

The Station Allotments, Headingley - A Growing Success



In January 2002, three new plot holders each received a Leeds Safer Communities Millennium Award of £1000 to clear, develop and enhance the allotment site at Headingley Station in Leeds.

The grants were used to purchase the tools and equipment needed to begin clearing and preparing the derelict plots on the 5.5-acre site. Over the course of the summer the group encouraged community involvement and other growers joined the site. "Community Crops" was born.

Community Crops aims to create a valuable community resource, providing opportunities for everyone involved to grow their own food, interact, and relax in a friendly, safe environment. The ethos of Community Crops is the pooling of manpower, knowledge, time and resources. This approach allows many non-traditional allotment users to

grow their own fresh food and reap the benefits of allotment growing, and at the same time secures the future of the site.

Over the last 18 months, members of Community Crops have cleared a massive 1.5 acres and began cultivation in earnest. The plotholders have agreed that the whole site will be managed organically; since the site has been derelict and unused for many years, they have the ideal starting point. Although growing primarily for taste and nutrition, their produce has earned several prizes in a local gardening show.

The creation of various wildlife areas is also underway, including an interactive nature walk and the restoration of the old English apple orchard. Soft fruit beds designed for "picking your own" will be planted. Community composting and recycling

facilities will be available. A traditional native Yorkshire hedgerow will be planted around the entire site providing a pleasant view for the neighbours, a wildlife corridor and added security.

Longer term projects include the provision of a sensory garden, in collaboration with the local branch of the RNIB, and a children's garden displaying unusual vegetables and fast growing herbs that can be touched, picked, eaten and explored on the spot. The group are also committed to utilising sustainable energy sources and setting up demonstrations as working educational tools.

The remaining plots will be organised into a four-year crop rotation system. Future proposals include joining the Henry Doubleday Research Association's Heritage Seed Scheme to grow traditional English vegetable varieties

Projects on site are organised and mentored by Leeds Organic Growers, (LOGS) a local voluntary organisation dedicated to organic growing and the promotion of allotment usage through educational, environmental, and healthy living initiatives.

Allotment sites should be seen and used as valuable resources," argues Iwan Hopkins, spokesperson of LOGS. "Their potential for alternative community and environmental uses should be supported, encouraged and promoted by local authorities nationwide. ◆