

Project Update – No 4

November 2015

Redefining the art of the possible at Mission Possible



Launch event visitors and BCU students at the new fire pit and "The Shack" community meeting place.



Plot holder and PAG member, Brian Carter after cutting the tape to the revitalised shop

In less than six weeks, and with virtually no budget, a group of architectural students from Birmingham City University have seemingly done the impossible at Uplands Allotments in Handsworth. They have revitalised the dilapidated shop to include a new "Seed Bank", designed and built a new bridge to create an important strategic link between parts of the vast allotments; and made usable an unused "Community Shack" complete with external meeting place and pit, prototype rainwater catchment system and waste materials exchange bank. All three projects were launched at a series of ribbon cutting ceremonies in front of students and guests.

Collaboration

The work has been conducted in close collaboration with plot holders in processes that have evolved as the work has progressed. Team Shop held a series of consultative workshops and quickly found that using models of what they proposed engaged better with plot holders than drawings or computerised visuals. It created a more "fluid development" as the team responded to inputs from plot holders.

Team Bridge initially tried to engage with tenants via a questionnaire but found it more productive just to chat with them. The project evolved from "just" the bridge rebuild into providing more accessibility and the creation of community space. The work included extensive site clearing activity into which plot holders became increasingly involved. Project Shack discovered a bounty of skills amongst the tenants who increasingly engaged with the project as the work progressed. As they cleared the site they found a "treasure trove" of materials that they were able to reuse. They also built from waste materials a rainwater catchment system that feeds into a standard allotment water butt. It is hoped it may be adopted across the whole allotment. All three projects notably made extensive use of discarded materials.



Plot holder, Mr Sagoo, who helped students with the provision of tools, cuts the tape to declare the new bridge open.

Chair of the Uplands Allotments Cooperative Association, Mavis Powell, said "It was very refreshing to have the students on site. They worked tirelessly and very effectively and what they have done on site is beautiful. The stores were old and dilapidated and they have given it a new lease of life. The bridge had been collapsed into the stream for a long time. The students have done magnificently and it should last a long time. They have brought The Shack back to life so it can be used for a multiple of purposes. The plot holders have been happy to see them on site and several of them have got engaged with the work. It's been very successful". Plot holder, Brian Carter, said "I was sceptical when I saw them arrive with their drawings and computers but what they have done is fantastic. The shop has not been properly used for 50 years. They have given it a new lease of life."

Pictures below, left to right: Brian Carter and Andy Hilton (BCU) with students at The Shop. The fire pit. Joint project leader, Malcolm Currie and UACA Chair Mavis in The Shop. PAG member, Richard Baines with Mavis at the prototype rainwater catchment system.



MISSION POSSIBLE AT UPLANDS

From joint project leaders,
David Middleton, Malcolm Currie, Sandy Taylor

When David Middleton challenged a group of specialists to the idea that to create a low carbon, sustainable community was "Mission Impossible", Malcolm Currie representing Uplands Allotments in Birmingham thought otherwise.

We believe the allotments plus adjacent areas is the second biggest area of open land in Birmingham, second only to Sutton Park. With 38 acres it is the largest allotments in the UK and has one of the highest points in Birmingham.

Current Project Advisory Group (PAG) Members:

Richard Baines, (Black Country Housing Group); Brian Carter (UACA); Adam Carthy, David Cole (SIG); Malcolm Currie (UACA); Steve Davis (WHG); Paul Dockerill (WHG); Andy Hilton (Choral Studio); Prof Kevin Kendall (Adelan); Tony McNally (Climate Change Solutions); David Middleton (DMC); Jennie Middleton (DMC); Felipe Moline (Food Forest Brum); Charlene Mulhern (Birmingham City Council); Peter Shirley (Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust); Peter Short (Birmingham City Council); Jacqui Staunton (Climate Change Solutions); Sandy Taylor (Green Urbanist); John Turner (Anthony Collins); Bevil Williams (REPC).

Current PAG Observers

Glenn Barrowman (Wolverhampton University); Phil Beardmore (Sustainability consultant); Councillor Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham City Council); Hayley James (Albion Foundation); Mike Kinghan (Chase Community Solar); Stella Raphael-Reeves (Birmingham Metropolitan Council); Darren Rudge (Birmingham Metropolitan College); Councillor Lisa Trickett (Birmingham City Council); Allison Tripley (Albion Trust).



Project Advisory Group Chairman, David Middleton, before cutting the tape at "The Shack"

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