

Clapton Park Estate Case Study - Transforming Urban Green Spaces

There was a garden with a difference at the 2008 Chelsea Flower Show. A community garden created by the Clapton Park Estate, Hackney showed how to transform our urban landscapes whilst attracting a wealth of wildlife and encouraging the social and physical wellbeing of the residents.

The garden, a typical cross-section of one of the estate's transformed green spaces, was sponsored by Clapton Park Estate's Tenant Management Organisation, Natural England, Green Estates, Pictorial Meadows (seed providers) and Neighbourhoods Green.

By sowing annual flower seed, the muddy edges of the estate have been transformed into wildflower meadows. These formerly neglected grass corners require no watering or herbicide, which has resulted in improved biodiversity and less vandalism - all for less cost.

The Clapton Park Estate's venture started 5 years ago when the Tenant Management Organisation decided they wanted to add excitement and colour to the estate's 120 green spaces. They approached The Grass Roof Company to help them achieve this. John Little of The Grass Roof Company said: "Put poppies in front of a dull fence and suddenly the space makes you smile...all for 50p worth of seed."

The results of this project have made a huge impact to the residents of the 1,200 properties on the estate, whose view of the green spaces around them has changed as a result of the project. Pride in the results has encouraged them come to Chelsea and demonstrate to others what can be achieved in a city housing estate.

Jan Cowdell from the Clapton Park Estate said: "We are here to show everyone what can be done and, we hope, encourage other estates to take a fresh look at their green spaces. Our estate is now one where the residents have every reason to talk about and enjoy the green spaces around them".

Natural England, the Government's wildlife agency, has been working in partnership with Neighbourhoods Green in their quest to improve the open spaces owned and managed by social landlords, by analysing problems and identifying possible solutions. The Clapton Park Estate is seen as a prime example of what can be achieved by communities working together on housing estates.

Mathew Frith of Peabody Trust (a lead partner of the Neighbourhoods Green project) said: "The brilliant flowering at Clapton Park Estate is an excellent demonstration of how social housing landscapes can be transformed through a little innovation and courage to break away from the orthodoxy of green deserts. Neighbourhoods Green looks forward to further promoting such examples to others within the sector."

Alison Barnes, Regional Director for Natural England's London Region said: "We are extremely excited by the work that has been done by the community at the Clapton Park Estate and the example it sets for the many similar estates across London and beyond. Not only are these enhancements better for wildlife but they have major health and social benefits. Daily contact with nature brings the obvious physical benefits of encouraging people to be outdoors more often; and spaces enlivened by colourful plants, birdsong and the buzzing of bees lift the spirit and are good for the soul. We fully support the work of Neighbourhoods Green in highlighting the importance of the greenspaces owned and managed by social housing providers and are delighted to be able to sponsor this project."

As Derek, Clapton Park resident said: "I love it. It makes me feel good, it makes me feel free, in touch with nature, in touch with my childhood".

Natural England

Natural England is the government body that is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England has newly established a London region. It has been created to protect and enhance London's natural environment for people and wildlife by maintaining and increasing the amount, quality and accessibility of natural green space and improving the environmental function of the green space network and its interactions with the built environment.

The Clapton Park Tenant Management Organisation

The Clapton Park Tenant Management Board was formed in 1994 and has been running under a tenant management scheme ever since. The estate has around 1,200 properties mainly leasehold and there are at least 120 separate green spaces. In the past these spaces were maintained using conventional methods, however in the past 5 years they have been transformed through the estate's association with 'The Grass Roof Company'. The results have encouraged the Board to go to Chelsea (w/c 21 May) to show what can be achieved in a city housing estate in partnership with Neighbourhoods Green, who have used the site as a case study, and Natural England, who are sponsoring the event.

The Grass Roof Company

'The Grass Roof Company' is run by John Little, a specialist in developing a sustainable approach to green space maintenance and 'naturally' greening the urban environment. His approach on the Clapton Park Estate is based on a philosophy of mixing native/non native annuals to reduce the use of herbicides within urban environments. John says: "Maintenance and design shouldn't be separate, they will only work if they are combined. Maintenance contractors are the key to resident involvement in their green space". Since working at Clapton Park, the Company are being asked to demonstrate their methods to other Housing Associations, Tenant Management Organisations and Councils. See www.grassroofcompany.co.uk for further information.

Neighbourhoods Green

Neighbourhoods Green is a partnership project led by Notting Hill Housing Group and the Peabody Trust, highlighting the importance of green space in and around social housing. Through guidance, support and various tools, it aims to demonstrate the benefits of green spaces for residents of social housing and highlight ways and means of improving them to social landlords and their partners. It has recently published A Natural Estate, guidance on how to promote biodiversity on housing estates.

Neighbourhoods Green is supported by CABE Space, Natural England, Groundwork London and a number of social landlords. These include Circle Anglia, Family Mosaic, Gallions Hyde, Kush; Metropolitan, Newlon, Places for People and Southern. Further details can be found at: www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk.