



Case study: Helping Environmental Regeneration in Broomhall (HERB)

Name of project or group

Helping Environmental Regeneration in Broomhall (HERB). Case study by Polly Blacker, February 2022.

What actions for nature did your group want to take and why? The inspiration came from the development worker/manager of the Broomhall Centre back in 2000. Initially action was focused on the Hanover flats/Exeter estate, where beautiful 'hanging gardens' from the flat balconies plus borders at the base of the flats were created. I became involved in 2003 and started a sister group in the older area of Broomhall, which has very dense housing, and where pavement extensions to form traffic-slowing chicanes had been installed, which allowed us to place plant containers along the streets to counter the brick, concrete and tarmac. Where there were no utility pipes or cables below we were also able to plant trees. We went on from there to gradually take over management of - now - 4 green spaces, which had been neglected and poorly maintained by the estates department of the City Council, and to create a garden beside the Broomhall Centre.



Photo credit: HERB/Polly and Tony Blacker

What resources or support did you need/use? Our principal resource is volunteer labour, mostly from local residents and students, but we have also applied for grants from the local Ward Pot and have been given small grants from St. Mark's church. Previously, the City Council offered free bulbs to community groups for planting in public spaces and also the Norton Nursery site gave us some old plant containers and plants. More recently we have been given small Box, Yew, Holly and Sweet Chestnut saplings by the Landscape Design Department of the University of Sheffield as part of their Parliament of Trees project and Parks and Recreation gave us some Alder Buckthorn saplings. We also received advice from the Ecology Unit in planning our bio-diversity plot, our most recent project before lockdown.



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How did you empower or involve others? Previously there was a Broomhall Newsletter delivered to every house in the area, in which we regularly wrote articles and posted pictures. We have also had a stall at the University of Sheffield's Volunteers Fair annually and additionally organised Give-It-A-Go and taster sessions for their students as well as having a permanent advert on the Sheffield Volunteering website. Sheffield Hallam University use Voluntary Action Sheffield for their students and we have recruited members of the general public as well as Hallam students via VAS. Now, word-of-mouth and local visibility also result in new recruits joining us and we have an entry on the Broomhall Centre website. Empowerment comes with taking part! Enthusiasm is definitely catching! and the mix of students and local residents, young and older, is mutually very beneficial and inspiring. We have involved children from the Broomhall Centre Homework Club and from a local Woodcraft Folk group with planting fruit trees and flowers too.

How did it make you feel? It makes me feel great. It's really heart-warming to have people constantly pass such positive comments about our efforts, for example "I always walk through this bit on my way to and from work at the hospital, it gives me a real lift and I love to see the changes through the seasons." We have even been given packets of biscuits, and stolen bites in December, to keep us going!

What changes have there been as a result of your actions? Lots of changes: the green spaces, which were unkempt and unappealing with some anti-social behaviour problems, are now used almost every day by people resting on the benches we've had installed on their way home with shopping; people sitting in the sun chatting; children playing outside safely; people picking the fruit and herbs from our mini-community orchards and herb beds; lots of people coming together for events such as Apple Days, a Jo Cox memorial day, welcome to new students parties in October, a celebration of our bio-diversity plot etc. We are now monitoring butterflies and bird species richness as part of More Data 4 Nature with the Wildlife Trust and hope to see increases in numbers as our bio-diversity and our alder buckthorn plots mature.

Have you had any memorable nature encounters while doing this? I think my happiest moment was when a local resident living just behind the biodiversity plot told me he'd woken on the first morning after we'd installed two little cement sink ponds to see a fox lapping water there. A few years ago a flock of waxwings came to feast on the crab apples from a memorial tree, which we planted for a man who had a huge impact on the neighbourhood during the Housing Action Area period of the 80s; that was very special - this winter Mistle Thrushes have been munching happily there too. The students love to find worms, baby frogs and other creatures and students from other countries like to learn words like ladybird! Blue tits nesting in one of our boxes the very first year we installed it was rewarding. We were all excited by the spread of waxcaps that appeared in 2020 and one of our students spent lots of time taking careful photos and IDing them.

How have your actions been shared or inspired others? Much of what I've written already demonstrates this. One nice question from a passer-by about some lemon balm - a plant he didn't know but he'd smelled the leaves - resulted in us giving him some to take home for his garden. In fact people often ask us for information or advice about plants.



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What is next? One of our next projects is about trying to further inspire others. We plan to organise walks around our sites to show people what we're doing and why. We also hope to make vertical herb containers out of pallets to give to local people (as in the Wildlife Trust's magazine). Another project just underway is to work with the Girls' Group at the Broomhall Centre and Ignite Imaginations to create a mural on a long dingy wall on one of the streets with negligible front gardens to brighten it up; the girls will help with the design and the idea is for it to be nature and 'iconic Broomhall' inspired. A further project is to plant some Hornbeams to screen the edge of the ring road and then create willow tunnels and play spaces next to the Hanover Playground. Additionally I plan to sow - and then plant out - Giant Sunflowers, and Hollyhocks to follow on, along a gable end wall beside one of our green spaces with Year 3 children from Springfield Primary School

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