The Growing Localities Awards
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* Disclaimer
Responsibility for the views expressed, together with responsibility for any errors, remains with the author Gerard Lemos, (Lemos&Crane).
For many years, City Bridge Trust has built its reputation as a significant supporter of the environment through its grant-making and strategic initiatives. The Trust has supported local community action, biodiversity, and environmental education; and it has helped the voluntary and community sector promote sustainability. In order to mark the Diamond Jubilee of HRH Her Majesty the Queen in 2012, City Bridge Trust launched Growing Localities, a new grants programme with a budget of £2m. Her Majesty graciously agreed to be patron of this scheme.

This scheme inspired hundreds of organisations and communities in London to improve their localities by enhancing green spaces, growing their own food and acquiring bee-keeping skills. We also supported organisations offering horticultural work training programmes to people with special needs and young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). This programme is helping disadvantaged people into real jobs which are long term, rewarding and sustainable.

Building on the success of the Growing Localities Grants Programme, in partnership with the consultancy Lemos and Crane, we launched our Growing Localities Awards. The Awards recognise and celebrate the very best of “growing and greening” initiatives from non-profit organisations large and small.

There are five categories with winners and runners-up as well as two Judges’ Special Prizes. I hope you find their stories as fascinating as I did. They are an inspiration to us all.

We are indebted to each of the many organisations and charities who generously shared their projects, achievements and ambitions. Ultimately they are all winners!

Billy Dove MBE JP
Chairman, City Bridge Trust
Introduction

Better Angels of our Nature: The Value of Green Spaces
Throughout history and across cultures, a profound awareness of the symbiotic relationship between people and their environment fulfils a central role in spiritual, artistic and social thought. Nature offers a mirror and match to ourselves, allowing us to reflect, develop, explore and relax. It also brings people together to work with one another, enjoy each other’s company and unite over a shared experience. These two essential characteristics are a precious resource, buoying emotional and social wellbeing.

Engaging with nature offers a tonic to counter feelings of anxiety, futility and disassociation. Such activities enable people to create an environment in which to experience the value of their own contribution and creation, step away from a troubling circumstance and focus their mind and energies on a fulfilling scene, task or activity. The beauty of this opportunity is its universal relevance and applicability; to engage with and enjoy the natural world is indiscriminately open to everybody, furnishing each with a space that can be made relevant to their own needs, concerns and circumstance.

“But any man that walks the mead,
In bud or blade, or bloom, may find,
According as his humours lead,
A meaning suited to his mind.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson, The Day Dream

Nature is at once vulnerable and strikingly persistent, and as such provides a calm space in which our own responsibility, influence and capabilities, as well as our relative place in social and environmental history can be seen and experienced. By engaging with the natural world we are often helped towards developing a calming sense of scale and perspective which can be fundamental in supporting ourselves through difficult experiences, emotions or circumstances.

“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all, it teaches entire trust”

Gertrude Jekyll, On Gardening

In recent years there has been a cultural move towards celebrating our relationship with nature and communicating our duty to protect it. With the remarkable successes of writers including E.O. Wilson, Robert Macfarlane and Richard Mabey, we have seen a popular shift in public consciousness from the understanding of green spaces through the lens of scientific understanding of its principles and processes, towards an understanding more concerned with the experience of the natural world; to explore its nature matched with our own, what nature brings about in us, what we share and what we can use it to achieve.
Understanding of the positive effects of engaging with our natural environment has recently been more formally pursued. Research into the relationship between proximity to open green spaces in urban areas and levels of stress, and the significant benefit of exercise for mental wellbeing has led to a growing emphasis from within the social research and charity sectors on the relationship between horticultural activities and improving wellbeing, especially for those experiencing poverty, exclusion or vulnerability.

However, in urban life our interaction with green spaces can often seem restricted. The natural world is edged out of reach; boxed into private gardens, relegated to neglected space or removed entirely to make way for the conveniences and necessities of modern living. Thus many people, often including the most vulnerable members of society, are not always able to easily reach the many benefits that such spaces afford.

We are in an age often popularly characterised by its dysfunctional and exploitative relationship with the natural world, with limited biodiversity, excessive waste and harmful pollutants often in the headlines. Green spaces are an increasingly precious resource. In this context, the projects and programmes seen throughout the Growing Localities scheme are evidently vitally important.

“In nature and the language of the sense, The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being.”

William Wordsworth, Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey

1 Grahn and Strigsdotter 2003
2 Halliwell, 2005; Richardson et al 2005
We work to show that nature has no boundaries and everyone should experience it.”

Creekside
Above: Joanna Lumley and Raymond Blanc launch the Growing Localities scheme at Guildhall London, May 2012

Left: Launch of Growing Localities, May 2012
WINNER:
St Mungo’s: Putting Down Roots (PDR)

St Mungo’s Putting Down Roots scheme is an opportunity for some of the most vulnerable people in London to learn valuable skills and gain accredited qualifications, in order to be supported in their move towards employment. The project engages its members in community gardening work improving public spaces across London, while providing vocational and therapeutic training and support to overcome barriers between its participants and stable employment.

Through their notable presence in improving and maintaining highly visible community gardens across London, the scheme goes a long way towards redressing negative perceptions of homeless people, and fostering a valuable sense of belonging. This is fundamental in lessening feelings of social anxiety and isolation. St Mungo’s PDR provides a precious opportunity for excluded and isolated members of society to enhance their own quality of life, and to feel connected and valuable within their communities.
RUNNER UP:
**Peter Bedford Housing Association: Plot to Plate**
Peter Bedford Housing Association’s Plot to Plate scheme is transforming the food culture and overall wellbeing of its residents, through providing skills training in growing, harvesting and cooking locally grown food. The scheme also supports tenant-run community kitchens and provides catering services for local organisations. The project’s focus is on developing participants’ knowledge of the association between food and lifestyle, whilst encouraging positive social relationships between tenants and developing partnerships with organisations in the local community. With its recent first successes in profiting from the sales of foraged leaves to local restaurants, the scheme has successfully demonstrated its value in fostering a working social environment in which new skills and relationships are developed, whilst improving the health, wellbeing and employment prospects of its participants.

HIGHLY COMMENDED
**The Blackstock Triangle Gardeners** have successfully improved the natural and social environment of their neighbourhood by encouraging the community to grow fruit and vegetables in shared public spaces. The project’s strength is clear from its positive effect on social relationships, with people further developing the project by opening their front gardens to host seed swaps, cake days and even play performances.

“It makes me want to weep with joy when I see all the green growbags all over the place and I think why would you want to live anywhere else?”

Judith

**The London Orchard Project** has brought communities together through encouraging the planting of local orchards. Focused on ‘food-deserts’, the scheme has improved locals’ knowledge, access and interest in fresh food, as well as stimulating positive social relationships and a sense of wellbeing and local pride.

“It was great to see so many people turn out to plant and meet more of my neighbours. I feel so proud of our tree planting!”

Louise, Islington
Introducing Young People to Nature

**WINNER:**
**Groundwork: Access to West London's Nature**
Access to West London's Nature offers a wide range of activities aimed at getting children and young people with limited access to nature exploring and learning about local wildlife. The project is hugely popular with children, families and teachers, and has successfully raised knowledge and interest in local conservation issues. Facilitators have noted a positive change in children’s attitude and behaviour towards nature, for instance observing that at the end of a minibeast session children could “demonstrate how to handle them without fear or harming them, whereas previously they may have been afraid of them or wanted to squash them”. Groundwork’s project is successfully building an informed and respectful relationship between children, their communities, and their natural environment, and the popularity of their project is testament to their success.

**RUNNER UP:**
**Creekside Education Trust: Wild Urban Adventures for Young People and their Families**
The Creekside Education Trust allows young residents to get ‘hands on’ experience of their local wildlife, through extremely popular creek walks and mudlarking sessions in which children put on their waders and explore Deptford creek, learning about its history, geography and biology. Other regular activities include bug-hunting, den-making, crab-netting and fire-building exercises, all geared at encouraging exploration, fun and engagement with wildlife while also learning about how best to protect it. The result of this unique project has been local young residents becoming enthused by the idea of discovering wildlife on their doorsteps. On the back of this success, the Trust are now pursuing partnerships with other local organisations, to ensure their message, that ‘nature has no boundaries’ reaches as many people as possible.

“Feet-numbing fun!”
A common quote from the young people who visit Creekside
HIGHLY COMMENDED
The valuable Oasis Children’s Nature Garden allows children and young people with limited access to outdoor space to experience a wild green area in which to play and explore. The garden is a precious space in which to experience the emotional, social and physical advantages of open green space.
WINNER: Hexagon Housing: 42 Newstead Road

The residents of Hexagon Housing’s 42 Newstead Road have transformed their front and back gardens into a thriving green space and communal area in which people can come together to enjoy a shared social atmosphere, and care for the chickens that have taken up residence there.

The project has had an extraordinary effect on building social confidence and connections within a group who have experienced the isolating effects of mental ill health. Testament to this is the expansion of the project, with residents of a next door sheltered housing organisation also coming to share in the work and rewards that the garden affords. The group are now working to create a wildlife feature pond and a rest and relaxation area nearby, after which they intend to develop and maintain an aviary to complement the existing wildlife.
RUNNER UP:
Samuel Montagu Youth Centre, SMYC Urban Nature Environmental Project

The Samuel Montagu Youth Centre and local residents have reclaimed a nearby abandoned plot of land and re-established it as a shared space for regular chicken and bee-keeping sessions.

The site is home to alternative educational sessions run by Full Circle Education, as well as providing meaningful jobs for those undertaking Community Payback.

The space serves a large portion of the local area, as well as sustaining a vibrant collection of animals, and contributing to a transformed local landscape.
Nature Themed Arts and Crafts

WINNER:
Central and Cecil: Growing Together Gardening Group

Central and Cecil’s gardening group offers regular garden-based arts and crafts sessions for residents of a care home for older people, within a specialised dementia care unit. The group uses the natural environment to stimulate animated discussion and share knowledge and entertainment, during sessions involving a wide variety of imaginative activities including art, singing, poetry and story-telling. At the residents’ request, each session involves a walk around the garden to enjoy the fresh air and experience the sights, smells and sensations of the outdoors.

Making Wreaths at Central and Cecil’s Growing Together

Growing Localities
Central is the use of the natural environment as a means of orienting residents within their natural and social surroundings. For example, by reading out a seasonal poem, making birdfeed balls and discussing as a group the value of attracting beneficial wildlife, the group might proactively emphasise the fact that it is Autumn. Using skills such as gardening, flower arranging and willow weaving reconnects residents with their talents and interests from earlier years. As well as enjoyment and stimulation, this brings with it the therapeutic effects of connecting with each other, and to your own memories, within an environment characterised by conversation and companionship. The group now intends to establish a public garden art and photography exhibition in the grounds of the home, in order to display their work and challenge preconceptions about older people.
WINNER:  
Core Arts: Greening the Grey  
Greening the Grey is a unique project that seeks to make valuable use of a temporarily vacant site, using its transformation as a means of engaging a wide range of local groups in horticultural activities. Redundant and abandoned plots are reclaimed by the local community and transformed into thriving and functional green spaces accessible to some of the most vulnerable people in the neighbourhood.

At the heart of the enterprise is the development of a shared space in which relationships can be forged and confidences built. A diverse range of hard-to-reach groups are invited to develop practical skills through participation in a range of growing and greening activities on the site.

Core Arts emphasise the value of horticultural work to overcome barriers which may prevent any individual with complex needs from realising their potential. Through transforming an unused plot of land, Greening the Grey provides means to equally radically transform its participants’ experiences of their community, and to equip them with emotional and practical skills fundamental for an improved quality of life.

“We water other groups’ beds while we’re there and they do the same for us. It’s really had an impact as a health awareness project and has given our members new skills and experience.”

Nithya
RUNNER UP:
William Paton Community Garden Project
The William Paton Community Garden project is a community-led undertaking which has seen the reclamation and development of an abandoned brownfield site. The area had been neglected and was attracting fly tipping and antisocial behaviour, but has now been transformed into a communal haven in which local residents can come to grow fruit and vegetables, or to enjoy the wildlife garden. With the wider area undergoing considerable social change, the William Paton Community Garden provides a welcome space on which to bring people together over a shared goal.

HIGHLY COMMENDED:
At Maiden Lane Estate, the London Wildlife Trust has empowered residents to transform their environment into a beautiful and productive space. The project has seen the successful transformation of derelict areas, through the work of dedicated volunteer residents.

"[This has brought me] new friends, [and is] helping me build better relationships with my neighbours, along with fresh air, a bit of exercise and giving me a great sense of pride in where I live."

Maiden Lane resident
Spitalfields City Farm’s Selby Gardening Club encourages residents of the Selby Estate to cultivate areas of unused land to produce flowers, vegetables, herbs and fruit. Aside from significantly improving the environment on the estate, the project has encouraged its residents to meet one another, work together, and enjoy each other’s company. Participants and organisers have noted a clear improvement in the ease of communication around the estate, which has played a positive part in encouraging a sense of ownership and belonging among its residents.

“I didn’t talk much to my neighbour R before but now we talk about our gardening.”

Selby Resident

The Burgess Park Food Project: Glengall Wharf Garden project has transformed a derelict park into a flourishing community hub, entirely supported by a diverse range of local volunteers all motivated to improve their local area.

The site, which used to be a common spot for fly tipping and anti social behaviour, now hosts a thriving volunteer community, maintaining the newly established natural habitat, and developing a safe, shared space for residents.

The community is now able to use the site for foraging walks and talks, as well as social, culinary and celebratory events. The group is laying the groundwork for the area to become an extremely valuable social, educational and environmental resource for the whole community.
Summary

The Growing Localities Awards are a snapshot of horticultural projects across the capital. The results show that a wide variety of innovative and engaging activities led by motivated and dedicated individuals are currently taking place, and successfully enhancing the lives of their participants and local communities.

Entrants to the awards were extremely diverse, but were united by common themes, particularly with respect to their remarkable achievements and outcomes.

A striking consequence of many of the projects was their encouragement of a beneficial sense of ownership and self-ownership amongst their participants, which is extremely valuable in maintaining a positive and comfortable self image. A fundamental sense of ownership over the area in which people live, as well as their own skills, contributions and decisions was apparent across all of the projects.

This engenders a sense of pride in your environment and community and – crucially – in your role within it. This was particularly significant in projects working with people who may have often felt that their responsibility for their own decisions was frequently taken out of their hands, such as those taking place in refuges, with homeless groups, or those experiencing mental ill health.

“If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable.”

Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

Across all of the projects, a consistent and powerful theme of transforming a locality into one owned, shared and enjoyed by its residents emerged.

The tangible social effects of the shortlisted projects are clear from the organisations’ enthusiastic accounts of their work. It is telling that the Poplar HARCA facilitators noted that the resident older and younger gardening groups became “comfortable to not only support each other, but to express and share opposing opinions” as a result of their shared project.

The relationships forged throughout this and other projects are substantial working associations, secure enough to air grievances and problems as well as to work collectively and positively with one another.
Not merely brief interludes of successfully and happily working together, the shortlisted projects all establish the ground for long-term significant and realistic relationships between people who might not otherwise have made a connection. It is the strength of these relationships that will enable residents to feel supported, connected and respected in their own communities.

“When I chased my mum with the worm it’s the first time I’ve seen her run.”

N, 8 years old. Selby Gardening Club

The positive impact and lasting social benefits of these activities are evident from their continued ambition and popularity. An overwhelming impression arising from the entrants is that of optimism and conviction in the work that they are doing, and the benefits that it is having, which goes a long way towards confirming the value of such innovations for London’s residents.

Harvesting potatoes. Peter Bedford Housing Association, Plot to Plate

There is still much to be done, however, and more communities to encourage into green spaces. The first joint report by the Environment Agency and the Greater London Authority concluded that around 16% of the capital is considered to have deficient access to nature, which does not take into account the still varying levels of engagement with available natural space across various communities.

The same report found that communities with the lowest rates of interaction included people over 65 years-old, black and minority ethnic communities, and lowest income households, groups amongst those perhaps most likely to experience feelings of social exclusion, vulnerability and isolation.

It is fundamentally important that community and local groups such as those involved in the Growing Localities Scheme continue to receive the recognition, support and encouragement needed to ensure that as many people as possible come to know the emotional and social advantages that nature provides. All of the projects featured in the Growing Localities awards have achieved exceptional success in improving the wellbeing and quality of life of their participants, and by extension the natural and social environments of their wider communities.

St Mungo’s, Putting Down Roots

Ten Good Reasons to Support Environmental Projects

01 Green spaces bring people together. Shared outdoor projects provide space for people to forge new relationships and to strengthen pre-existing ones, encouraging social confidence and reducing social exclusion.

02 Gardening supports the physical wellbeing and bodily health of their participants, providing opportunity for everything from pleasant gentle exercise to strenuous physical work.

03 Outdoor activities attract a wide range of people who may not be drawn to more traditional ways of working, allowing a wide range of people to develop new skills, confidence and qualifications.

04 The benefits of horticultural projects are far-reaching. Participants may enjoy specialist benefits, while the whole community gains from the transformation of their area.

05 Participating in environmental projects allows you to be a part of ‘something bigger’, and long-lasting, providing a positive sense of perspective.

06 Participation in gardening projects can encourage the reduction of stigma and isolation, and redress negative perceptions, through engaging in a shared or highly-visible positive activity.

07 Organisation of green space projects can come from anywhere, and successful participation is accessible at all levels, from enjoying a transformed space or its produce to cultivating the land and educating its residents.

08 Environmental projects allow participants to experience the benefit of stepping back from normal routines and environments, ‘clearing your head’ and taking time for yourself.

09 Horticultural projects work with structured methods and clearly defined aims, which is very welcome to people whose lives might be unfocused, chaotic or not stimulating.

10 Outdoor environmental activities for children support confidence, skills and health, and go a long way towards protecting the natural environment for future generations by ensuring it is understood, respected and enjoyed today.
Appendix

Growing Localities Awards Entrants (* indicates shortlisted)

African Physical Training Organisation (APTO)
Arlington Association*
Becontree Heath Islamic Society
Blackstock Triangle Gardeners*
Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses*
Burgess Park Food Project*
Calthorpe Project
Central & Cecil*
CGP London
Christ Church Primary School
Clapham Park West Residents Association
Community Links
Community Options
Cordwainers Garden Association
Core Arts*
Creekside Education Trust*
CSV/Retired & Senior Volunteers
Cultivate London
East London Garden Society, The
Epo Community Gardening
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens*
Fern Street Community Garden
Ferry Lane Action Group Environment Group
Forest School Harrow
Friends of Abbey Gardens*
Friends of Beckenham Place Park*
Friends of Eastcote House Gardens
Friends of Peckham Rye Park
Friends of The Tarn
Garden Classroom, The
Greening Brownfield
Groundwork*
Groundwork South
Green Peas UK
Hammersmith Community Gardens Association*
Hexagon Housing*
Higher Heights Youth & Community Organisation
Interfaith Action (Interact)
John Tucker Gardening Group
Kentish Town Improvement Fund
Knapmill Way Allotment Association
Lewisham Nexus Service
Limehouse Community Association
London Borough of Lewisham
London Orchard Project, The*
London Play
London Wildlife Trust*
Long Lane Pasture Trust
Lucy Brown House Wellbeing Group
Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust
Mencap
Mission Care
North London Action for the Homeless
Northbrook Park Community Group
New Cross Gate Trust
Oasis Children’s Venture*
Octopus Community Network*
Organiclea*
Pepys Community Forum
Peter Bedford Housing Association*
Plumstead Common Environment Group
Poplar HARCA*
Providence Row Housing Association*
Richmond Churches HT
Riverside ECHG
Samuel Montagu Youth Centre*
Selborne Society Ltd, The
Sherland Road Residents Association
Single Homeless Project
Solas Cymru
Spitalfields City Farm*
St Mary’s Secret Garden
St Marylebone Church
St Mellitus Church
St Mungo’s*
St Peter’s Church
Stepney City Farm*
Stewarts Road Adventure Playground & Youth Centre
Toffee Park Adventure Playground
Trees for Cities
Uniting Friends
Upper Street Association, Gardens Committee, The
Westcott Park Community Gardening Group
William Paton Community Garden Project*
Wimbledon Chase Primary School
Winterton House Organic Gardening Club

Credits

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