

Green Spaces Project of the Month

September 2002 - St Agnes Park, Bristol

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Making it happen

First an organisation called Involving Residents in Solutions (IRIS) funded by the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) conducted consultations with local communities. They found out that people wanted to use the lodge for a resident park keeper and as a community resource; and they wanted to clean up the park, improving lighting and pruning trees and shrubs.

The next step was for IRIS to help St Agnes Park Association to apply for funding to achieve their goals. Refurbishment of the building was paid for by £165,000 from the Regional Development Agency (RDA) and the SRB's Inner City Lifeline scheme. Salaries for Constantine and his colleague Kathy Jacks a community development worker, were paid from European funding.

The council's park maintenance contractor got together with the probation service to tackle the clean-up, then donations from the council, the Home Office Police fund and residents' own fundraising provided thousands of bedding plants and bulbs to brighten up St Agnes Park.

A survey by Bristol parks department showed that, as well as appreciating improvements to the infrastructure and maintenance of the park, a majority of residents felt that improved security was an important achievement. Armed with this evidence, they were able to make a case for Neighbourhood Renewal funding to pay for additional lighting. Children are now able to use walkways through the park as a safe route to and from the nearby school. Peter Wilkinson, head of the parks department says, "A safer park makes people feel more confident and better about themselves."

We asked Constantine what sort of activities local people enjoy in the park and he listed,

"family picnics, a fun day at which they have puppet shows, workshops - children orientated, teach them how to DJ and everything - they have a four day event just before Jamaican Independence Day with circus leader workshops, drama ..."

In 2002 St Agnes Park received a mention from the Civic Trust in recognition of the architectural restoration of the lodge. By March 2002 IRIS withdrew from the project. St Agnes Park Association is growing, becoming increasingly representative of the communities it serves, and has plans to become a charitable company which would manage the lodge and may manage the park in future. Constantine still lives in the lodge house and is currently employed by Bristol City Council on secondment to Bristol Contract Services who maintain the city's many parks and green spaces.

In order to address wider community concerns, and in the context of the Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative, Constantine now works half his week at St Agnes and the remainder of his time is divided between nearby St Paul's Park, Grosvenor Road open space and Mina Road Park. When he sees that some maintenance work is needed, he brings his tools and attends to it.





Future Plans

The St Agnes Park Association want to improve the kitchen in the lodge house annex and get it working as more of a café, to bring in some funds. The Parks Department are thinking of ways Constantine can safely transport tools on his weekly rounds. One idea is to use sustainable transport such as a milk float or a little three wheeled buggy - like a motorised rickshaw.

There are plans to develop the park further over the next couple of years, with new paths, a play area and better shrub borders. A memorial garden to Bangy Berry, the community worker who was shot dead in St Pauls in the 1990s, has occupied a small corner of the park, but the hope is to position a more prominent feature - perhaps a sculpture placed in a circular flower bed - to create a focal point in the park. A design for improved railings and entrances would enhance the feeling of St Agnes Park as a 'secret garden' - a surprise green space in the midst of the urban chaos.





Further Information

For Alison Benjamin's Guardian article 'Bright Spark' go to
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/societyguardian/story/0.7843.553847.00.html>

Institute of Leisure and Amenities Management
<http://www.ilam.co.uk>

Database of historic parks
<http://www1.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/landscapes/ukpg.database>

Background to community safety in St Paul's area and survey results
<http://www.crimebristol.org.uk/audit/appendix3.html>
<http://www.crimebristol.org.uk/index.html?audit/action-groups/ashley.html~main>

Bristol City Council website gives lots of information about how to get involved in parks:

To complete a survey on park maintenance in Bristol go to
<http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/cgi-bin/w3index-frames.p1?BLO0017+BG>

For a picture of residents volunteering to maintain St Agnes Park see
<http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/cgi-bin/w3menu?C+BLO00108+BG+F+CMM00102+DPE00104>

For more details about Civic Trust awards visit
<http://www.civictrust.org.uk/top.shtml>