

MICHAEL ROWAN, CHAIR, FRIENDS OF LOWNDES PARK, CHESHAM

My name is Michael Rowan and normally I would say I am a Trustee of GreenSpace and it's my role to chair conferences. Today I am happy to say that I am here as the Chair of the Friends of Lowndes Park, Chesham in Buckinghamshire, so I am one of you, not one of them today.

A few bits and pieces to give you a flavour of how the day will go, the speakers are all very strict to time and my colleague in the front here, Sarah, will give them timings of ten minutes, five minutes and one minute. If you notice that from where you are sitting in the audience, that is not us voting on how they are doing, it is to tell them how long they have left.

This is a great day as this conference is the culmination of the Park It! events that have been taking place over the last three years. Again with a different hat on, Mile End Park in Tower Hamlets was the first Park It event to take place and since then there have been 33 events, all more and more successful, and all learning from what other people have done. I think its brilliant and its particularly fitting that it culminates today; in a day when we all get together and talk about what we are doing and how we are doing it and who is doing what.

A few house rules – please put them (mobile phones) on silent or vibrate or switch off mobile phones because there is nothing worse than the phone going off in the middle of a speaker talking. I would like to thank a few people – clearly I would like to thank Birmingham City Council for once again making this event happen, sponsoring this event and finding such a great venue and such a great place. I was here a couple of weeks ago and it is great to come back here. Don't worry about taking too many notes, you will be able to download presentations from the website, after today apparently. We need the evaluation forms back from you, so while you are here please fill them out. It is really important you do because we do take notice. I sit on a group that goes through

evaluation forms and looks at who thought what and what percentage of people like this and didn't like something else. We probably have a good 45 minutes on what we are actually going to do next. So a lot of the other conferences and speakers all come about because of what the evaluation forms have told us. There is a panel discussion taking place this afternoon – you are going to have a chance to put your questions to a variety of speakers. If you have a particular question, can you please fill out the question sheet and hand it in to the GreenSpace staff outside, by the end of lunch.

A couple of official welcomes if I might, the first one is the Heritage Lottery Fund representatives, Rex Carson, Rachel Evans and Alison Millward. HLF are probably the organisation that has put in the most amount of money into parks in the last ten years without doubt so a lot of us have got parks that are looking a lot better than they would possibly have done and if I sound as though as I am crawling a little bit too much, its because we will be putting in our HLF bid in March 2008. The other official welcome is to CABE Space, that is Andrew Parsons and Brian Quinn. CABE Space are champions of excellence, design and management of parks, streets and squares, how they interlink, and they are specifically interested in how community groups can be engaged directly in the design process for new and improved spaces which is exactly what we are here today to do.

FATHER BRIAN RALPH
ST BARNABAS PARISH CHURCH, MILE END

It's good to be here, particularly coming to Birmingham, I haven't been here for years and years and it's fantastic to come back. What I am going to talk to you about this morning, you will probably think what is he talking about, it's nothing to do with parks, but bear with me and we will get there in the end. I think it is good to try and understand the context which I am coming from: Why the event works so well and of course, whichever community we are from, we are going to have completely different issues; different problems, different things to celebrate and be joyful about and different things to be depressed about, each community is different. So what we do in our little corner of Tower Hamlets in Hackney maybe different to what you guys will do in your places.

I have been a parish priest for 15 years now and my first place of work was in Yeovil in Somerset, which of course is very different to Tower Hamlets in the East End of London. I have been in the East End for 12/13 years - in Bethnal Green but when I first got there I noticed first of all coming from Somerset, that everything was very big and there were lots of different issues around. But particularly what I noticed that summer when I first got there in 94/95, that everybody it seemed at that time, was really in the party mood. There were Shoreditch who had just become kind of gentrified, Hoxton Square, Damien Hurst and others were all just breaking through on the scene and there were lots of things going on. It's a very densely populated place – not many green spaces at all, not very many parks, everybody seemed to be living on top of each other.

I read a story about this Franciscan friar in a book by Ken Leach. Some of you may know he was an urban theologian and he talks of this guy called Brother Neville Palmer. Now Brother Neville was a member of the Franciscan Order and in 1943 moved into an old brothel in Cable Street. So it was him and two other members of the Order, which took over this old brothel and kept it as a place of

hospitality and in those days, Cable Street, became a place which was full of cafes, bars and flats and so on. It was mostly populated by early stowaways from West Africa, lots of the early drug traffic was happening around there, lots of prostitution and so on, it was a really full on place in 1943. Ashley Young in his book on the East End of London, I think I remember reading, called it the most odoured, filthiest, repellent street in Christendom. But what Neville did there was to bring that community together, whoever they were, whether they were the gangs, the drug dealers, the stowaways, whoever they were, he lived among them and he loved them. Those were his people and he made that community work and even now if you go down into Cable Street, near the docks, you will find people in their eighties and nineties who still remember Neville Palmer and to them, he is still a legend. He used to wear this habit which at one point, apparently had been brown, but it was showing signs of greening, it was all very tattered. He was a very nervous person who would just greet people and then move down the street, but he was committed to those people and to that community.

I am a great believer in building community, my congregation sit there with pens and paper just to see how many times I use the word 'community' in my sermons. My daughter has even given up coming to church as she knows what I am going to say, it is about bringing people together. When I first came to St Johns on Bethnal Green, my previous parish, it was right above the tube station in the East End, a very busy place and next door to the church were these toilets and a small park, called Museum Gardens. The toilets were used for all the things that toilets were used for but mainly for intravenous drug use, prostitution and so on. Every time we opened the church building, whether it was for services or whatever, people from the toilets, the street drinkers from the park, whoever, would come in. It used to get really stupid, because we would have a queue of these people waiting and many of you might have these experiences, where you live - they would want money, food, clothes and so on. It came to a situation where people were starting to use and inject at the back of the church

and so we wondered what we should do about this. So we opened a centre right next to the park for all the different people, for all the people in the community, whoever they were just to come along and eat and work together. We had artists and musicians and so on, everybody came along, and it became a kind of collective, a collective across the whole community. There were people who went to the church, people who went to the mosque, people who drank in the park, people who did art, they all came together and made this amazing community. Every Friday morning, we used to have 80/90 people just working together. We had a nurse, who herself was a drug user, who would patch up their wounds and then we would go out and work on the streets at night with the young women who were working as sex workers.

Then when I moved to my next parish in Mild End, St Barnabas, we had similar problems and similar issues. So we decided we needed a way of bringing the community together again and like Neville back in those days. The way he managed to form the community and reclaim Cable Street for the people, we decided we needed to reclaim the north end of Mile End Park for the people. The Church at the time, hardly anybody went to, because it had become a clique, it had become somewhere people just met for themselves. We thought it was our job to open this building to the whole community and to spill over into the park. Now the issues seven years ago are the same issues today, we had within a year six people who had been shot or who had been stabbed, five of whom it was fatal and I had been doing many funerals for them. We also had a fatal shooting of Harry Stanley who was shot by the Metropolitan Police for carrying a table leg. All these issues and the community was starting to get a bit fractious so we were just saying to each other, what are we going to do, this is a great place and we need to celebrate this. So it was bringing people together in the open. We met, I think, six or seven of us in a bar in Mile End Park and we had old punk rockers, myself, other people involved with the community, and we decided what we would do, we would put on a festival, a free festival for everybody. In the spirit of those free festivals not where you saw anything

commercial and where you had to buy tickets for massive amounts. We did it just to see what would happen, to see if people would come along. Thankfully Michael gave us the park for free and we gave it a go and that first year, we had musicians coming in and playing for free; Finlay Qway, the old punk bands and lots of other different local musicians who just gave their time for free. We thought we would just see what happened and about three or four hundred people turned up. After that event, it just got bigger and bigger, and that space that was just used for dog walking, became a space where people felt they had ownership of, felt that something was really happening here and felt that it was somewhere they could meet people who they normally wouldn't. The interesting thing is that the collective which has now been built up, a collective of people that organises this event every year, come from the churches of other faith communities, guys who were sleeping and drinking on the bench, a couple of sex workers; who all meet together and prepare this event together. It is in its fifth year and we now have a collection of 65 community groups who are involved. It is grouped around housing issues, green spaces and parks, health, education, people looking at gun crime and so on; but its people working together. We also now work together with a dance space, a Sikh as well as the Hindu community and other artists. It has brought about this whole community cohesion just through a couple of people having an idea and being prepared to go with it.

I grew up in Gloucestershire, in a place called Cheltenham, which isn't that radical, and for me it was really important when I was growing up to have these open spaces. I spent lots of my time when I was a kid, in a place called Cleve Hill near Cheltenham race course. We were really lucky having all this open space to be around. When I was in Somerset as well, we had masses of open space and I just think it is really important that we exploit these open spaces wherever we can be. My kids go to this school in London, we call it 'the cage', because it's right in the middle of an estate in Bethnal Green, and they literally have a cage around it, which is from here up to the ceiling. It just looks like a prison, it is that kind of place, there is no grass, they just have tarmac, and they

are rubbish at football, because they grow up on tarmac. I am also Chaplin to a secondary school in Bethnal Green and again that is like a cage, there is no experience of being out in the open, being able to run around. We need to exploit all the spaces so we can give these kids the opportunity to be out and about, which we have done with this Festival. I will show you a copy of the DVD of a couple of years ago, just to show you the kind of people that come together. The point in showing this, is that place was really used for dog walkers and nothing was happening there. However in the middle of the film you may have seen some older members of our community and 'hoodies'. Due to the event, it drew together Age Concern with a theatre group (which again came out of this festival called Urban Theatre) and they worked together on a musical called 'The Hoodies of the King'. The older people played the 'hoodies' and the younger people played those who were judging them. It was quite interesting the relationships that grew out of that, to the extent now, where they have adopted brand new grandparents and that has been really positive as well.

There have been lots of other things that have been developed from the event and that is just one day but throughout the year we have lots of other things happen and lots of people working together. You cannot do this in a building that is why it was so important that that place was reclaimed for the community. You can do various things in buildings but to have an outside space which people pass day to day and walk through. People never used to walk through that park and it is really important - it becomes a life blood for that community because it is never advertised outside that small community. If we did, I think we would be overrun with some of the bands that we have. It is a place where we can showcase local musicians, talent from schools and colleges as well. Those people who may just pass each other in the street, have now befriended each other; they now talk to each other. As you probably saw, the Muslim community get involved as well and we brought together some Palestinians from West Bank for this event last summer. Through this event some musicians came over, they played in schools and the park. We had this incredible event one evening in the

church where you had Muslims, Jews, Christians, Socialists, Anarchists and whoever, all coming to this event and all dancing together in one of the most incredible evenings I have ever seen. That was due to being able to go to this park in the summer, get together and meet people. Others have got much better things to say about parks than me but just to say its worth taking a risk, its worth pushing boundaries and its worth reclaiming these spaces even though they may at first to be seen to be quite hostile. I think you have got to be brave enough to say, right this is our space, this is our community, and we are going to have it and reclaim it. We are going to work with those people who we may not necessarily want to work with and when we do, we might actually be surprised.

MARIANNE BROOKER AND LESLIE SILVERLOCK YOUNG ADVISERS PROGRAMME

LESLIE SILVERLOCK

Well this is Marianne Brooker who has just won the National Award for Social Enterprise of the Year – they set up a programme in East Anglia and she is fifteen.

MARIANNE BROOKER

This is Leslie Silverlock, Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor for DCLG and newly appointed President of the Young Advisors National Charity.

Leslie – we are going to tell you how to engage young people but we are going to show you some of the pitfalls, what works and what doesn't work

Marianne – and why its really important to engage with young people and what you get out of it yourself.

L – and we are also going to tell you about this new innovative scheme about young advisors.

Now, if you saw this (picture on slide) what would you do within the area that you live, within your local authority? Where people with prams and pushchairs have got to cross the road where a lorry has flooded the road. In fact this is a place where young people might, in fact do or did hang out before this happened. What is wrong with hanging out – how do we begin to make hanging out respectable?

M – Quite a lot of the time, we hear from young people that there is nowhere to go and sometimes the work we do goes a lot deeper than that, like really obvious things that are overlooked. Now this park, not only is it covered in graffiti, which

maybe isn't that effective, the work we do is to go to local authorities and make sure that they know that that's there.

L- You know that this is wrong, graffiti on garages and walls unless maybe it has been put together by a graffiti artist, but what would you do about it? Well, the young people that we work with (of whom Marianne is one of 154 at the moment around the country, but there are going to be lots more this year) in fact know about Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act. This requires every local authority to take into account the community safety implications of its decisions and if you don't wipe this out, basically it's going to get worse. There is going to be more rubbish, more people dysfunctioning, more people misbehaving, things going wrong in local communities. That is why we have got 120 odd seriously deprived communities in this country which we don't need to have because we are an incredibly wealthy society. And if we put up messages like this, 'no skateboarding allowed' – I live near Minehead in the West Country and I went into a park recently – no ball games, no skateboarding, no cycling, no playing musical instruments, really no sitting about eating sandwiches, what's all that grass for. Go and look at the flowers, that just about all I can do and walk through. It doesn't have positive signs you can skateboard over here, you can cycle here, so after dark people come in to the park and drink.

M – Another great thing about having young advisors themselves and the training that we undergo, is that we know all the horrible jargon that local authorities work with and we know how to talk to young people themselves, so problems like this don't happen so much. Like this skate park here (picture), it was put there by the Council. It got covered in graffiti and was not maintained very well and then they took it out and there was uproar, and then they put it back in and then they took it out again. The climbing frame is outside a housing estate (picture), the money was raised through a local youth forum and they were told you have to put it in this corner, right next to a main road, right outside this really rough

housing estate and now they have to take it back out even though they objected to putting it there in the first place.

L – in the last conference that Marianne and I did for GreenSpace down in London, I asked a friend before we did it, to go to where he used to live in Derbyshire, a fairly small town, and walk around and look (he is in his forties) at the places where he used to hang out with his friends and where he used to play. They were not quite as bad as this but he found 23 places in a town of about 80,000 people where he could no longer go. Buildings on them, places turned into a car parks, places where they used to be able to go had disappeared in that town. Have you come across the 'Dangerous Book for Boys', it teaches you how to make catapults and illegal weapons like that; you can't do that anymore in that town where my friend went.

You have got a blank space in the back of your work book in the back of the programme, could you just scribble down what you would do about that and then we will tell you what young people did. This is what the young people we are going to tell you about, can do: You can put a gate on the back of the alley by negotiating with the local authorities. The Sikhs in Southall got together because the Ealing Council told that it would cost £3000 for a gate on the back of the alley so the Sikhs in fact managed to gate the alley for £120. In Wakefield they got the people in the prison to make the gates for them, so they were in fact free, but they wouldn't let the people out of the prison to fit the gates at the time, but the young people we are going to tell you about, know how to do this.

M – We do a lot of neighbourhood regeneration work, this is probably the thing about parks and open spaces that bugs me the most in the entire world. You have all seen one of these before, it's a youth shelter (picture); its one of those quick fixes most authorities do absolutely everywhere. If there is a drug problem, a truancy problem, a vandalism problem, this is going to solve all of your problems. In the summer they are really hot and in the winter they are really

cold, ignoring the fact that they are almost completely vertical so you can't actually sit on the seats. They are called a youth shelter when they have a huge hole in the roof, so you don't actually get shelter when it's tipping down with rain. That's one of the things we are trying to get the local authorities to think outside the box with, the things they do and how they renew parks and open spaces when the money could be spent on whole host of different lovely things.

L – I was working up in Trameer Rock Ferry the day before yesterday and the young people up there are trying to get something like that in the right place in the park – a park with drinking problems and all other kinds of problems. The residents have set up an inter-generational project before they can do anything about it because the residents are saying that they don't want a youth shelter, because people will hang out all night and day, and get drunk and take drugs probably. We have to call it sheltered seating.

M – As with any presentation, we have to have bullet points or it wouldn't be fun. The sort of things we look at when we go in and work in parks and green spaces. A lot of the time you go into a park, either something that has been there for a long time or something that has just been designed and its really segregated. You have your old age pensioners over here, the dog walkers over there, young people can be here and no-one ever really gets to mix. When you look at parks being the focus of the community it would be nice if we got to see someone who wasn't exactly the same as you. Instead of going in and saying you should do this because I know more, we go in and we train existing youth councils, existing youth forums. So that they can then go into their local authority, with their background local knowledge of their area and say actually you need to be doing this and you need to be doing that, maybe look at doing it like this. These were consultations, so its not just someone sitting behind a desk saying – if I am going to get this funding, I have to ask goodness knows how many people, a few questions on a sheet of paper and it ends up being something photocopied, put through a few doors, and no one ever looks at it, its just a huge tick box.

I am doing some work in Braintree at the moment with Essex Rural Community Council and their consultation is absolutely fantastic. There is this whole big series of workshops going round schools, a big event in the park, probably not as impressive as yours but this is a big thing at this park. They are going for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, and it is just this huge big deal at the moment that the park is going to get made up, everyone in the community knows about it. Making sure that stuff is maintained by local authorities, that they know they have a responsibility and then in turn it will be maintained by young people. Making sure it is in safe and realistic locations. Like the shelter we saw earlier which was put right next to a main road or in the middle of a lot of trees because people are taking drugs, so let's just put them as far away as possible and then we can't see and then it's not a problem.

L – So that's what we think should happen, the youth shelter that has involved young people in where it should be put, that's the kind of thing we think should happen. The Young Advisors Programme that we are going to tell you about made five different videos from Ilfracombe to this one from Portsmouth. They went around their areas looking at waste ground, bad spaces in East Manchester and saying what should happen beside the canal, making places safer and making them more inclusive for young people to be not just present there, but be creative to socialise. They don't have places to go, like pubs, other people's homes to group up. Wouldn't it be better if they group up outside where everyone can see them and they can see each other, like down in Plymouth in front of the City Hall, where they skateboard, but the police are called every hour or two to chase them away. In fact quite a lot of the older people there in the summer, eating their sandwiches, like sitting there watching them doing their tricks over the street furniture. So we could adapt the street furniture, it would be a bit radical thinking outside the box, so that they could skateboard safely, properly and be completely entertaining.

M – I was trained about 18 months ago and I remember seeing this slide and thinking it was really cool. That is how we are trained up and know what we are going to do but now it's changed quite a lot, there are lots of exciting things going on with training. This is what the training package looks like and we are in the progress of getting it accredited as of yesterday by ASDAN. This is good for young people because they get an award at the end of their training which covers a whole spectrum of everything you need to be a regeneration and renewal consultant. It also means that when they go away and think, 'well I think people need to learn this and have one-off workshops and training sessions, which is what I like to do', they can go away and get it accredited. So the young people at the end of this training, can then write their own and sell it to people as an accredited package.

L – One of the exercises that they have to do in their training – we are going to ask you to do, they map their local community – this is somewhere near Nosely in fact. What they know is where the drug dealers are, who is taking the drugs, in fact it is not a problem in this community, they know the 20 people who are taking the drugs and think they are best left alone. That's what young people will say because they are not busy trying to apply the law. They know who is kerb crawling, they know who the prostitutes are, they know which house is a crack house, they know who is doing the graffiti around the back on the garages, those are the red spots on this map. When they are doing their training they mark the hot spots, now if you wanted to know those things, you would have to go and ask the community beat officer or the Housing Officer or the Parks Officer. They know where all the different problems are and they have come up with a strategy, in fact this group (they are aged 14 to 17) have made a film, for tackling some of the problems in that community. They are now negotiating with the local authority, with the police, and as you can imagine, they are knocking their socks off. So we are going to ask them to do it.

M- If I give you a brief spiel on how this is practically useful for you and we are not just killing time. It's an exercise to do if you have a group of young people and a group of local authority officers or someone who is quite apart from the young people and seeing how their two maps differ. You only have a couple of minutes to do this but you can go really in depth with this. I am a bit of a cow when I get people to do it because I say there are so many different levels – that you start off with a geographical map of your area and sometimes you get some local authority officers who don't know where streets go, which is a bit worrying. Where town centres, where facilities like schools, youth centres, where the council offices are in comparison to where housing estates are, which areas are really affluent and which areas are not, so generally there is a two way mix. Where the different hotspots are, a really in depth look at ethnic minority breakdown and if that relates to the hotspots. Then whilst young advisors have done it, then they put that all together and have this thing that they can go in as a calling card to local authorities and say look, this is happening and this is happening. But for you, you could quite easily use it in consultation, just to give people a bit of a deeper understanding to what is happening in their area. But today, if you could just draw a map of your area and see where you think different things happen and then maybe when you go back home, talk to someone else about it and see if their opinions differ.

L-In particular, put your park or open space, that you are particularly interested in, in that map as well and identify some of the problems. I can see one or two people that haven't picked their pens up as well, if you were with young advisors, you wouldn't get away with that.

M-You can stop with that now – if any of you are interested in some of the other exercises we do in consultation workshops, we would be happy to have a chat – there is a whole load of them.

L-There is a fabulous map on the Young Advisors website made by Stephen Reddy, a 16 year old boy in Bootle. He wouldn't come here, because he can't bear talking to three people at a time and he doesn't write either but he knows how to use his technology. He has made a map with 168 photographs behind it – you can go to different spots in Bootle and he can show you where the park has got broken equipment, he can show the councillors where the cemetery has got fences broken open so that any animal or person can wander in and out of the cemetery and so on. It's a stunning mapping exercise and you can download that one off the Young Advisors website which we will tell you more about it.

Have you got this problem anywhere near you? Abandoned vehicles, burnt out cars in people's front drives, their back gardens, or indeed in your play spaces. The Young Advisors without a protocol, which most local authorities have to write with the police, they can tell you how to get rid of a vehicle like that within 2 hours. You don't have to push it to the bus stop and ring the bus company and tell them that it's a hazard, which is what one resident's group had to do because it hadn't been removed for three months. You don't have to take an egg cup full of petrol and pour it on the petrol cap, like another resident's group had to do, and then call the fire brigade and say it's a fire hazard because it hadn't been moved for a month. The Young Advisors, these young people, can tell you how to get one of these vehicles removed, these eyesores out of your community, out of your park, out of your green and open spaces or close to them, within a couple of hours.

M- One of the important things that we have to try and get across is that like many types of youth groups and youth forums, we are not like that – its training young people up to be consultants so empowerment through employment, if you like. Its young people going into organisations, empowered with background knowledge, so that they can say, with credibility, that they know what is right. They can advise organisations from Central Government to Regional

Government officers, to Friends of Parks Groups, anywhere that has focus and benefits from Young Advisors on a daily basis.

L-Now we come to possibly one of the tricky bits for some people. We pay the Young Advisors £4 an hour, during the 30 hours that they are being trained. We pay them £8 an hour when they are doing their consultancy work, more than some school dinner people are paid, more than some youth workers are paid. We set the wage, what we call a respectful wage, for the knowledge and skills that they have developed. If you think about it, the young people in Hull when they heard that a community centre was being built, I think it was on the Preston Road Estate, they went and saw the Planning Officer, they looked at the plans and said that porch is too small. When the centre is closed, we hang out down the shops, we get told off. Why don't you make the porch bigger, somewhere for us to hang out safely and happily and talk to our friends? It took them four hours to do that and it cost £32, just imagine how much you would have to pay a consultant, an architect, a designer and a planner to not come up with that idea.

The toilet block – a group of older young people used to hang out on the children's play equipment down in Brighton. A community orientated vicar went and saw this group of older young people and said what would it take to stop you hanging out here and scaring the small children away from using their equipment? They said well that rubbishy old toilet block over there, that's walled up and has got graffiti all over it. Why don't you take down the walls, why don't you just leave the posts on the corner and we will go and hang out in there, and this cost very little other than ideas for this to happen. They also then got engaged in tackling some drug dealing problems in the basements of some old people's flats as well. This is a group of young people I mentioned earlier in Wirral, tackling parks problems, waste problems, fire setters. In fact the two Young Advisors, we found out, who were so successful in tackling some of the fire setting problems in the parks there, had been part of the gang the previous

year that was setting the fire, that is why they were so successful. They knew who to go to and who to tackle.

M- For some people sitting here, generally we do the spiel to strategic target people who are quite apathetic sometimes, like the audience we have to convince – this is one of those slides. It is very easy to write us off as it is just another youth initiative and we can just put it under the carpet, maybe pat them on the head a little bit when we have the youngest member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. We go in and advise local strategic partnerships – we know what all these scary acronyms means, we have written training packages on how to empower young people through the writing and delivery of your Local Area Agreement. There really is a strong knowledge base and a really keen way of directly engaging and empowering with local young people.

L- And they know how much your CDRP might be called Community Safety Partnership in your area. They know how much they are getting from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund of the LAA and what they are spending it on. They can go and advise them on whether that's a really good idea or whether they are just going to recycle anti social behaviour problems and move them from one park to another. They can talk very confidently about that sort of thing, not if you ask them to write a strategic plan maybe but they will go to the meeting and put some of these people straight about how they might be wasting some of their money.

L-This is a project called Girls Let Loose and what they did. This is a thing for you to convince the cynics that's it's a worthwhile reason for spending £8 an hour for these young people. Cost benefit analysis - how much money do we save by doing something like this? These girls set up a project in Runcorn, which in fact saved the police over £8000 over six months. This was because they were no longer being called out every day, pretty well every evening, certainly Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, by the old people living in a block of high rise flats

reporting there were young people hanging around the bottom. The girls set up one of these called a generational project, the police estimated that a call out, very conservative £65 for a call out, its actually nearer £185, but at £65 a call out, they saved 123 police call outs to that block of flats because of the work that these girls did, so £8000. Now won't we be mature partnerships when we can translate that £8000 into a youth worker who keeps Girls Let Loose going forever, its all our money isn't it?

M-You also probably missed a statistic but the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK are made up of 40% young people, 20 and under. If you divvy up all the open space that young people can go in and play in the country, every child should have an average sized dinner table to themselves, which is scary.

L- Golf courses, do you remember for every acre of public space, there is 80 acres of golf course in the country – if we were a communist country, we would say that one acre should be given over to play space for every golf course, wouldn't we?

M-Turn round to each person sitting next to you and each say one way how you already engage young people in whatever work you are doing, be it voluntary or paid, and one way you can, something different you can do – in 30 seconds.

L-One of the things apart from mapping exercise, the Young Advisors do, is called Youth Proofing. They look at the kind of documents that public services write for each other, that only speak to other public services and not the general community. For example, Wakefield green space strategy, they took a hold of that, its a hundred odd pages long and they read through it and they analysed it. They worked out all the things that nobody could probably understand that was in there and they re-wrote bits of it. They told the local authority that if they really wanted to have a good green space strategy, it needed to be a lot shorter. They could have this big fat one, but they needed to have a simpler one because you

don't make any changes and you certainly don't sustain them unless you have got the community involved. If the community has got 40% of people under 20, then they need to be involved. You know this don't you, it is your space. 'A Guide to Community Groups' working to improve public spaces, this is superb, it's an absolutely wonderful document, it mentions young people on two pages, but it is very good. Most documents don't mention young people. You also have this one 'How to Create Quality Parks and Open Spaces'. Good but hardly mentions young people, probably the energisers and the drivers in many communities.

M- Going back a little bit, it's quite interesting to see how the receptiveness of local authorities has changed quite a lot, around the youth grouping thing. I developed a short exercise to show them what its like to be presented with so much jargon. It was all text language, when you miss out all the vowels and it goes really horrible. I gave them a few sheets of that, stuck in front of them and said well this explains our workshop and translated this is what it looks like. The first conference I ever went to was our local launch; it was about two days after my first round of training. A couple of guys at the front, who I think were Warden Managers, pushed it to one side as though well I'm not doing it and I just stood there. Now I go into organisations and say you have to do this for us, its going to be fantastic, its really interesting to see how its changed, how our movement has got bigger and youth empowerment going up the agenda a little bit has really made a difference in the past year, which is cool. And another thing, going back, because I forgot to say it, generally when we used to go into youth group things, it was 'well we will keep this big fat document and then we will do a really dumb down version and that can be the young person's thing'. That's not what we do at all, its making a document that is accessible to everyone in the community. So the average 15 year old can't understand something because its full of so many acronyms and so many words like stretch targets and key performance indicators, your average 35 year old who doesn't come from a local authority background, wouldn't understand it either I would have thought.

L- The young advisors get involved in six different levels of activity – some just want to work in their local neighbourhood, help you sort out the parks and local spaces. Others want to work over a whole local authority area like the way I was telling you about in Bootle. Some work regionally, so Marianne is now working with the East of England Regional and the Government Office for the East of England and selling them Young Advisors. They sell their services, the Manchester Young Advisors are now self financing. They interview people from the primary care trust and the parks environmental services and so on, to see how they can schedule their working because obviously they are all at school or college or unemployed looking for a job. So they only have a limited number of hours. They can only work for ten hours a week if they are under sixteen but most of them probably only got 2 to 4 hours that they can operate on this particular programme. Therefore, they have to schedule and plan how they are going to do the work. Then others go to national conferences and speak alongside people like Baroness Andrews, some get involved in grant making. One of the exercises they do on their training is called 'Loose Change' which you might find fun to do yourselves. You just ask everybody to get loose change out of their pockets, imagine every penny is £100, it's a one off windfall budget, how would you spend that to improve the park. Make a list of priorities of how you would try to change that park. Because they are stakeholders, aren't they, they are taking some money out of their pocket and putting it in the middle, whether they will get it back or not is another matter. It's a nice little exercise, and as you can see, Marianne has been a young advisor for just over a year and she is delivering training, how many of you are delivering training now for other young advisors?

M- Every young advisor who comes out of their training is immediately able to go away and write a package and deliver it. Probably all of them have done something, whether going into DCLG head offices and training for an hour or taking a Friends of group and explaining to them how they can tap into the local authority more.

L- On November 5th in Manchester, November 12th in Birmingham and on November 16th in London, councillors are being invited to come to a seminar to be trained by young people in how to engage young people in their local wards. If you know any councillors or any of you are elected members, you can get your name down for going to those events.

M-This was a list that we used last time which has grown quite a bit of the schemes we have doing at the moment. There is also enough money from the Government for every new deal for communities area, of which I think there are about 16 that are getting them. There are 16 that are starting up new projects, so that's another 16, and then next week there is Intensive Pilot Project with Waltham Forest, so we are spreading like wildfire.

L-They are not constrained just to those areas. Young Advisors in those areas could go into a neighbourhood area and help you and if you don't have a scheme in your area, they will come and help you, or in fact it's really quite easy for you to start a scheme if you look on the website.

M- Our website for the social enterprise that I work for is www.beyond.org.uk and our national charity website which facilitates the whole movement is www.youngadvisors.org.uk so it's fairly easy to remember. It is probably best to ring up and speak to a person direct as there are so many ways of doing it to suit you specifically. It is probably best to talk to a real person and not a computer screen.

Just to end on a slightly positive note, if you are looking at working with young people, it's really important that you are working inter-generationally. It is not just about young people, it's a community thing and making sure that young people are able to work with older residents which they are perfectly capable of doing and have done a lot. The best example today would probably be that dear old Leslie, who isn't 21 anymore, bless him, and I am only 16. We have been

working together for a very long time and it works and we have done some cool stuff so I would urge you to get involved.

L- That is actually a demonstration of a week being a long time in a young person's life so if you are going to get young people make sure you plan it. Don't just go and talk to them because they will want results by next Friday, unlike people in Minehead who decided they were going to set up a skatepark in Tesco's, bought the land and its two years later and still no skatepark. Most of them have left town and if they have left town, they have left disillusioned about local public services and what they can achieve. Now we have got 20 people in other parts of the country who probably wouldn't try and engage with public services. One of the things we say is that young people will take anything, including responsibility which is what this programme creates.

The question you can't ask probably because its not politically correct, is well its alright for you, you have got people like Marianne who is going to be an MP one day or a youth parliamentarian or young people who do A levels. The group I was talking to you about earlier in Tranmeer, of those Lee, who will be fronting up the Manchester conference, hasn't been to school for a year. Inspector Mick Blees couldn't be his mentor anymore because he is a police officer and it clashed with somebody who is playing truant from school. However Mick is actually helping him in his spare time when he is not doing his police work because we know that this young man is going to go places. The same is for the two boys with ADHD up in the North East, George down in Brighton whose local copper said you are going to get an ASBO if you don't become a Young Advisor. Three of the girls up in the North West, I learned the day before yesterday when I was helping them a review of their programme, are pregnant now because that is one of the ways in which you get status in your community. In other words, these are young people who are facing difficult family economics, work problems, home problems, education problems, they are not just the high flyers in our society. The reason we are recruiting them is because they actually know what the

problems are, what the real issues are in local communities in parks and open spaces. Marianne's Mum who you are going to meet later, told me that she would have been shoplifting a year ago if the gang she was hanging out with had influenced her more than the Young Advisors Programme.

**EMMA WOOLF, BIRMINGHAM OPEN SPACES FORUM
AND
NICK GRAYSON, BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

Nick – Today we are basically going to present to you how things are in Birmingham currently, but more importantly how we have got to where we are. There has been quite a journey through this whole process and I think it is worth exploring and that is what we have done to our presentation. Explore the learning points that we have all made both from the professionals point of view and the community's point of view. I think the essence is that Birmingham is a surprisingly huge place, there's no other local authority that comes near the size of Birmingham. We are talking a million people and it waxes and wanes, some years its more and some years its less. A million people, ten parliamentary constituencies, and in 2011 its going to be the first UK city that is going to have a majority of ethnic minority in its population, so there are major issues that are happening right here within Birmingham. But one of the things that has happened over a period of time is that it's the voices of the people that are starting to be heard because it's their call for change that the politicians are starting to listen to. Emma will go through various issues around how the Open Spaces Forum has changed and how the perspective has been grown on that. I will make some comments about the parallel tracks and parallel lines that as professionals we have been walking on. Hopefully we will conclude with some elements around what we now feel is a much more shared vision of where it is we want to get to.

Emma – What is BOSF? If we had thought about it beforehand, we would have come up with a much better acronym – we are an umbrella organisation. We came together about three years ago because somebody said this would be a good idea. Our aim is to bring together all the Friends user groups of open spaces in Birmingham, as we are often all working in isolation. The park down the road from the park that I was in, we didn't know they had a Friends group and I am sure that's the same for cities and towns that you are in. It was important to

us that it was open spaces and not parks, isn't it 403 official parks in Birmingham, but that doesn't touch the surface because that is 403 places that have got the name park next to it. We are talking about nature reserves, recreation grounds, cemeteries, in some instances that is the best open space that a neighbourhood has got. That little scraggy bit of land at the end of the flats because again that is the only bit of open space that the neighbourhood has got and they think its their park so as far as we are concerned, we are interested in them. So we have got everybody from that nice concrete drying yard that they are trying to turn into playing space in our group and the vast acres of Sutton Park with their forty year old Friends Group. So that is who we are – now we are a voluntary group – I am the voluntary Chair of the Friends of Cotteridge Park, I am now the voluntary Chair of the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum. Nobody has decided to give us any money yet, so if you have got any suggestions that would be great.

Why have an Open Spaces Forum? Well we did it because lots of us were working in isolation so we thought, there has got to be good practice out there, there has got to be good experiences, somebody must have got some money from somewhere. So let's all get together and share that information so that we can help the individual user groups make the most of their space. As some of them were extremely well organised at bringing in money and resources and getting the Council to do what they wanted and some of us were bumbling around in a corner. So that is what we want to do, to make them make the most of their spaces. But we also wanted to be a unified voice for the city because one voice by itself doesn't get anywhere, in our case 96 Friends Groups working together begins to make a bit of a louder noise. We also wanted to bring together the user groups with the people who actually deliver the services, now in some cases that is the Council, lots of cases that is contracted out. But it was also important to us to work with those groups belonging to bits of land that don't belong to the Council. There are lots of bits of spaces I am sure you know about where you live that nobody quite knows who owns them anyway. Some will belong to Trusts that are impenetrable, you can't find who actually owns them,

and some of them are in theory in private ownership but are used by the public. So we wanted to bring all those people together, to meet, to discuss issues and to agree action. Three years ago we got together and we asked lots of people if there was a need and surprise, surprise, there was a need. So how do we work well again? I am sure you know this experience, it was rather us and them. Lots of our Friends groups reaction was 'bloody Parks Department, it's all their fault, blocking, stalling, saying no, being awkward and that is when you can get them to answer the phone, or email or a letter'. But equally they are going, no blame the user groups, they do their very best to keep us at arms length as we are trouble, we are awkward , we can be cantankerous and nasty and we can blame them for everything.

So we thought we would do the Scooby gang – a more positive friendly approach, that we wanted BOSF to be seen as a positive partner in an equal relationship. That we had as much to offer in terms of local knowledge because our parks managers are so overworked they don't actually get into parks anymore. So when you ring them up and say, you know that bit of space in the corner, they can't remember where you are talking about. It is important to us to recognise that the Parks Department is not the enemy, they are the other group in this city who care as much about parks and open spaces as we do. They would be dying to have loads more money to spend, they would love loads more staff, so we have got to stop seeing them as the enemy and that we are an equal partnership. If you want to pick on an enemy, pick on the politicians, because they are the people who actually control the budgets and to a certain extent it is down to us because we are often reluctant to pay more tax and unfortunately that is where the money comes from. So we have got a selling job to do on people, so they see that actually parks are beautiful, they are wonderful, they need investing in and unfortunately a lot of the time that comes down to us. It became apparent that the important thing was that we work with the Parks Department, with the parks professionals, with the owners of land, because between us with

our experiences and their experiences, we make a great pincer movement on the politicians, who are the people who have actually got the money.

This is what we do, I am sure you all do these things to a lesser or greater extent. Our aim is to use these sorts of modern and less modern technologies to provide all our user groups with up to date information about what other groups are doing and where money can come from. Whether there are training courses to go to, whether they can link up with another particular group, if a group has got a query. For example our latest newsletter has got a letter from one group on Japanese Knot Weed, very practical, very sensible, how are you dealing with it, can you let us know. Another one will be a success story of a group that planted a wildflower meadow and want to pass on the message how it is done. We can send out emergency email updates – there's a funding deadline coming up next week, quick put some money in. We have got a website, we hold conferences, we bring people together. Once a year we have a meeting with the officials and we all get together, it's a time for the parks managers, the people who make the policies, even a few councillors to meet these groups and actually thrash out specific problems. This year we are going to do it slightly differently. We are actually getting everybody to meet with the local PCT's to see how we can make the most of parks and open spaces in terms of improving the city's health and wellbeing. Again, I am absolutely frank, we are doing that because we think there's money in it and it might be another way to get money into your park or your open space.

The other thing we do an awful lot of, is sending out constitutions to people and I know that sounds really stupid, but the first questions people ask are: How do we get started? What do we do? What's a committee? So the other conference (we do two a year), is aimed at the Friends Groups themselves. It covers the very technicalities of how you run a group, how you motivate volunteers, again where you get money from, and those sorts of things. It is important that we mentor groups and network groups, we have a new group over in Ward End and another

group from a bit further over that side of town, its going to help them on a partnership basis. These are the issues that keep coming up, again I am sure that they are all familiar to all of you. The people who ring up and say they want to build a Tesco on our open space - somebody wants to do something to a bit of land or take a bit away because its for the very best for your park, if we sell off a corner. Getting groups started as I mentioned, helping groups restart and finding money.

Nick – Emma has gone through some of the issues that have come up that have clearly identified themselves from groups consistently across the city in relation to parks and open spaces. Yet it wasn't until 1990 I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. We had an urban development corporation created in East Birmingham to try and regenerate the industrial areas that were fairly derelict. A decision was taken with the start of that industrial zone, we were actually going to do public consultation big time, in relation to everything, housing, public open spaces, parks, schools, employment, everything. It was the first time that the parks professionals had never really taken on board the notion of talking to communities. Going beyond the idea of just turning up at one committee where the local voice for the local action to do a particular thing turned up and that was what actually went forward. To actually do something proactively, outreach and find the missing people and the missing pieces in the puzzle. It was the first time we tried it and the big surprise across the whole city, the more we did of this, was the positive responses that kept coming back. As far as the people are concerned, public open space and the environment, was right up there as one of their top agenda items. It wasn't on the politicians agenda at all, but in terms of the people it was one of their number one issues. This was for all the reasons we have heard about this morning, young and old, it's a unifying potential place. So this term of latent guardian because not only were people willing to participate in consultation exercise, they were actually putting their hands up to say what can I do? It really took quite a long time for us

to acknowledge that really; in terms of the public they were actually really keen. So over the past 17 years, we have tried to build that more into our policy.

We were lucky enough to be the UK lead on a European research project that looked right the way across Europe at all the ways in which other European countries, both EU countries and candidate states. We went all the way to Turkey, right the way across to Dublin, Finland, right down to Albania, looking at how parks and open spaces are managed in these places and how all the different disciplines that are involved in them, come together. I mean there is no EU policy on parks and open spaces, none, so again as far as the people are concerned, it's a key, but politically it just isn't there so the driver behind the research was actually to try and push that. What came out of that was that really there is a need for re-skilling the profession and you are almost looking at the idea of creating a new profession. That actually parks are far too important to be in the hands of horticulturists, they are actually something that is far more generic and addresses a much wider agenda. For goodness sake, let's everybody wake up to the fact that these places are fundamental to the future of cities, so that's the way we are heading at the moment.

Emma – So having got to the point that they are taking us seriously and we have stopped throwing things at them, we need to move to the next stage. We need see some results from this partnership working we wanted to see some outcomes. Basically our outcomes are more money for open spaces and more input into how that money and other resources are used. As I am sure, again you know, as soon as you start to volunteer for something – as Marianne has discovered – they will keep using you all over the shop. We need to spend all our time persuading our Open Spaces Forum members to get involved in their local committees. I won't bore you with what all words mean and I am sure you have similar ones where you are, so we are asking local people to join CSP's, environmental theme groups, and ward advisory boards. That is where you have to be if you want to influence decisions at a local level, and get hold of some

money. Then on top of that we are asking people to get involved city wide so you have got to have an input into who has got the money and can we then distribute that out to BOSF members. Who has got the policy? How do we influence that? So again we are asking people to get involved.

Now a couple of examples are, we have been working with Nick on the Birmingham Environment Partnership. For the first time BOSF is recognised as a body that can be a filter through from the centre down to the local and it feels like it is really making progress. They recognise our value and we are able to make good use and support our user groups as such. We are also involved in a new local charity called Birmingham Trees for Life and again they have recognised that we are the route through to the community. By making use of us they can improve the disbursement of money and it can be more effective and more efficiently used. You have got to be a bit careful when you make yourselves invaluable as its very hard work and again a lot to ask of volunteers, as most of us are volunteers. One or two manage to squeeze it in through their job but for most of us, this is unpaid work.

Nick – We just about came together in both our thinking and physically in time within the city to work together on the parks and open spaces strategy for the city. This is now adopted as a supplementary planning document to the whole planning system. There was a great deal of involvement in terms of consultation and community input. There was a need for more but at least there was a recognition that you cannot create something that is going to last 10 to 15 years into the future and not positively engage with all these stakeholder groups and so as an example, that has worked quite well. One of the things that stands out of that was a need that parks are very simple places, when they are empty they are just grass and trees, but actually they are incredibly complex places to manage. They cover a whole complex agenda of issues and so what we have devised is a comprehensive assessment tool, a checklist, and the Birmingham approach to that is to do it jointly between officers and members of the Friends Group. This is

so that you get their perspective and our perspective on the value of a space and really what we are trying to extract from that is to quantify the community value. That is something when we spoke across Europe to all these other European countries, they really didn't feel as if they were engaging with that on a regular basis. To actually get direct engagement with communities and direct involvement, again it was an emerging issue rather than something that had been run for a long time. The key issue is the more we work together, the closer we work together, again the speed at which local authorities are able to do things, frustrates the Friends Groups and frustrates everybody. It frustrates us but we are used to it. Just as an example, we have got well over 400 parks in the city, an example recently given by CABI is that Paris has 1% of its city budget devoted to parks. The budget for Birmingham is three billion so 1% is thirty million. When I first joined the department x number of years ago, our budget was 28,5 million so we were actually very close to what we should have been on. Since then we have had ten million pounds taken off it from cuts, so it's hardly surprising that we are where we are in terms of issues. The city's motto is 'Forward' and has been since its inception in 1889 and its got this incessant drive that whenever Government is thinking of doing anything, Birmingham is first with its hand up, saying yes we will be one of those, we will do that, we will try that. Within the authority, its just amazing that we have so many strands that we are running with and so much changes going on that nothing ever stands still for longer than five minutes, its constant restructuring, constant change, which for us is really difficult to deal with. Trying to explain that to community groups or other people that you are engaging with – 'that well actually the decision maker you met with last week, isn't the decision maker anymore, but in fact there are three people you have to see now and so that's another three months before we can tell you whether or not we can give you £10 000'. The process is almost becoming unmanageable but one of the sad consequences of all that is that it's all performance driven and everything has to be measurable. All those community links, they are not measurable, they are soft skills and they are being stripped out. There isn't that conduit, there isn't that network of people who have

those community skills and community development officers who used to be those conduits with the groups who could explain and spend their time and build capacity within communities. It's gone, because it's not performance related and the net result of that is exactly what Emma was saying. All the emphasis is then on the part time amateur in terms of well how do I drive it forward without anyone else being between me and this great beast of a local authority that's got three billion pounds? How can I actually get hold some of that to spend on my space?

Emma – So those are the difficulties about working with a large local authority but there are some bonuses – this is my picture of a community on a plate for a local authority. Nick said he thought it was a jelly when he saw it. The bonus is we have the opportunity because we are that conduit. Unfortunately we are the unpaid amateur conduit but most local authorities, I am sure you know this, can't get by with any policy or any document without saying – oh, we have spoken to the community, we have. Most local authorities, either because they are short of time or lack knowledge, find it very difficult to find the community. So one of the good things we have got, our value, our use is in the fact that we can bring the community together. Give them the opportunity to speak on their behalf but also speak for them sometimes. What the last three years has shown us is that we have made huge progress in getting the officers to trust us, that we are practical, resourceful people, useful people, we are a contributor to the system. We are not an additional workload for them, but we think we have got as far as we can with that. Nothing is going to change any further without us arm twisting the politicians which in some ways sounds obvious, but it felt like we had to go through that first step before we could get to this one. But now is the time in Birmingham to turn the spotlight on the politicians.

The drawback of a city this size is that Ward Councillors aren't interested beyond their ward, they are certainly not interested in constituency wide, and they certainly aren't interested in city wide. But its city wide where those decisions are taken, about where the money comes from, so we have now got to do the next

job which is to mobilise the member groups. We want them to mobilise their members to keep hammering away at the politicians when it comes to elections, when it comes to budget decisions. But money spent on open spaces or redirected to it, equals votes and this is a huge job for us to do and we are not yet resourced to do so. So we need a champion, we do need someone in Birmingham, who is a senior respected politician, who will take up the voice of open spaces users and ensure that those are heard across the city. We have got to our first big test now. Birmingham City Council will be sending out – you will like this phrase, its Grounds Maintenance Contract for Reprourement. Which basically means that they are handing out the contracts for who does the actual grass cutting and it feels like this is the point at which we find out if they really are taking us seriously: Whether we are going to be included in the negotiations in a meaningful way, whether our requests, that they are going to recognise that the BOSF members and their groups are a really good local resource for monitoring how those services are actually delivered, seeing as their officers haven't got the time to get out there. And can we convince the politicians that this is not an opportunity to save yet more money, but an opportunity to raise standards and meet voters expectations? Will our champion come along in time to do that and will someone please find some money to help us do it? This is my favourite bit and I am so proud of this – the jury is still out.

Nick – So finally we get to the point where hopefully we are now trying to form a sort of shared vision in terms of where we are going. It is beyond them and us because what is really needed is a much broader appreciation of what parks are all about. We have to get beyond the single site issues which are important but there is a much larger argument to be had in terms of how parks and open spaces within a city, within the fabric of a city and its future development can actually serve a major role. It needs to be raised up on the political priority list to be seen as being absolutely fundamental to sustainable development. Everybody, all politicians, every Government document talks about sustainable development. I have yet to hear a Minister speak who actually understands it.

There is no comprehensive grasp of what is behind it and the whole issue of balancing social, economic and economic practice in decision making and forward planning. It just doesn't seem to be there but that is where parks need to sit, within that whole debate. Much more broadly than that, beyond the city councils, beyond the local authorities, beyond the government people involved, the whole city in terms of corporate responsibility and much wider stakeholder groups, needs to be engaged in that process. So as an ambition within our parks and open spaces strategy, we have said that over the lifetime of that strategy, which we are looking within ten years, we would like to establish a Parks Partnership Board in Birmingham. To be a mechanism, a management tool that actually has on it, the city council, the members, also the community, the PCT's, the Chamber of Commerce and everyone else that is a major decision maker. All in terms of driving the city forward as a whole and recognising the importance that Parks can deliver on all those agendas of health, education, welfare and everything else. So it fits in terms of what has been talked about in terms of green taxation and changes. These slides are a couple of examples from Holland, where in one town, the local people are able to get discounts on their council tax. By assisting with the grounds maintenance and actually choosing to have an involvement that is financially related to what they pay in terms of maintaining the green and open spaces within the town. The role of the authority is to help train them in terms of delivering on that. It is just an interesting model in terms of what is happening elsewhere that we might want to pay attention to. That is our position really. For me the future also needs to be about a different profession, a much broader profession with a much broader outlook in terms of where parks are at.

PAUL BRAMHILL
CEO GREENSPACE
AND
DIANA JONES
COMMUNITY NETWORK MANAGER

Paul – I thought it would be quite interesting to start this section off by reflecting on why we are here and how we come to be here. In 1996 the Heritage Lottery Fund launched its programme for public parks initiative, funding public parks and since that time, and now in co-operation with BIG, they have put over half a billion pounds worth of funds into public parks and it has done a huge amount to change the face of many of our town and cities across the country. I think where we first came from in terms of building up our approaches to working with communities, was to encourage the Heritage Lottery Fund to look at not just the legacy of completing a project and not see that as the end itself but very much to see it as a starting point, how it is engaging with the local people who have lived there and one of the key issues was we were trying to put back years of neglect somewhere in the region of twenty to thirty years neglect into public open space.

One of the things we wanted to look at was the sustainability and how do we also make sure in having invested this money into public open space that we don't just go into the same process of decline. Another thirty years we would be trying to find another half billion pounds just to put right what we did over the last five years. That led us to work I think inspired from the States in particular. When we were forming the Urban Parks Forum, we had linked with the Urban Parks Institute in New York and there the levels of decline in their public open space was so radical that community groups had actually come together and started to campaign and form a really active body of residents trying to transform their space. Its not that we didn't have examples here in the UK and one of the early projects I was involved with was looking at Nunhead Cemetery and that was a great example.

Friends of Nunhead Cemetery had been going for 18 years and they really have been the reason why the cemetery had been conserved and that they took on the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and now it is a really valuable open space within Southwark. So I think stage one was to see what we could do in terms of linking together with community groups across the country and I think with the HLF funding, a lot of groups started to form at the same time. Now some of those we are talking about, hoping that groups didn't just form for a project and then disappear and I think the whole point of this was to try and see can we link to groups, can we provide a service to community groups, to inspire them, to take on not just receiving a project, to actively programme, to get involved with the future management and development of those open spaces so that the investment didn't just fade away.

So I think that is where we started, we set up the Community Network – Sarah Moore founded it, spent a lot of time trying to contact you all and trying to set up the links across the country and that grew into a website and then into Community Green Place, an e-newsletter which now comes out monthly. So echoing what Mike said, we hope you all are linked to that network. The second stage was what we have seen over the last three years in the Park It! project and that was trying to look at some of the outcomes from the research from the community network. We got lots of feedback that groups wanted information on training, on how to campaign for public space protection, how to look at conservation, how to look at funding but also there were lots of concerns on how to sustain groups, those who had come together. How do they actually attract more of the community to get involved in the work they are doing, how to keep the numbers up, how to sustain the groups so that they can sustain the interest in the space?

Park It! was conceived of to look at how we can work with groups and how we can build capacity in groups through the development of events to really encourage them to grow their numbers, to look outside their normal membership and to really embrace the whole community. I think some of the discussions this morning clearly illustrate how that occurs, how that has

happened and how successful it can be. So I think we have generated this better understanding, we have tried to understand how better to support groups to give confidence in the fact that groups can put on fantastic events, they can be small, they can be very varied, they can be large scale. I think the largest was about 11 000 people in the first year in Belfast, so a whole range of events. I think what it has achieved is over to Diana to tell us.

Diana – Well the team has been doing a bit of evaluation of the events over the past three years and there have been 33 major events and 18 smaller ones and Holly has just told me that she thinks that over the three years, they have been attended by about 100 000 people. This aim to make groups stronger and retain their volunteers and move from strength to strength, certainly seems to be borne out by their evaluation. Apparently 50% of groups said that they had seen an increase in their Friends membership since their Park It event, 83% said they had seen an increase in the use of their parks since their Park It event, and then there were other more incidental benefits which are interesting. If you have been to the No 1 workshop 'Friends or Foes', this is an interesting one, 86% said they had improved their relationship with their local authority by working on the event management together and then interestingly in relation to what DCLG are wanting community groups to do, 75% of groups involved with Park It! events have taken on a more managerial role in their site in the last six months and surprisingly 81% are keen to increase that involvement even further. So you are gluttons for punishment out there really.

Talking to people today in the lunch break, it's evident that there is just so much enthusiasm and also there is so much experience out there and it's really how we can hang on to that really. We feel we want to just bottle it and take it home; it's worth a fortune for our parks and our parks managers. So what are we going to do at GreenSpace to try and capture that and make use of it. As Paul said, the first thing we have been doing is to try and refresh our Community Network and please do go onto our website and register your group on there if its not already and also tell any other groups you know about the network, because it will only ever be as good as the number and variety of

groups who are part of it. GreenSpace is in a great position to be a resource for community groups involved with open spaces and we have got an excellent website and fortunately this year we have had a bit of government money. We are very grateful to CLG this year because it has helped us to develop the Network and refresh it but also to try and make our website to make a kind of one-stop-shop for you providing all sorts of information for groups involved with green spaces and that work is on going at the moment.

The most exciting thing of all really is, and this hopefully is going to become evidenced in the next week or two, that we are setting up an online forum on our website for groups to exchange information because this seems to be the thing that wasn't really happening. There is lots of information out there – I know now talking to people at lunch time that there are quite a lot of local forums and you are beginning to exchange information locally, but what we can do as a national charity involved with green space, is facilitate that nationally online. We are hoping that it will happen in the next week or so and we will be emailing you all to tell you that it has gone live. But what we are going to be asking you to do is to help up kick-start that – we feel that the people here today are the real experts, you have shown that by turning up on this particular Saturday. You are experts in many ways so we hope that when we let you know that the forum has gone live, you will go on there and perhaps raise some of the issues that have been raised at the workshops today and it will give you a chance to say what you wanted, so I hope that you will use the forum to exchange your experiences.

The only other thing I need to say to you today is that we are really regarding you as our big focus group – we are looking to take away from this meeting some ideas of what you think GreenSpace could be doing as a national charity for you and the evaluation form, which I will mention again, you will see on the second side we have asked you a few questions about your group and something that a number of people have talked to me about today, is how many of the groups here are in forums. How many forums already exist? So I have already got the first thing to take away that we have got to do. Two or three people have been lobbying me saying can we at GreenSpace find out

what forums exist and can we bring them together in a meeting, so I certainly have got one thing to take away already. So can you please be sure to fill into the evaluation forms and its going into a prize draw.

GREAT PARKS, GREAT PEOPLE

20th October 2007

Questions and Answers Pre Lunch

Question – Starting with Brian, I think Brian reminded us that all of us who have organised events in our parks, any thing like that, we have all done it. We start with a wing and a prayer, it's just that what he gave us was very close to the bone. Marianne, obviously very inspiring.

I would just like to ask if we could have a hand count of those of us who have achieved any Local Area Agreements, one of those smart things that Marianne introduced on the screen. So in other words, if any of us have got any departments other than parks, to sign an agreement to deliver, whether its children's services or health or sport, could we show now.

Question – A question for the youth advisors, how do you deal with the problem of long time spans between starting a project and finishing it, for example our local skateboard park took 8 years from inception to construction and then they built it without any toilets and in the wrong place?

Marianne – Well I think if you have got young people involved in the process all the way along anyway, then it will probably move a little bit faster. The worst thing about the time difference is you go in with – 'we are going to do this, what do you think?' and then you go in and say, 'we are still going to do this' and then its 8 years of hearing nothing. I think the best way of dealing with it is that stuff does take a long time sometimes but just making sure that they are kept informed and kept involved and they are leading that process and that they know why it's taking 8 years. It's not just a fobbing off.

Question – To Brian – obviously the festival is a fantastic annual event – could you say a bit more about what happens to the other 364 days of the year on that local park and in particular in terms of some of the issues raised around drug dealing, prostitution, etc – do those things start happening again at other

times throughout the year or are there other events happening throughout the year which mean that those issues are elsewhere?

Brian – We have stuff going on in Mile End Park all the time. We have some fantastic park rangers as well who get to know the community very well and get to know the young people well. They spend a lot of the time engaging with school children, with the older people too. There are lots of educational programmes that go on. We have environmental programmes in the park where kids who are primary school kids, can do pond dipping, learn about ecology and so on. There are bat walks at night, flower walks and so on. Next week I believe we have got 'Park in the Dark' which is an annual event and each year we go and Michael spooks everybody out around Halloween in Mile End Park. So it is constantly used and the park rangers engaging with the young people help a lot and it's a funny park, because it's very thin and very long and it goes through quite a few communities. There's an ecology centre, there's an arts pavilion, there's also a green bridge which links the park across a big main road to the other part of the park which runs down towards the Thames and so there are lots of things that go on all the time.

It looks as though we shall have to redefine the use of the park – they are not just green spaces where the horticulturalist is king, but they have other uses and with the help of these wonderful youth people, I am sure this would be possible.

Question – In Bristol, one of our major problems is an absence of experience in horticulture and grounds maintenance in senior management so it does concern me. I think horticulture is very important in parks and I would be interested to know where people see the balance to be drawn between horticulture in parks and other uses in parks?

Michael – Because I am a trained horticulturalist and make no apologies for that and no-one designs anything in my park without my say so and what actually the plants are and I argue the toss of whether this can go in or that can go in. But I think what has happened is I started training in the mid

seventies, 1976 onwards, and I just think the job changed, quite rightly, because I think I remember a time when it was keep off the grass and there was a little section where kids were allowed. If you look in the history books, parks were places where kids weren't allowed. It was a breakthrough when kids were allowed in there and I think it's great that we have moved on now and the thing I like best about my job now is that it's completely different. I can still do the horticulture bit, I can still talk about special occasions and what needs doing, contractors can't bamboozle me, you do need that information but the actual thing is the park is there for the people to use and so I have learned a lot since leaving college and formal horticultural training and moving on now to how the community can use it as their space and yes it helps sometimes to be a horticulturist. I think it's more of a partnership than it ever was and that is probably a good thing.

Nick – I agree with all of that. It's a tongue in cheek comment in a sense because like Michael, I'm a Master of Horticulture with the RHS, also a landscape architect. I am completely and utterly dedicated to the idea of high standards – I don't see them and that's the problem and I find that hugely frustrating. Part of the problem is, politically the budget and decision making is around how cheaply can you do your grounds maintenance. The fact that it's even called grounds maintenance is an indictment to what the purpose of parks should be. So my argument is that we need to have a much broader definition as to what parks should be and what the professional skills are required to run parks which then opens up a whole different group of categories of funding and areas of influence, way beyond grounds maintenance because we can all see what that results in.

Question for Brian – We have a park in Exeter that last year celebrated its centenary. We have a lot going on in there and as Exeter Park Watch we help coordinate support encouragement and make things happen and we were very interested to see that whilst we were tackling anti-social behaviour, this park was set in 1906 and we found that it said that it was established to cope with the problem of unruly youths in Exeter. So we realised that we hadn't come anywhere really, we had just come full circle. We found also that

a lot of anger amongst our young people, particularly in a very small part we are dealing with at the moment, is youth anger against other youths that trawl across the city and come in and trash the work that young people have done in their own parks. So whilst we have engaged some of the young people and things are happening and they are being positive about it, what can we do about a situation where we have outsiders coming in and making it really difficult for those who have made progress?

Brian – Just to say what I found has worked for us in our community, and as I have said every community is different, is getting young people to work with other young people themselves. We have within our local area partnership, we also have a youth forum and a youth parliament who go into other communities and work with their other young people's parliament too and I found that those things work incredibly well in my community.

Marianne – It's probably a good sign in itself in a way that the young people who have worked in that park, are angry about the fact that it is getting trashed, it's obviously a sign that they are passionate about it. Exactly what Brian said, its about working together and finding out why the young people who are coming in and trashing it, what facilities they have wherever they come from and how they can work together and how they can build an area that is suitable for everyone that they don't want to trash because they like it too.

Lesley – There are some remarkably simple solutions that are in fact quite difficult to implement aren't there – no park should ever be locked, we should create walk throughs to parks, and open spaces because we know that CCTV is actually an abject failure compared to improved lighting and capable guardians. For every crime that is committed there is an absence of one of us or a capable guardian, somebody around, more old people out walking on the streets. Its been proven that because the lighting has been improved, most of us won't commit the offences that we might have otherwise have committed. I mean if you are worried about leaving parks unlocked, which some people do seem to be, people who are going to commit offences will commit them

anyway, they will just go somewhere else to commit them. So if we have people walking through the parks, at least we are probably protecting those parks, using them a bit more effectively than maybe we do at the moment. I come across an awful lot of parks that are locked up.

Questions To the Panel

Panel Members

Marianne Brooker, Emma Woolf, Jane Brooker-Wood. Nick Grayson, Marcia Springer, Holly Rosenegk

Question – Kathleen Marshall is Scotland’s Commissioner for Young People, this week she published her report of her survey which showed there is a shortage of adults prepared to volunteer to work with young people through a fear of being accused of harming them or being branded a paedophile. How best can we overcome this fear in adults and encourage more to volunteer with young people.

Answer Jane – Its certainly something that we have struggled with within Young Advisors and we found one way of getting around it by linking in with local authorities and their partners, Connexions, local youth groups that were already there, and encouraging members who had already worked with young people and were therefore already CRB checked and had some experience to become mentors. The problem with that of course is that we are not encouraging ‘new blood’ to move into working with young people. I think one of the easiest ways around that is to make the most of the opportunities that organisations like National Youth Agency offer training for volunteers. It’s certainly something that we weren’t doing up until very recently, a couple of months ago. But there are heaps of opportunities to get either paid full training for your volunteers to work with young people or to scoop down funding from other agencies and there are loads of places that can offer that training so make the most of those. I think also as well on a local basis which I know a lot of you guys are working on, is to use the community members that you have already got in your community, that you know already have

basic links with young people, parents that have already got kids at school, tap into them. Older members of the community that are keen to get involved, take a couple of those off and get them trained up, get them CRB checked, its nowhere near as difficult as everyone thinks it is and as soon as you get one or two of them on board, involved, trained, CRB checked, you will be able drag others on board as well. I think you need to make it as accessible as possible for people like that to work with young people and we need, while keeping young people safe, we need to start breaking down some of that because it has become this huge issue that young people can get you into heaps of trouble, you can drop yourself in it by working with them. It makes it impossible and we need to break some of that down.

Question – Problems with motor cycles, access issues, danger to themselves and others, terrorising people who want to use the park – is there anything we can do. How do we cover it nationally?

Nick – It's a common issue – we have increasingly worked much more closely with the police because there was a time when the police were quite happy when they were in our parks and not on our streets, that's no longer the case and we have had some fairly high level meetings with the police at central level whereby money was found within the police service and also instructions and training were provided so each area of the city is now supported by an off road bike unit as part of the police network. They have taken it very seriously and have been able to follow it through and the sad truth is what prompted that was the death of a child in one of our parks. We had a near miss and raised it as an issue and whilst we were still trying to sort it out, somebody got killed in another accident. At that point everyone decided that they had to act and now it's being taken very seriously now and we have far fewer problems and certainly the managers on the sites only have to pick up the phone, they have got the local contacts and the response is very good.

Michael – This problem is not going away because every Christmas more young people get things like monkey bikes and what have you, so its not that we have got rid of the problem but we have managed it quite well and its

similar to Birmingham's experience, we did that by cross party working if you like. We worked with the local police, we worked with the people who deal with young people with anti-social behaviour, not just young people but everyone with anti-social behaviour, we worked with the local paper with reporting it, we worked with the police so that they could take bikes off people, and then we did photographs of them getting crushed and put them in the paper. So really from our point of view and also we set up lines where everybody could report what was happening. Now the police can't actually deal with all these things but generally speaking certainly the area that I am working in, they have got a limit on their time and they can't always respond to a motor bike in the park. However they do their best and we are working together on that and in fairness, probably because we had a really wet summer, but the incidence seems to be quite a lot lower, it seems to be going down since we set up this group. Does that answer your question?

Lady – I think that the response time is bad – we do have numbers that we can phone if there is any other trouble in the park too and we phone it, but the response time doesn't seem to be quick enough. I think the printing pictures of crashes and crushed up bike might actually be a good idea but in terms of access, there is access from main roads to our park, we can't put gates on because we need access for various services, so they just come in off the main road, and go in and out, so I have no idea what to do.

Michael – There is no quick fix for sure. There was another thing which they did – there was a piece of the law that explained that there are only certain places where you can drive them. Children say I want this for Christmas and parents say, 'here you are' – they don't actually think of that part – and just go down to the park and ride it. What we did was publicise it and we went around to all the shops that were selling them. Not everyone took it in, but we made a big thing about it and in the newspaper it said we are going to inform shopkeepers that although you are selling them, they may not be able to use them, they may be taken off you and so on. To finish it really, it's a multi-pronged approach and it's an ongoing thing.

Question – Have you any advice about risk assessment and obtaining public liability insurance from park based events? We have lost two annual events mainly because of the rising cost of public liability insurance.

Emma – Obviously we have had this sort of experience as well whenever we try and organise an event ourselves or support someone organising this event, if you have tried to get insurance for your activities, you can rapidly decide it's not worth your while doing it. Nick and I have been in long term discussions about the possibility of groups that are officially members of the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum have had a conversation in which their local Park Manager has approved their event, that we can then become somehow official Park Events and underneath the local authorities insurance and I would hope that is something that we can continue to look at. It's also tied in with our discussions about how you book a park for an event and the fact that it takes three months at the moment for whether it's the tiniest event or the biggest event, so that kind of thing might be a way for your Local Area.

Question

How did you cope with Health and Safety Insurance for events – it always seems a brick wall to get over?

Michael – You start early, he has a reasonable size group of people doing it, and one person is designated to get the form filled out and to chase around and part of that chasing around is to get people to me to provide plans and whatever else is needed in good time but really I think the secret is having one person who wasn't organising the stalls and the entertainment and the layout, but that their task was only to do that bit of it.

Holly – If you get a decent risk assessment template. You can download them, our website has a good one on it, but there are also other ones out there, which you can rate the level of risk for the different activities and once you have got a decent template, its much more straightforward to put together a risk assessment.

Question – we tried to get funding from a local council for the insurance and they just referred back to us – you must have £5 million insurance to have an event – we used to get the local insurance agent to sponsor it, which he did until he retired. The new owners can't fund £1000 per day which is our problem.

Michael – One of the things you might try to do is explain to whoever you are talking to in the Parks Section, that what you are actually doing is providing something at very little cost to them, that they need to be providing themselves to get the park moving and so on, you might just get an open door, obviously its finding the right person.

Question for Nick – I know its four questions, but for me it's important –

1. Do you have any statistical evidence that regeneration of parks and spaces in deprived areas, i.e. drug use, violent crime, anti-social behaviour etc, has decreased when these spaces have been thoughtfully regenerated?
2. Do you consider that park keepers/rangers are a must?
3. Open parks not locked are an idyll but are there occasions when parks should have a closing and opening time?
4. Do most of your parks have a perimeter fence?

Answer – The reduction of crime statistics from areas where parks have gone in, one of the areas was a city challenge area, which received about £35 million pounds from Government a few years back and is regularly on the news, and surprisingly we did create four parks within that area and because it was part of the funding package, we did actually monitor that and the use of the parks went up and the amount of crime that was related to the parks did drop. What was sad was that the funding that came with that package whilst the Board existed also supported the community groups. The moment the spending was gone and the Boards went, so did the support to the community groups, so all that useful work that had gone on, and the established emphasis that was behind those groups, their exit strategy wasn't built in, which was a sad thing.

Rangers, absolute must wherever you can and we are doing some interesting work. There is a leaflet out on our table, we are doing core city bench marking amongst other cities trying to recognise the importance of the ranger service as a profession with actual categories that you can measure in terms of how they perform.

Whether parks should be locked or not – open parks work in some places and they don't in others and are all our parks fenced, no they are not. Not by any stretch of the imagination.