

ARI has made 7 major grants to pilot schemes to regenerate allotment sites that have fallen into partial disuse, and which provide examples of good practice in allotment regeneration to be replicated or built upon in other parts of the country.

In each issue we feature an ARI Pilot Project, describing its work and the contribution that ARI funding has made towards achieving its aims.

Sharrard Road Allotments and Leisure Gardens, Sheffield

This pilot project involves a traditional allotment site and an adjacent leisure gardens site which until very recently suffered from spates of vandalism, including arson. Tenants were leaving and plots becoming overgrown. The leisure garden site in particular showed all the signs of going into decline.

Funding from ARI, matched funding from the council's allotment budget and some support from a local Area Panel, has helped turn the sites around. Two other major factors have contributed to this success: a lot of hard graft and the employment of a firm of consultants – 'U-Scape Regeneration' – who have helped plottolders, local people and the council come up with a shared vision and action plan for the whole project.

The consultants have used a range of techniques to engage and actively involve everyone in the project including questionnaires, one to one discussions, walkabouts, exhibitions, a comments board and a site visit to learn from others involved in site regeneration. Monthly steering group meetings are held at the local school, involving the Sheffield Allotment and Home Gardeners Federation, council officers, allotment tenants representatives, the consultant and a Project Ranger.

Good press coverage in the local media has helped raise awareness of the project; mail drops, a newsletter and

a display, have kept everyone – tenants, local people, schools and councillors – up to date with progress on site.

Developing an allotment society

Council officers were keen for an allotment society to be formed to help ensure the long-term sustainability of the two sites. Tenants' representatives were understandably anxious about some of the financial issues and responsibilities involved (particularly in relation to rent arrangements and service charges associated with the newly installed buildings). Happily, a group of tenants have now formed a society and they are keen to continue the regeneration of the site.

Encouraging young people to be involved.

One of the site's immediate neighbours is the local primary school. The Head Teacher's personal involvement and support has been crucial in successfully involving young people in the project.

Eight children from year 6 have worked together as a junior allotment committee, regularly visiting the sites to identify issues and make suggestions for improvement. They have carried out photographic survey work, visited other allotment sites and assisted the Rangers in hedge planting and mulching.

The school now has its own plot; a parent group is

working with the children to develop and maintain this. The layout is designed around their chosen theme – 'The Wizard of Oz'.

During an arts week for children in year 4, community artists and teachers focused on the history and culture of allotments through drama, poetry, dance and visual arts. A choreographed piece titled 'working the land' is to be performed at Sheffield's Montgomery Theatre. ♦

The story so far...

- Approx 330 metres of new palisade fencing with 2 vehicular gates
- 80 metres of native hedge planted.
- A new meeting room with a fitted kitchen, water and electricity.
- Roadways cleared of weed growth and resurfaced (including pedestrian links between the two sites and the neighbouring school).
- 2 shipping containers installed, one for use as a store and the other as a toilet facility (with connection to water and mains sewage).
- 4 new raised beds
- Untenanted plots cleared and let to new tenants
- A starter pack has been developed to promote good allotment use - 3000 copies to be printed shortly and provided free to all new tenants. It will be available to download soon from the city council's website – www.sheffield.gov.uk.



Year 6 children have formed a junior allotment committee