

Environ - "Allotments 4 All", Leicester

Promoting 45 sites across the city of Leicester, Environ is an independent charity pioneering a number of innovative approaches to allotments management. The project started in November 2002 with the aim of safeguarding the future of allotments in Leicester by promoting the uptake and sustainable use of allotments for food growing, whilst protecting and improving biodiversity in Leicester. Since April 2003 ARI has funded Paul Howgill's work as the project's officer.

"It quickly became clear that the allotment societies needed more support", said Paul. "Publicising vacant plots would be a waste of time if potential new ploholders were put off by their first contact with a society or were unable to find out how or where to get a plot. Good communication is key:"

Environ ran a series of workshops called "Plot Your Own Development" looking at the role that the secretary,

treasurer, and chair need to play in the running of a successful allotment society. Three other workshops also took place to support the novice allotment gardener:

- 'Getting Started'
- 'WWW' - what to plant when and where
- 'Digging your disasters' - an horticultural expert answered questions from new gardeners.

The City Council had only limited funds for publicity and it was difficult to co-ordinate their efforts with all the different allotment societies. The plan to change this was to:

- Try to get a 'celebrity' to take an allotment
- Carry out a poster and leaflet campaign publicising the Allotments 4 All project
- Put an article about Allotments 4 All and a map of the city showing all allotment sites on to the City Council website.

BBC Radio Leicester agreed to take on an allotment. One

of their presenters became the 'celebrity' and anchored regular programmes from the plot. Coverage during National Allotment Week included a half-hour programme and 8 other mentions on various programmes, plus 3 minutes on BBC TV's East Midlands Today news!

Environ have also teamed up with the local media to publicise positive stories from allotments within the city including a female gardener winning the city-wide best allotment competition for the first time, schools and community groups taking part in allotment activities and an allotment photographic competition.

Paul sums up their approach: "Any change on an allotment site is more easily achieved by evolution than revolution, and in some respects this is quite right. But some of these changes need to be propagated to give the best results - feeding and nurturing the allotment societies like any delicate bloom".



One of the Environ "Allotments 4 All" project workshops