**Case Study: Bryn Gwalia Community Garden**

**Mold, Flintshire March 2019**

**Background**

The Bryn Gwalia Community Garden is in the grounds of The Clubhouse, a community building, in Mold, Flintshire. This was a run down building on council land within a social housing estate. In 2005 the community, approached Flintshire County Council with an offer to take on the running and maintenance of the building and grounds for the benefit of the community. The council agreed and The Clubhouse Management Committee was incorporated as a limited company.

In 2008 attention turned to the overgrown grounds which was mainly being used as a repository for unsavoury leavings! After consultation with the local community, a subcommittee decided to create a garden with raised beds for people to use as mini allotments and a large communal area. Funding was granted by the Welsh Assembly’s Local Environment Quality Fund and the garden was landscaped.

The Community Garden opened in May 2010. The first years were plagued by vandalism and littering but the group persevered by simply rebuilding what was knocked down and cleaning up after the nightly gatherings. Gradually the damage was less and people stopped littering so much.

The last couple of years have seen a revitalisation of the garden and it now has 38 plots, some of which are communal beds. There is a large communal space and it is surrounded by 20 or so apple trees for anyone to harvest from. They have acquired a shed to store the communal tools, a plentiful supply of manure and they have a compost loo built for them by Groundworks.

**Group aims and achievements**

The group is gently guided by Angela Bebbington who suggests that the aim of the garden is to ‘nurture the skills’ of those who come there. It was started with a desire to give the community pride in its green space rather than using it as a general dumping ground. The ethos is to encourage learning and enjoyment of horticulture, crafts, sustainable development and the protection of the natural environment through sound environmental practices. Events, workshops and open days are held through the year for the whole community. Bryn Gwalia garden is a gathering point of calm and green things in a challenging community. It is a true expression of their gifts and skills and is facilitating their creativity.

**Audience and Volunteers**

The garden is an open and inclusive space for anyone living in Mold but is particularly for the residents of the Bryn Gwalia Estate. The garden is also frequented and appreciated by the probation service and local primary and secondary schools. The garden has benefitted from various volunteer groups (including a team of accountants) but the consistent support of the local probation service has been crucial. The probation officer brings a group regularly to help with the bigger jobs and to keep on top of maintaining the communal area. They are currently working on re landscaping this area.

**Obtaining Permission**

Permission to manage the land was granted as a side issue to managing the building which was the major concern of the council at the time. Splitting the land from the building was not considered though now, perhaps, it would be as demand for building land is high. Happily, The Clubhouse Management Committee negotiated a 25 year lease on the property so the garden is secure for the foreseeable future.

Brian Lloyd, local member of the garden, points out that the land is well placed near the centre of Mold town and would undoubtedly attract the attention of builders were it not for the existence of the garden. Preserving this green space for the community is an important role the garden is fulfilling.

Angela, who manages the site, is keen to tell me how much the garden has meant to her. Though she gives so much of her time to making the garden a welcoming, safe and inclusive place she feels she has received her own rewards in the form of mental wellbeing and the warmth of her community.

Another member says, “Coming to work in the quiet atmosphere of the garden is the highlight of my week. I bring a book and a snack so I can rest awhile listening to the wildlife before returning to my apartment.”

**The Future**

Looking to the future, the vision is one of evolution; of being open to all and any opportunities that may be requested or required for the benefit of this community. There is a commitment to support and create opportunities for all people, regardless of their circumstances.

On a practical front there are plans to build on the companion planting to ‘keep the bugs away’ and to increase the workshops available showcasing skills in woodland crafts, willow, art and design. The group are landscaping their communal area to make it more accessible and easier to maintain.