

Wider application

The investment of professional expertise in community development can help to secure the long term commitment needed if woodlands are to be successfully established in traditional public parks. Substantial national resources are currently being directed towards the renaissance of urban parks. There is considerable potential for these resources to be used for professional facilitation of community involvement and for urban parks to become more well wooded as a result.

Similarly, woodland creation and management provide ideal vehicles for consensus-building within communities, and can quickly build confidence for new local groups.

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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Further reading

Gibson T (1996)

The Power in Our Hands, John Carpenter

Greenhalgh L & Worpole K, eds (1995)

Parklife, Urban Parks and Social Renewal, Comedia/Demos

Greenhalgh L & Worpole K (1996)

People, Parks and Cities - a Guide to Current Good Practice in Urban Parks, HMSO, 83-86

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Urban Forestry in Practice

Building community support for new woodland in parks



CASE STUDY 3

Building community support for new woodland in parks

Introduction

The introduction of new woodland in public parks offers an opportunity to create more shelter, improve wildlife habitat, increase public enjoyment and, in some cases, to reduce long term management costs. However, any change to public parks requires popular support and continuing commitment from local people. This is particularly true where there is a change from a formal landscape to a more naturalistic one.

Specific example

Project name and location

PLECK PARK, Montford Road, **WALSALL**, West Midlands, UK
Grid reference SO 997 968

Project partners

- Black Country Urban Forestry Unit (BCUFU) (now the National Urban Forestry Unit)
- West Midlands Arts
- English Nature
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Countryside Commission
- Bostin' Arts
- Esso UK plc
- Highways Agency
- 3 local schools

Programme objectives

- To engage a wide variety of people from the local community in the planning and implementation of the creation of new woodland in the park.
- To test *Planning for Real* techniques as an aid to community based urban forestry. (*Planning for Real* is a well proven system for helping individuals to make a genuine contribution to local decision making, but it has been used mainly in the context of built development).
- To demonstrate that woodland could be acceptable in the park alongside other, more traditional features.

Site description

Pleck Park is a traditional park, dating from 1926, and located within a multicultural neighbourhood. It is owned and managed by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. It contains sports pitches and other play facilities and, prior to the project, it was dominated by close mown grass and a few avenues of existing trees. An elevated section of the M6 motorway runs along its western boundary, making the park relatively noisy and polluted.

Project design

The project aimed to reach beyond existing park users to other groups within the community. Professional community workers and community artists were involved as facilitators.

Implementation

- A community survey of the park's catchment area, carried out by Walsall MBC in 1991, identified popular demand for more trees.
- In 1992 a woodland awareness day was organised by BCUFU. This consisted of demonstrations of woodland crafts such as wood turning, hurdle making, willow sculpture and environmental education programmes, including mathematics exercises, drama and storytelling.
- A *Planning for Real* exercise was carried out. A model of Pleck Park was constructed and local people were invited to put forward their suggestions for new features. This interactive process enabled the position and extent of new woodland in the park to be agreed.

Practical techniques are available to help communities with decision-making. This is an example of *Planning for Real* in practice



New woodland means that the park will change and this requires interpretation



- A park history walk was organised by BCUFU in which local experts explained the historical importance of woodland and wood products to Walsall (eg: the use of oak bark in local leather tanning) and the history of woodland on this particular site.
- Over 6 000 trees were planted on an area of 1.4 ha, adjacent to the motorway. The trees were planted by 3 local schools, assisted by professional forestry contractors. The planting was funded by the Highways Agency.
- A professional community arts group, Bostin' Arts, worked with local groups over a period of 4 months in 1993 to produce designs and to create sculptures for incorporation into the park and its new woodland. This cost (£5 000) was funded by West Midlands Arts and English Nature's Community Action for Wildlife Fund. A leaflet, *Art in the Park*, was produced and distributed locally to explain the sculptures.
- A schools nest box scheme, tree dressing days and a summer play scheme were organised.
- An interpretation board was installed to explain the purpose of the woodland and the reason for the change in the appearance of this part of the park.

Establishment

- The woodland was maintained by forestry contractors for a 3 year period and then became the responsibility of the local authority.
- The sculptures were a mixture of temporary and permanent installations. The temporary ones were removed after 2 years, but three remain in place and have been maintained by the community artists.

Management

- A longer term management plan for the woodland has been drawn up by the Highways Agency, for implementation by Walsall MBC.

Results

- The local community has welcomed the new informal woodland.
- Over 90% of the trees survived the first 3 years. Pioneer species such as alder, planted at 600-900mm tall, grew to over 2 metres by the third year.
- In 1994, the project was highly commended in the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management Open Space Awards.
- Professional community artists worked successfully with youth groups, an Asian women's group and a single mothers group from a local tower block.
- Since 1994, Walsall MBC has developed its *Local Involvement Project* to encourage local people to play an active part in the improvement of parks and other public open spaces throughout the borough. This has included the setting up of several "Friends of" groups for local parks.



Creating new woodland has to be fun!

A wonderful windmill: one of the works of art designed and built by local people