



HIGHGATE SOCIETY

**A summary of points discussed at the Guerrilla Gardening discussion evening.
Friday 3 November 2023, 730-9pm**

Organised by the Community Projects Group

At the start of the evening, Andrew Sulston welcomed everybody to the Highgate Society and introduced April Cameron from the Friends of Waterlow Park as our “expert witness” for the evening.

Andrew said we are very grateful to the Society’s resident guitarist Jonathan ‘Black’ Byrd who provided guitar accompaniment for some parts of the evening, as well as the Highgate Society’s Social Events Group for their support with drinks and refreshments throughout the evening.

1. Overview

Andrew gave an overview of guerrilla gardening, covering its roots and why it is an opportunity to do something to improve the well-being of our community. There have been many aims of guerrilla gardening: food, protest, community-building, health, and sustainability goals. Our events so far have covered five or six sites and we have generally held about five events a year since 2020. We are now looking to scale up our work and wish to have local areas of Highgate get involved to help achieve this.

There have been some great local examples, such as the Miltons, where the local residents association worked with us to take on two flowerbeds, and since they have carried on the work themselves. More recently, following an article which we had written in the Ham and High suggesting the possibility, several residents have helped plant up the cattle trough on the junction of Archway Road and Church Road. This was an interesting (and muddy) exercise, where it was important to re-open the drainage feature at the bottom of the cattle trough.

Andrew emphasised that we need many different types of support and being able to wield a spade is only one role. Some people may be willing to offer plants from their garden, help with publicity or provide some financial support for events.

April then took the group through the types of planting which can be effective and positive experiences that she has had leading the gardening volunteers in Waterlow Park.

The group discussed how far we need to get permission to do gardening work on local land? Andrew said this may vary case by case and there are some legal restrictions. There may also be issues of accessibility where we will clearly need permission and help of the type that we get from Highgate Underground Station to do tidy up work behind their locked fences.

However, where land is publicly accessible and has not been properly looked after then there has been a failure of stewardship by the owner and it may well be a good reason to simply carry out the work to improve the use of the land.

2. Group breakout

Accompanied by Jonathan's guitar, we split into four breakout groups to discuss next steps and a plan.

Each group considered three questions:

Question 1: What are suitable areas for guerrilla gardening and what aims should we have?

Question 2: How do we form groups and what techniques will work well?

Question 3: What support does each group need?

3. In the final part of the evening, we reconvened to discuss each group's ideas.

Feedback on the three questions from each group is set out below.

Question 1: What are suitable areas for guerrilla gardening and what aims should we have?
<u>Group 1</u> : Outside the new education centre [<i>ie Whittington Education Centre</i>] on Highgate Hill; Hillcrest, by the bus stop and North Hill; The Grove.
<u>Group 2</u> : The cattle trough on Archway Road; the triangle of land opposite the Woodman pub; Pond Square; Shepherds Hill – the green area to the west of [<i>or at corner with?</i>] Archway Road; the land next to Gonnermanns; Jacksons Lane; Southwood Lane "development" area.
<i>Query</i> : In terms of the type of work, is street furniture such as fences and seats part of guerrilla gardening? Where are the boundaries? [<i>answer: not really but could be ancillary to a planting project.</i>]
<u>Group 3</u> : The new education centre on Highgate Hill; the land opposite Jacksons Lane. We should ask for people to suggest an area that needs help to come up with a proper list of sites. In terms of type of plants, we should plant robust shrubs. Note the co-benefits between well-used land and lower levels of litter.
<u>Group 4</u> : Archway Road planters. How many of these, what condition, what size should they be? Should we remove some of these? Can this be done in collaboration with the Archway Road Action Group – ARAG?
Highgate station approach; the crossing opposite Cromwell Avenue; the bare patch near Gonnermanns on Archway Road. The priority should be the Highgate station approach.

Discussion:

Sites proposed above: Many of the sites would be very suitable. As a first step, we need to focus on two or three to ensure this is achievable. The most popular choices above are the area of land next to the Gonnermanns furniture shop (*ie opposite Jackson's Lane*), and outside the new Whittington Education Centre on Highgate Hill. We would need to check both sites to see what might work.

Planters along Archway Road (also suggested above) are a further possibility and there is a group zoom meeting to discuss Archway organised by Natasha Walter (one of our meeting attendees) at 6pm on Monday 27 November. *Greening Archway Road - planters and guerrilla gardening* is on the agenda. Please do get in touch if you would like to attend.

Existing sites the Community Projects group has worked on: We have three recently active sites within the group now: Pond Square (flower bed behind the toilets building), three trial wildflower seed beds in the North Road tree pits and the cattle trough at the junction of Archway and Church Road (though this is largely in the care of Maria, John and Avigayil).

Local schools: Several groups made the proposal of trying to involve local schools. Following the guerrilla gardening evening, Andrew and Louise met with the community engagement team from Highgate School who said that their groups could do gardening work for a day next spring. We have a meeting with Channing School organised soon. St Josephs may be another possibility for the Whittington site, though noting they are younger children.

Proposal: Based on the above, we should continue to work on the existing sites we have, but seek to use the techniques discussed at Question 2 below to (i) the land next to Gonnermans furniture shop (ie opposite Jackson's Lane), (ii) the land outside the new Whittington Education Centre on Highgate Hill and (iii) Archway with the help if possible of the group Natasha has convened (as above). Where possible we should work with local schools.

Question 2: How do we form groups and what techniques will work well?
<u>Group 1:</u> We can do this using flyers with our contact details in the area where we want to work. We can try to involve the Highgate Horticultural Society. We should create official looking signs after we work on an area to communicate clearly to the Council teams that we have done the work, and we should provide our contact details and details of how to join the group and get involved. We should also consider how to get schools involved, for example where this can be part of Duke of Edinburgh projects.
<u>Group 2:</u> There will need to be ownership of the gardening project and proper monitoring. The areas that are worked on will need to be properly signposted giving our contact details.
<u>Group 3:</u> Local groups will need to look after their patch. Groups may appeal to people without gardens. Potentially school children can be involved. We should put up a sign saying <i>we are going to work here. Would you like to help us?</i>
<u>Group 4:</u> We can try to coordinate with the Archway Road Greening project [see Q 1 above].

Discussion: There was a high level of agreement on (i) the importance of signage as a communication, pre and post work, and (ii) involving schools (as per Question 1 above). We should also get in touch with the Highgate Horticultural Society to understand whether they may wish to be involved: eg could they provide experts? In relation to the Archway Road greening project see Question 1 above.

Proposal: We should use the signage approach on the three new sites proposed at Question 1 above. We should also get in touch with the Highgate Horticultural Society. See the example sign below on North Road which is a “post work” sign we put up last week:



Question 3: What support does each group need?

Group 1: The group will need planting advice. Some funds will be necessary and what about approaching local businesses and estate agents? What about an award for the best guerrilla patch or garden of the month?

Group 2: The groups will need expert input and planning help. It will be necessary to define the size of the project and have realistic and practical parameters. It will be important to ensure proper soil, drainage, and suitable planting. Provide guidelines?

Group 3: Each group will need leadership and a good connection with the main group. Each group should only expect limited help though from the main group. Each group should aim only for what is achievable. There will be need for some money and guidance. Also make it fun! In terms of collaboration with other guerrilla gardening groups, what about prizes and a prize giving to bring the groups together? What about tools?

Group 4: In terms of support before work is done, there will need to be approvals by a coordinating group and inspections, together with a plan of action and a planting list. Work will then need to be done. Importantly, after this, the site will need to be maintained.

Discussion: We will need to be able to provide planting and site advice. In terms of funds, we have limited funds available from the Highgate Society for small items but could not commit to funding guerrilla gardening work on a large scale. Fundraising may be needed. The

importance of leadership and fun within each group is key. Prizes for sites is a great idea. In terms of tools, some of us have these and can provide them if we attend a session. Some people may be willing to donate a small number of tools so that we have a central store.

A working plan for a new site might be as follows:

1. Site to be chosen
2. Leader/s to volunteer
3. Site visit from members of the main group
4. Members to be recruited if needed (various ways as discussed above)
5. Plan to be drawn up as a group. If planting suggestions or planting plan is needed, then obtain from the main group, unless site group can provide it.
6. Decide how it will be achieved. If funding is required, how much and how will that be obtained? How will the plants/materials be obtained?
7. Implement the plan
8. Draw up plan for maintenance
9. Main group to check in on how plants and how site is faring

Two useful tools for everyone would be:

- a. a WhatsApp group to let everyone know when an event is planned and
- b. a Google map showing the locations of our sites.

Our working model of a Google Map is as below. Everyone should be able to access this but please say if not:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?ll=51.57353758725778%2C-0.16105356489009903&z=15&mid=15cVTQvRL9doRDtm-HqfkJ41orrqyMgc>

Proposal: This goes back to the point discussed at the start of the meeting that we need many different types of support and being able to wield a spade is only one role. Some people may be willing to offer plants from their garden, help with publicity or organisation or provide some financial support for events.

Requests:

Based on the areas discussed above and your reflections on this note, please get in touch if there are ways in which you would be able to help, whatever these may be.

Please also confirm if you would be willing to be added to a WhatsApp group for the guerrilla gardening work as suggested above. In this case, please do confirm your mobile number.