

THE SPACEMAKERS' PROJECT

Hareclive Road, Hartcliffe: A Public Park designed by local young people

Hartcliffe and Withywood suffer from deprivation, challenging social issues, high levels of unemployment and some under-developed public spaces.

However, in 2003 professionals from various fields and backgrounds devised a scheme to involve at all stages disenfranchised local young people in shaping their local environment.

Eventually 10 young people aged 13 to 15 were selected to form a steering group which included an architect from Marloes, Pembrokeshire (who they selected from 17 candidates!) as project manager, two school mentors, an artist, and a local youth worker, Mark Rooney, from Hartcliffe Youth Centre.

The young people - called the Spacemakers - went on a three-day, tailor-made course about the design of public spaces. They also visited four major parks in the UK and others in the Netherlands. They chose this Hareclive Road site from ten local spaces available.



They then worked with the architect and artist on various ideas. Much of the practical work was then undertaken by the project manager and landscape architect but the Spacemakers provided the Public Relations via 'flyers' and prepared models, plans, and displays to show local residents and funding bodies including City Council officials and councillors. They were interviewed on a weekly basis by local radio and TV during the construction of the park and at its launch, in November 2004.

On a sunny but freezing day in November 2005, prompted by the Council's admirable Clean and Green Board, several of my group and I visited this small but astonishing site regeneration project. The transformation of this slope was quite remarkable in two ways:

1. The dynamic but simple design. This is highlighted by a dramatic custom-designed stainless steel shelter sitting on stilts at the



highest point of the site. A stainless steel slide, also custom-built, had been set into the slope below leading into the central gravel area cut through by the meandering white concrete watercourse (an old stream which had been uncovered) and sheltered by ancient oak trees.

2. The young Spacemakers' personal development. They have all grown in social and communication skills, knowledge and understanding of themselves and about the processes involved in teamwork and community action. They have changed their outlook and expectations: as one of them, Adele Sadd, said "We've got more confidence. We did a lot of public speaking and we got better and better at it." Now aged over 16, they are all in full-time education and five have every intention of going on to university.

Last year the project was successful in a £20,000 bid (via a section 106 agreement for offsite young people's provision in the planning approval for Morrisons supermarket in Symes Avenue). This pays for the long-term maintenance of the park, one of four local ones, and the Council's Parks Department has taken on responsibility for its future upkeep: two Park Keepers have been employed and Community Play Rangers run free outdoor play sessions twice a week that provide opportunities for local children to play in the park in all weathers.

To conclude, this is what we call true Community Involvement, what the Society has been battling for over many years, as opposed to the lip service so often meted out! Above all it was important for the involvement of young people whose future environment is really what the Society tries to look after.

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