

Wider application

The ecological and community benefits achieved through *Neighbourhood Nature* were objectively monitored. This confirmed the approach as a valuable complement to the more orthodox built solutions and high capital expenditure normally associated with urban regeneration.

A partnership such as this, which combines technical expertise with the enthusiastic support of local community leaders can be extremely effective. The general popularity of wildlife, together with its use as an aid to education, as an indicator of environmental quality and as an accessible vehicle for practical community involvement make *Neighbourhood Nature* a model which could find useful application in the residential areas of a great many of the UK's towns and cities.

Further information

National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry.

If you would like further information on other case studies or their application, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

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A nature conservation charity - one of 46 country wildlife trusts established to bring people and wildlife closer together.

Further reading

Agate E (1998)

The Urban Handbook : a practical guide to community environmental work
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Doncaster

Agyeman J ed (1996)

Involving Communities in Forestry Forestry Practice Guide 10. Forestry Commission

Baines C (1986)

The Wild Side of Town Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton Ltd

Burgess J (1993)

Perceptions of Risk in Recreational Woodlands in the Urban Fringe

A research project for the Community Forest Unit, Countryside Commission

Greenhalgh L & W K (1996)

People, Parks & Cities A guide to current good practice in urban parks

A Report for the Department of the Environment

Greening the City - a guide to good practice (1996)

A report for the Department of the Environment

Titman W (1994)

Special Places; Special People. The hidden curriculum of school grounds

World Wide Fund for Nature/Learning through Landscapes

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Urban Forestry in Practice

Involving local people through nature conservation



Involving local people through nature conservation

Introduction

Urban regeneration can be made more successful through the direct involvement of local people. Projects which promote practical nature conservation can strengthen communities whilst at the same time helping to bring natural landscapes close to where people live and work.

Specific example

Project name and location

NEIGHBOURHOOD NATURE programme, **WALSALL**, West Midlands.

Project partners

- National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU)
- The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country (formerly the Urban Wildlife Trust)
- Walsall City Challenge
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Project objectives

- To engage the local community directly with practical nature conservation, as a means of increasing support for woodland wildlife
- To establish new woodlands as an aid to urban regeneration
- To promote the cultural, social, economic and environmental importance of woodland
- To encourage local landowners and managers of land to adopt urban forestry principles

Site description

Neighbourhood Nature was established to deliver a practical example of the way environmental action can be used to promote local community involvement in urban regeneration. The project focused on an urban neighbourhood in the town of Walsall. In 1993 this was designated as a City Challenge area, thus benefiting from Government funds for a comprehensive five year programme of regeneration. *Neighbourhood Nature* ran from 1993 to 1998.

The City Challenge area is a mixed neighbourhood, comprising housing, shops, schools, industry and both formal and informal recreational open spaces, covering 4.3km². The area has a high level of unemployment and the people who live and work there are of diverse ethnic origin.

Activities and achievements

A full time project officer was funded by City Challenge to facilitate a wide range of activities over a five year period. *Neighbourhood Nature* also had a small pump-priming budget which was used to initiate certain types of project.

The project was monitored and guided throughout by a small steering group containing representatives of the partner organisations and of the local community.



Local people planting trees shows that no matter how large or small, the contribution adds much to the urban forest



On the edge of an urban area, natural surroundings provide an essential "lung" for the local population

New woodland was planted on 16ha of land within the City Challenge area. Planting sites included school grounds, public parks, derelict land and land around factories and housing estates. The grounds of seven schools were improved for wildlife, for pupils and for environmental teaching and teachers were trained to make use of the new resource.

Community activities included play schemes, art workshops, Dawn Chorus Day walks and a Spring Clean Day. 24 separate community events took place between 1993 and 1998. In addition, an annual free tree scheme distributed 6400 native trees to individuals for planting in private gardens. Twenty local groups were supported with grants to undertake woodland related projects



Community activities not only improve the environment but can be a valuable aid to bringing local people closer together

Wildlife monitoring involved young people in recording birds in their gardens over two years. The results were fed into a wider national garden birds survey carried out by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In addition, a more general garden wildlife survey involved local residents in recording the presence of a number of easily identified indicator species, including fox, bat, bumble bee, mistle thrush, snail and oak tree. These surveys clearly showed that residents can provide accurate, reliable and valuable survey information about their local environment

Youngsters making nestboxes helps them to understand wildlife



Successful promotion of *Neighbourhood Nature* was achieved through a travelling exhibition, publication of an explanatory leaflet and through representation at national and regional conferences. In addition, in 1996, a national school grounds conference was organised, in partnership with the educational charity Learning Through Landscapes to capitalise on the experience gained by *Neighbourhood Nature* in Walsall.

Next steps

Although the City Challenge initiative ended after five years, the success of *Neighbourhood Nature* enabled Walsall MBC and The Wildlife Trust to obtain continuing funding from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget, and the programme is now underway in another district of Walsall.