

**BEN Green Spaces Project Focus Group – BEM Network Conference,  
Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, Liverpool, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

*The BEM Network Community Conference, a day-long, free event open to all, was aimed particularly at those active in the voluntary and community sector and people who are interested in issues that affect BME communities.*

*The BEM Network is actively seeking to address barriers to inclusion and see this as an opportunity for voluntary and community organisations to engage with them and let them know what issues are of concern and what ideas they have for development. Information from the day will be used to feed into on-going strategies and lobbying on issues that affect Liverpool's diverse communities.*

*Workshops at the event included: BEM Sports Northwest, exploring approaches to developing effective partnerships; 1NW Regional Network for BME, influencing regional policy; CEMVO capacity building and operating for sustainability; and BEN, tackling barriers to inclusion in green space. There was also a powerful poetry performance by Ann Lopez.*

*The results of the Green Space workshop below, will feed into BEN professional guidance papers to be published on our web site at [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)*

**WHAT WE KNOW AND THINK ABOUT GREEN SPACES**

**1/ How many of you were interested in green spaces before you were invited to this focus group?**

6 out of 9

*One participant said she was not sure what we meant by green spaces, so she was not sure whether she had been interested before. So we looked at questions 2 and 3 first, then came back to question 1. She had been involved in trying to create an adventure playground and go-karting project, and lobbying for activities for young people in the park. The consensus was that these were green space issues.*

**2/ What is a green space?**

The environment – fighting for it  
Food growing  
It's associated with life

Grass  
Parks – Sefton Park, Princes Park  
Allotments

Woods  
Botanic gardens  
Street corners – open spaces, waste ground  
Playing fields  
Beaches – Southport, Formby, Ainsdale, West Kirby, New Brighton

## **USE AND IMPROVEMENT OF GREEN SPACES**

### **3/ How have you used green spaces?**

Meadows and wild flower areas on playing fields have been created and used with communities as outdoor venues for events and to promote walking.

Nursery visits to beaches and parks, taking sporting equipment and barbeques.

Green Acres art projects in disused gardens – cleaned up and planted up gardens, created a sports pitch for kids.

Trips to Wales, Colwyn Bay.

Day trips to the countryside for recreation – to get away from the inner city.

Visit to an integrated / interactive farm where children have contact with animals – Canning Place and Rice Lane Farm (some participants were aware that these projects were members of FCFCG)

Cycle paths – Liverpool Loopline (Sustrans) school parties to the Wildlife Centre and family / group events with the cycling network.

### **Examples of Green Spaces**

*At this stage I showed the group a flipchart prompt sheet of examples of types of green spaces, taken from the examples of good practice on the Green Space of the Month web pages (which is linked to the typology in Green Spaces, Better Places) and I showed them the Green Spaces leaflet with 8 examples of specific projects.*

The group agreed that many of the types of green spaces suggested they had already identified (Q2, parks, allotments, woodlands, playing fields, and botanic gardens) (Q3, gardens, sports pitches, skate parks, footpaths, cycle paths, city farms).

They expressly wanted to add adventure playgrounds as a type of green space not on my list. I would also note that semi-natural meadows and beaches were two further types of green spaces / civic spaces mentioned by the group under Q3.

It is noteworthy that the group had not thought of the following types of green spaces before: forests, rivers, ponds, nature reserves, picnic sites, hospital grounds, and community centre yards.

#### **4/ What would you like to do or see in green spaces?**

In L8 area of Liverpool, needs an adventure playground – campaigning since 1980s, land available in Speke Garston, suppliers ready but no council permission due to previous accident.

Good walking and cycling routes from L8 to waterfront.

One participant reported that a Kenyan family she met 10 years ago would have liked simply to go into Sefton Park, but they felt unsafe to do so.

Sculpture park.

Play environments, variety of types of play space, better quality, play strategy for older children 10-18 age group.

Skate park – but there is local opposition.

Better maintenance of existing green spaces.  
Good facilities – café, toilets.

Safety in parks – feel exposed, improved approach roads, better access, lights, no cars, no drug dealers, security guards (eg in Palm House in Sefton Park) other people, people mixing more.

Festivals, Mardi Gras.

Cycling, running, look at wildlife.

Personal safety – wouldn't go alone, wouldn't go at night.

Participants also named a number of good examples they have seen in parks in other cities / countries (Central Park in New York, Holland, Paris, Manchester and London) of activities they would like to see or do in Liverpool, such as:

- Boule
- Chess
- Boating
- Art projects
- Educational activities
- Circus

## **5/ Have you been involved in the use, improvement or creation of green spaces?**

### **USE**

Bike workshop.

Dog walking and training lessons

Football – Saturday and Sunday Leagues are “massive”.

A Save the Children Fund group funded by Merseyside Youth Challenge Trust had been involved in orienteering at Alton Towers and were described as “fired up beyond all comprehension” by this simple activity. As a result the children were interested in going on to become professionals in the field of outdoor activities.

### **IMPROVEMENT**

Participants had not been directly involved in any successful projects to improve green spaces but were aware of one example of improvements which had positively impacted BME communities: Calderstone Park, in a suburban area accessible to BME groups, where the tennis facilities had been improved.

Also they voiced views in support of a bid to improve the swimming pool at Picton Sports Centre, increasing it to Olympic size. This high profile campaign has celebrities on board.

### **CREATION**

One participant had been involved in a project attempting to start a go-karting track, but this had not yet proved successful.

The group was very enthusiastic about developments in the area of the docks, the waterfront, otter’s pool and new plans for the Festival Gardens. They missed the Chinese garden, Japanese garden and the nature garden, which have been removed. The waterfront is seen as a particularly democratic / multicultural space.

### **Examples of care and involvement**

*At this stage I showed the group a flip chart prompt sheet listing examples of the types of activity groups may be involved in to care for or improve green spaces.*

*The list included:*

*Tree planting*

*Organising Walks*

*Picnics*

*Litter picking*

*Designing mosaics, seating, fencing, paths*

*Survey / monitor wildlife*

*Join 'Friends' group or management group*

*Become a warden or ranger*

*I asked whether they were aware of any BME community involvement in activities of this kind in Liverpool.*

The local newspaper recently carried a competition for suggestions to improve the area of council owned amenity grassland next to the Kuumba Imani centre.

One member of the group had been involved in organising rounders matches in the park.

It was noted that the cycle loop has wardens and police patrol on horseback. Some instances were given of community skips being organised, and it was felt that improved recycling facilities were needed.

The group was aware of the Environmental Wardens in L8. They have been in place for 3-4 years and are paid by the city council through either New Deal for Communities or Safer Cities / Safer Places. The group welcomed the wardens and wanted to see them in the parks too. They felt it was good to see local people working, after having suffered high levels of unemployment for so long.

## **BARRIERS AND WAYS FORWARD**

*Participants were asked to bear in mind that barriers and solutions may be considered in three categories*

- *Personal / Social*
- *Facilities - quality available*
- *Knowledge, support and resources*

### **6/ What puts you off using green spaces?**

Litigation

Culture in Britain – not very laid back (people don't relax much)

Poor maintenance, shabby appearance, under-funded, mismanaged?

Not just green spaces, the wider environment / built environment too.

Dock muck

**7/ What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?**

Fragmented communities, lack of motivation – need to get “armies” of people involved.

“Young people have grown up where green space is trashed space”.

**8/ What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?**

Conservation / planning inhibits development

Bureaucracy

Jargon

Bad consultation – innovation is not captured

Risk of vandalism / graffiti

**WAYS FORWARD**

**9/ What will encourage us to become more involved?**

Funding

Clearer information to grassroots, better networking

Master plan – cluster management

There is lots of scope – a “blank canvas” and lots of resources, a good knowledge base exists but it’s about knowing how to tap into it.

Need to change attitudes eg land art is temporary but increases the sense of ownership

Promise of employment for local people – as part of sustainability agenda

Modern apprenticeships

Training element / skills exchange eg Landlife / Eden Project

**10/ Is there anything else you would like to add?**

- No