Training courses for Green Gym participants have already been run on the site and both projects are working with the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Derby City Council to create a management plan for the site.

If designation goes ahead, the reserve will have lots of possibilities. Green Gym members will be able to help with management tasks on the site



Derby BTCV

Tree felling was on the agenda for some, including Alex Kilpatrick, Chair of the Friends of Allestree Park

and could become a self-sustaining 'friends' group.

It's hoped that improving the quality of life for local residents and giving them a chance to see action is being taken will lead to a greater sense of pride in their area. As a result, anti-social behaviour should reduce and local biodiversity increase.

Further information

Leon Hayward, BTCV Derby – 01332 348591 or l.hayward@btcv.org.uk





A group of young walkers following one of the footpaths

Stafford Borough Council

Kingsmead Marsh LNR, Stafford

Grant applicant – Stafford Borough Council

Background

Kingsmead Marsh Local Nature Reserve is a wonderful wildlife haven at the heart of Stafford. It's also a haven for local people – and is now being used to help them improve their health.

Most of the LNR is marsh and, at six hectares, is more extensive than many of the remaining marshes in Staffordshire.

Willows have been coppiced in the centre of the marsh, and native wildflowers have been planted alongside a footpath by the Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) group and nearby schools.

Conservation work, such as opening up footpaths, has gone a long way to encouraging more people to use the reserve.

In fact, the marsh has now become a major health walk route as part of Stafford Borough Council's Walking for Health programme, set up by the Council's Local Agenda 21 team.

Achieving goals

The original Walking Working Group set itself the aim of encouraging walking for health, environmental and leisure purposes and as a way of getting to work and school.

The group then began to promote walking for its health benefits and produced, with volunteers and primary schools, a series of 'Doorstep Walks for Health' leaflets.

When the national 'Walking the Way to Health' initiative was launched, the group secured money to appoint a Walking for Health co-ordinator. It

“An enjoyable way to cross from one end of the town to the other without having to endure the hustle and bustle of people or traffic.”

– Lee Pennington,
Occupational Health Worker

was also important for the success of the project to forge links with a wide range of partners in the health, community, voluntary and environmental sector.

The co-ordinator set up a programme of walks across the borough aimed at sedentary people and those living in disadvantaged communities, and began to expand the network of voluntary walk leaders.

Many of the walks use local green spaces and reserves, including Kingsmead Marsh, where discs on waymarker posts signal the ‘Doorstep Walks for Health’ routes.

Successes

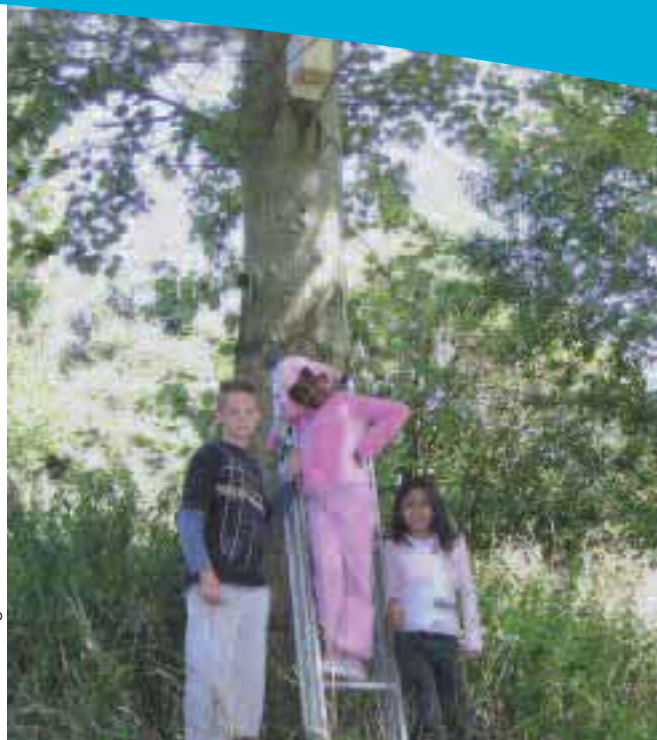
Walking regularly can benefit both physical and mental health in many ways, and can even reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by up to 50%.

Support Time Recovery worker Peter Barnes encourages his clients to discover the area. He feels very fortunate to be able to find an area that gives him an uplifting feeling, providing him with just the escape he needs.

Around 600 people have taken part in the health walks so far and around 90 volunteer walk leaders have been trained. Courses are run regularly, and several biodiversity staff and conservation officers from the Wildlife Trust and the Borough Council have become walk leaders. Their involvement means they can promote wildlife and biodiversity as well as the health benefits of being out in natural green spaces. The health walks have earned a great deal of publicity.

The future

Stafford Borough Council has worked to highlight the clear links between health and biodiversity. The next step, to build on both the Wildspace!



Stafford Borough Council

Because biodiversity staff have become walk leaders, they show walkers wildlife along the way

project and the health walks, has been to submit two funding bids both with a focus on wildlife and the health and well-being of the local community. The first is to develop one of the new LNRs as an exemplary woodland and the second is to establish a community garden, founded on the emerging philosophy of ‘green exercise’.

Further information

Danny Averill, Community Liaison Officer, Stafford Borough Council, Local Agenda 21 Team – 01785 619387 or daverill@staffordbc.gov.uk

Support for developing healthy walking initiatives is usually available from a local authority’s sustainable development officer or health promotion officer, from the local Primary Care Trust or from the ‘Walking the Way to Health’ staff nearest to you. They provide an excellent package of support including a website at www.whi.org.uk.





Fly-tipping in the woods .

Wildlife Trust for Lancashire

Grange Valley, Pope Lane Field and Boilton Woods LNRs, Preston

Grant applicant – Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North

Background

Grange Valley Local Nature Reserve and Pope Lane Field and Boilton Woods LNR are in the Brookfield and Ribbleton wards of Preston, Lancashire, wards that are within the 10 percent most deprived in the country.

These wards, though, also offer some of the best green spaces and habitats in Preston. Boilton Wood, for example, forms part of one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in Lancashire and is designated as an SSSI. In Preston, the whole concept of LNRs, their actual designation, purpose and their increased use, has had a positive impact on the surrounding communities. The Wildspace! project introduced new opportunities to learn about wildlife, to train for work and to enjoy some peaceful leisure time.

Preston City Councillor Veronica Afrin is pleased to see the provision of more open space within the city.

Achieving goals

Through the Wildspace! project, led by the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, there have been real improvements on both reserves.

In deprived neighbourhoods, people tend to suffer long-term unemployment, poor health and depression, which can lead to social isolation, lethargy and a lack of respect for their local area. So, a lot of the Trust's work was at a very local level, building relationships with residents. Julie Livesey, Wildspace! Project Officer, found that working with the local community was highly satisfying. She said: "People's energy and

“Designating these areas as nature reserves will not only contribute towards the physical improvements, it will also offer great benefits to the community.”

– Veronica Afrin, Preston City Councillor

resilience has inspired me, especially when the going has been tough. Everyone pulls together and bounces back.”

The Trust prides itself in becoming part of the neighbourhood, rather than taking a lead, which can cause friction. The project consulted people from the surrounding communities through drop-in sessions and events. Working as a team of partners was also crucial to the success of the project, which formed part of an award-winning Productive Landscapes scheme.

Successes

Tree-planting, hedge-laying and woodland management were carried out by dedicated local volunteers during weekly work parties, by ‘New Deal’ clients, and by school, community and youth groups.

Liz Jenkins, 7th Preston Scout Group Leader, found that the clean-ups were something her group enjoyed doing on a regular basis. “Hopefully coming along and picking up litter is leaving a beautiful wildlife habitat in a better state than we found it, so that we can come back and see the wildlife as it should be,” she said.

As well as providing training opportunities for the people involved, the project increased the chances of employment for those looking for work. In fact, the Trust notched up a 50 per cent success rate at getting participants back to work.

Local schools and young people benefited from the environmental education activities organised and delivered by the Wildlife Trust in partnership with Preston City’s Council’s Parks Ranger Service. And people from the neighbouring areas were encouraged to come along to events at the reserves to see for themselves how enjoyable visits to local green spaces can be.

By getting involved in using and managing the

Wildlife Trust for Lancashire



Children taking part in making a banner

sites, people came to care for and respect their green spaces. There was also a reduction in those less desirable activities, such as fly-tipping. After attending organised activities, people felt more confident to use the reserves in their own time. With more people about to keep an eye open, the reserves suffer less from antisocial behaviour.

The Friends of Grange Valley raised funds to pay for bike barriers at the entrances to the reserves. Again, this simple measure has meant visitors are less worried about walking through the reserves.

The future

Fostering a sense of care and ownership has been developed over the three years of the project. Now that funding for the CLO is nearing an end, the ‘friends’ groups for the LNRs, in partnership with the Council, are determined to carry on the management and educational activities offered by these still developing sites. This should ensure the reserves remain accessible to local people and that they will continue to offer a hands-on experience of looking after the wildlife and habitats.

Further information

Julie Livesey, Community Liaison Officer, Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside – 01772 752445 or jlivesey@lancswt.org.uk





Hundreds of local children have discovered the joys of the LNR.

Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

Lattersey LNR, Cambridgeshire

Grant Applicant – The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

Background

Lattersey Local Nature Reserve sits at the eastern end of Whittlesey, a small market town in the Fens near the fast-growing city of Peterborough. The LNR has just celebrated its 20th birthday, opening to the public in 1986.

For 20 years, it has been Fenland's only LNR and consists of 11 hectares of relict fen – a mix of open water, reedbed, trees and scrub and grassland. It is an island for wildlife in a sea of intensively farmed arable fields and new developments. Accessible greenspace is equally important in a rural area as in an urban one because although residents might look out on a large expanse of green space, most of it is privately owned with no public right of use. Indeed, the land may not even be safe to use.

The Wildlife Trust wanted to encourage community involvement in the management and monitoring of Lattersey LNR, to use the LNR to increase awareness and understanding of biodiversity, to encourage local action to help implement the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and to promote the LNR as accessible and inclusive to all groups and individuals.

Achieving goals

Despite being in a rural area, Lattersey suffered from issues more normally associated with an urban area. The LNR was neglected, inaccessible and lacked facilities. Its path would flood for many months of the year and the information boards were old and tired. Many people visiting the reserve would only do so in groups, as they felt threatened among unsavoury evidence of fly

“We love the new paths – they show where we can go, and the information boards and all the events add to our understanding. We come here every day now.”

– Local resident

tipping, drug taking, rough camping, shooting and unauthorised fishing. The reserve is surrounded by mixed housing, including sheltered housing, farmland, industry and roads.

The challenge at Lattersey was to allow as many people as possible to enjoy and get involved in wildlife. Funding enabled the installation of a boardwalk around a large part of the reserve, along with new information boards. Improved car and bike parking was installed and dumped rubbish was removed.

Successes

Schools within walking distance of the LNR were encouraged to use it for study. Wildlife Trust officers walked around the improved reserve with staff from two local schools, who had not been keen to use the LNR prior to its clean-up. They were so impressed that they wanted to begin making use of the resource immediately.

One local teacher said: “We felt uncomfortable in the reserve before, and it was certainly not somewhere we would wish to bring the children, It is now completely different, feels clean and safe, and we can see real opportunities here for our studies.”

Since that time, there have been dozens of accompanied visits from the schools, and hundreds of local children have discovered the LNR in a positive light. Both schools are now using the sites independently following a successful Wildlife Trust led inset day introducing 10 school staff to the LNR’s opportunities.

Other major successes include training workshops and community events. These drew hundreds of local people, again strengthening their association with the LNR. They have learned why it is important, what it supports and how they can help look after and enjoy it. Events were free, as many families were financially stretched.



Bark rubbing was a popular activity

Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

It became evident that the reserve acted as an important playground for many local children. So it was important to make contact with children and young people through events, group trips or school trips. The junior branch of the local angling club was contacted, and an agreement was made for them to use one of the lakes for free fishing as long as they worked with the Trust, to fish responsibly. This has seen more children bringing parents with them, or in groups, to fish without lighting fires etc.

Local residents have also developed a real sense of ownership and visit frequently.

The future

In the near future it is hoped to set up a friends group which would, with the help of wildlife 'experts', be keen to lay on events. Talks are taking place with interested local residents. Ultimately the hope is that more and more local people will become guardians of the reserve. It certainly feels looked after and cared for now, thanks to the increased community involvement.

Further information

Rachel Price, Community Wildlife Officer, The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough – 01733 890419 or rachel.price@wildlifebcnp.org



Visitor friendliness – 1



Visitors in the Visitor Centre in Crane Park

London Wildlife Trust

Crane Park Island LNR, Twickenham

Grant applicant – London Wildlife Trust

Background

In June 2004, the Shot Tower Nature and Visitor Centre in Crane Park, Twickenham was opened to the public in a ceremony led by Sir David Attenborough.

Sir David described the nature reserve next to the tower as “one of Richmond Borough’s best kept secrets and one that is full of enchantment to all those who know it”. His words were a fitting tribute to the results of a long, hard slog by London Wildlife Trust.

The Trust took on the Old Shot Tower, a grade II listed building, back in 1986, when they formally accepted responsibility of managing Crane Park Island Local Nature Reserve. Both the reserve and the tower represented relics of the gunpowder mills that existed on the site until 1926.

From that time on, they have been working to ensure that everyone in the area could enjoy the wildlife that lives right on their doorstep.

Achieving goals

The Trust had a vision of turning the 83ft tall Shot Tower into a nature and visitor centre for the local community. But it was a slow process. Money had to be raised and the practical work organised.

In the meantime, the project continued to carry out education and outreach work, offering formal education opportunities to schools as well as informal walks, talks and events for the public. In 1997, the Heritage Lottery Fund offered to fund the restoration of the building and a high quality permanent exhibition for visitors to learn about the amazing history of the site as well as its rich biodiversity.

“One of Richmond Borough’s best kept secrets and one that is full of enchantment.”

– Sir David Attenborough

A partner was needed for this final stage of the restoration process and a proposal was put forward to the Wildspace! scheme. The scheme funded the most exciting element of the exhibition – a giant interactive wall map, showing the full course of the River Crane from source to mouth with information about the history of the river.

The permanent exhibition was called ‘From Big Bangs to Blue Flashes’ to reflect the story of the nature reserve, from satanic gunpowder mill to the haven for wildlife that it is today.

Creating the interactive display involved engaging a professional team of designers, artists writers and engineers and took around six months to complete.

Successes

The map can now be used independently by visitors to the centre and as a teaching tool for a class of children, using a facilitator. Children love being able to push buttons to find out more, but people of all ages have found it a fascinating and impressive focus for the visitor centre.

Since the Shot Tower has been open to the public, more than 6,000 people have visited – either on weekend visits or to the large number of special events. The ‘Gunpowder, Treason and Plot’ event on November 5 has become an annual favourite with local people and draws in more than 200 people each year. An event that so well reflects the history of the site has helped ‘spark’ an even greater interest among visitors.

This summer, more children than ever have been discovering the local wildlife and using the classroom space in the visitor centre. It has given the team a chance to develop a compelling series of wildlife themed programmes that have included arts and crafts, environmental games and more.



London Wildlife Trust

Children using the interactive display at the visitor centre

The future

The Trust hopes to keep increasing visitor numbers and wants to add to the high quality information they provide. They also hope to organise special exhibitions to reflect different interests.

Further information

Alex Robb, London Wildlife Trust Crane Park Island Project – 020 8891 2334 or wildcrane@btopenworld.com





Here's looking at you - a Foxglove Covert school group

Ministry of Defence

Foxglove Covert LNR, Catterick

Grant applicant – Ministry of Defence

Background

From a piece of neglected military training land to a thriving centre where people can learn about wildlife, get involved in art and generally enjoy the natural world, Foxglove Covert is a Ministry of Defence and Wildspace! success story.

The Covert, at Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire, is an award-winning nature reserve created in 1992 from 42 acres of woodland, scrub and wetland left isolated when two army barracks were enclosed by a security fence. Now, it has a Field Centre with state-of-the-art facilities for conservation work and environmental education. The building has a specially designed bird ringing room, working beehive, interactive displays and activity room with one-way observation windows that overlook a wildlife garden.

Achieving goals

The Covert has grown into one of the foremost military conservation sites in the UK. It was designated as an Local Nature Reserve in April 2001, becoming the first LNR ever to be declared on MoD land.

The driving force behind the success of Foxglove Covert is Major Tony Crease, Deputy Commander of the Defence Training Estate North, who has been a prominent figure in MoD conservation in the area for several years.

Major Crease drove the early developments and habitat improvements on the site with the support of volunteers. He feels the field centre is “a tremendous asset for the LNR and is enjoyed by many different strands of the local community”.

“Since the field centre was built, it has been a focal point for research, education and community activities.”

– Major Tony Crease, Deputy Commander, Defence Training Estate North

Support from Wildspace! was the catalyst which helped persuade other grant-giving bodies, who in the end contributed over £300,000 towards the new centre. Assistance was also given with employing a site warden and community liaison officer. Recognising the benefits that the post delivered, the MoD has offered further funding for at least the next two years.

Successes

In the early days, an old garden shed was the only base for volunteers and visitors to the site. This decrepit hut was replaced in 1996 by a mobile cabin previously used for soldier recruitment which, in turn, was replaced by a Portakabin from the tank hangars.

These modest temporary buildings were finally replaced in 2002 by a state-of-the-art field centre, which now attracts around 10,000 visitors a year. The site has been expanded to 80 hectares and is cared for by two wardens.

It is the only national bird ringing station on MoD land and one of the most productive ringing sites in the national scheme. More than 30,000 birds have been ringed on the site including rarities like Parrot Crossbill and Icterine Warbler, but studies into the resident and summer migrant population are high on the agenda. A staggering 1,600 species of flora and fauna have been recorded.

The reserve also has its own beehives, including an observation hive where the bees can be monitored by people in the field centre. Moth trapping, bat detecting, fungi forays and wild flower walks are all part of the routine activity.

The future

Foxglove is increasingly at the heart of the community and further development stems from direct contact with the friends group and other regular users.



Ministry of Defence

Happiness is a day at the LNR

Possibilities for the future include a new workshop for the volunteers, the introduction of highland cattle to help manage the wetter areas, and ever stronger ties with the habitat management department of the local college.

A new and exciting education pack is almost complete and will be adopted by local schools, including those that support children with learning difficulties.

Further information

Major Tony Crease, Deputy Commander – 01748 875504 or anthony.crease@landmarc.mod.uk



Wildspace!

Working with disability – 1



Students took part in a range of activities including bird box making

Bristol City Council

Stockwood Open Space LNR, Bristol

Grant applicant – Bristol City Council

Background

Twelve students from Florence Brown Community School in Bristol, a secondary school specifically for young people with special needs, were invited to get involved in Stockwood Open Space Local Nature Reserve.

The young people, aged between 13 and 16, had a range of disabilities, including learning difficulties, behavioural issues and mobility and sensory impairments.

Bristol's Wildspace! team, 'Go Wild in Bristol', worked with the Avon Wildlife Trust, Bristol City Council Youth Service and community artists to create a project that would help the teenagers expand their nature knowledge and build their self-esteem.

Achieving goals

The young people, who were all members of an after-school club run by youth workers, were chosen for the project because of their interest in wildlife.

They visited the reserve on four evenings in May and June – each time, experiencing a different range of activities. They tried their hand at pond-dipping, trapping small mammals, making bird boxes and detecting bats.

For their final outdoors session, the group organised a barbeque on the reserve and stayed on site until after dark to look for nocturnal animals.

Wildspace! funding meant specialists, such as a small mammal expert and a bat expert, could be

“The young people gained a tremendous amount from this project in personal and social development and through the new understanding they gained of open spaces and wildlife.”

– Youth worker

brought into the sessions – giving the teenagers chance to meet different adults with interesting skills and jobs.

Community artists took digital photographs and made sound recordings of all the activities. At the end of the project, the group came together in a music studio, where the young people helped create a soundtrack to accompany a CD of their photographs. The project was also evaluated during this session, through holding one-to-one interviews with the teenagers – and feedback was very positive. The CD was played to the whole school during an assembly and everyone taking part got their own copy for their Records of Achievements folder.

Successes

The CD was valuable in that it gave the young people something tangible to take away with them and to remind them of the experience.

The photographs and the soundtrack showed them in a very positive light, which was important for building the self-esteem of a group that often suffers from a negative image and prejudice.

The making of the CD also brought excellent publicity for Wildspace!, both for this specific project and for the LNR work in general. In fact, a TV crew attended one of the sessions and the project was featured on the local news programme.

The future

It's hoped that the after-school club youth workers will organise more visits to the LNR. They have also approached the Community Liaison Officer about working together on other projects and they are now looking for ways of raising funds.



Bristol City Council

Water wildlife was a fascination

Further information

Sally Oldfield, Community Liaison Officer,
Bristol City Council – 0117 922 4429 or
sally_oldfield@bristol-city.go.uk



Wildspace!

Working with disability – 2



Using tools like rakes was a totally new experience for some participants

Sheffield City Council

Shire Brook Valley LNR, Sheffield

Grant applicant – Sheffield City Council

Background

Shire Brook Valley LNR in Sheffield wanted to link their two main goals – stepping up community participation and promoting access for all by repairing paths, increasing signage and developing trails.

So, when the Wildspace! Community Liaison Officer (CLO) bumped into a member of staff as a day centre for people with learning disabilities, they hatched a plan. Soon, two new groups were visiting the reserve each week undertaking a variety of simple tasks.

Achieving goals

The LNR is made up of a rich variety of habitats, including ancient meadows, wildlife ponds and marshes, woodlands and the largest area of lowland heath on the east side of Sheffield. The

reserve is home to rare species such as water voles, harvest mice, great crested newts, emperor and ling moths, betony and harebell.

On each day, up to 14 clients from the day centre visit the reserve and a programme of activities has been specially developed for the group.

The conservation tasks undertaken, although small, always made a noticeable impact and local people often stopped to congratulate the group on the work they were doing.

For many adults with learning disabilities, using a spade or pair of loppers was a totally new experience. The challenge for the CLO, was breaking each task into all the separate actions, as in this example of how to use loppers – “Look at branch that needs cutting, step forward to be able

“I never ceased to be amazed at what individuals could achieve with appropriate instruction and patience. And once a new skill had been mastered, there was no stopping anyone!”

– Chris Smith, Community Liaison Officer

to reach, lift the loppers, open the handles, move the loppers forward until branch is between blades, close the loppers to cut.”

CLO Chris Smith was amazed at what individuals could achieve with appropriate instruction and patience. And she found that “once a new skill had been mastered, there was no stopping anyone!”

“It was a great project because everyone could achieve something. The clients and the staff always joined in enthusiastically,” she said.

A two-day Nature Therapy seminar for trainers, health workers, therapists and educators was also held at the visitor centre. The seminar explored the potential of human contact with nature and alternative approaches to health therapy and psychology, including the benefits to more vulnerable people.

Successes

Although it took the volunteers several weeks to settle into their new environment, by the end of the first summer everyone was enthusiastic and getting involved. One group developed into a walking club, starting with short walks around the visitor centre. They now walk around the whole reserve and have designed a set of maps for their favourites.

The other group focused on nature study, with activities on trees, birds, mini-beasts and the weather. And, with great success in making bird feeders and nest boxes, some of the group have gone on to do practical conservation tasks on the Trans Pennine Trail which crosses the site.



Sheffield City Council

There was plenty of enthusiasm once new skills had been mastered

The future

Opening up the LNR and visitor centre to local people with disabilities has been a great success, creating new opportunities for the individuals and their families. The enthusiasm of those taking part has been extremely rewarding for all those involved with the project.

Further information

For further information contact Chris Smith, Sheffield City Council – 0114 275 1176 or chris.smith@sheffield.gov.uk

