



# Underneath the arc

The Marsh Street Arches and Garden Project is a community-led project designed to transform a section of derelict council owned land into a community garden and to develop and use four adjacent railway arches.

**S**ituated in an area of Barrow in Furness that is densely populated but with virtually no open public green space, the project is the result of five years voluntary hard work which has steadily developed from a simple idea of local residents who had the aim of:

1. Transforming an area of derelict Barrow Borough Council owned land, to the south of Greengate Street Bridge into a well designed, user friendly urban oasis which people can relax in and enjoy, visiting again and again. The garden has three main features:
  - i. The picnic area, where families can eat outside and use the BBQ area.
  - ii. The quiet garden, where people can walk around and see a variety of plants and trees, with a central feature including herbs and fruit trees.
  - iii. The promenade, which is the main route to the Gardens and also provides access to the arches.

The main pedestrian access route to the Garden will be provided with the removal of an unused and derelict eyesore property on Marsh Street.

2. Gaining permission to develop several large, vacant and spacious (2200 sq ft) adjacent railway arches belonging to Network Rail in such a way that would be of benefit to the local community and provide additional local resources.

The arches provide a connection between the site of the garden and another, similar sized plot of presently unused, derelict, Council owned land to the immediate north of Greengate Street Bridge.

The land and Arches proposed for development had been derelict for almost 30 years and used as an area for fly tipping, arson, under age drinking and drug abuse.

In addition to the physical regeneration of the area, the project also had aspirations of developing the skills, knowledge and qualifications of local people through involvement in each stage of the process including consultation, research, design, planning, construction, delivery of services and evaluation of the project.

The project committee has always believed that the full involvement of local people in the process would not

only provide the best opportunity for long term sustainability of the project but would also help with the wider social and economic regeneration of the area, provide people with skills and confidence to start new projects, access to training or further education or finding employment either within the project or elsewhere.

In 2004, a project committee consisting of a local resident Graham Bromley, community development workers Graham Robinson and Stephanie Kershaw, BAE Systems graduates Leon Taylor and Euan Chisholm, architect Hugh Massey of Hugh Massey Architects and Terry Spurling of the Submarine Heritage Trust came together to push the project forward.

## Consultation

Their first task was to consult with various stakeholders, including local

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Above: View towards the arches, detailing the raised planters July 2008



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Safer, Greener programme, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and Cabe Space.

**Making a start**

The next stage was to submit a planning application for the proposed use of the land and adjacent railway arches and to explore a variety of potential local, regional and national funding opportunities. This included the Big Lottery, The Landfill Tax Credit, and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Initially, after securing local Street Safe funding, it was possible to approach a local contractor that could clear the site of rubbish, overgrowth and any hazardous materials in preparation for further work which included soil analysis.

Several skips were needed to remove the large amount of rubbish that had accumulated on the site, including household rubbish, building rubble, beds, bicycles, vehicle parts and televisions.

Brambles and overgrowth were cut back to ground level and sprayed with a solution that would retard

Below: Overhead view from Greengate Street Bridge

Bottom: View from the railway arches

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residents, local schools, Cumbria Police, local Councillors and Spacia, the property arm of Network Rail, who have a responsibility for the arches.

The project committee worked to produce a comprehensive 30 page project plan for the proposed developments for the areas of land to both the North and South of Greengate Bridge and the Arches underneath the Bridge. This included a risk assessment and design features recommended by Cumbria Police Crime Prevention Officer Sharon Livesey and based on the Secured by Design initiative which supports the principles of designing out crime.

The project plan was then submitted to Barrow Borough Council in an effort to gain their approval to use the land and to convince them that the group could deliver the project and cover issues such as management, governance, funding, sustainability and maintenance.

In 2005 after considering the original proposal document the Council agreed to lease the land to the south for the committee to develop.

Experience to deliver the project was gained by attended courses such as ‘Spaces by Design’ at The National Tenant’s Resource Centre which included on-site visits to similar community-driven projects undertaken by Groundwork and by using resources such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s Cleaner,



# “Amended plans created a natural wildlife haven and attracted various species including slow worms, lizards, hedgehogs, insects and small birds”

their growth. An added benefit of this clearance work was the safe removal of dozens of used syringes, some of which appeared to have been recently used.

The soil analysis work involved digging small pits at regular intervals on the site and removing a sample of debris from each hole. These samples were then sent to Patterson Analytical Chemist for analysis.

This work was vital as it provided not only the evidence needed to show that there were no possibilities of hazardous materials beneath the surface but also provided an accurate record of the depth of the hard surface.

We have kept in regular contact with officers from the Estates and the Strategy and Regeneration Departments of Barrow Borough Council and with representatives of Spacia. This has helped to build a confidence between us and offered the opportunity for them to raise any questions that they may have and to explore any potential for their future support. In particular, Val Holden, Chris Jones and David Joyce from Barrow Borough Council and Nick Hurst from Spacia have regularly offered advice and guidance to the project.

Ultimately this continued dialogue led to the project securing a long term 80 year lease on the land followed by a successful funding application submitted to West Lakes Renaissance, a public-private partnership formed in May 2003 and funded by the North West Regional Development Agency.

This funding, from their Rail Corridor Improvement Grant not only provided the main capital for the construction work but also an expenses and consultation budget for the committee.

The consultation budget was used to conduct additional public consultation throughout the process which has included leaflet drops, questionnaires and open public meetings.

Funding from West Lakes Renaissance Rail Corridor Improvement Grant allowed us to put the work out to tender and eventually appoint Continental Landscapes as the main contractors. They began work to construct the community garden on 6 February 2008.

## Going batty

It has not all been plain sailing for the project and, as you can imagine, there have been many highs and lows, much frustration and moments of utter despair. We have remained committed to our aims and determined to deliver the project and have worked tirelessly to overcome several problems over the years. This was evident in 2007, when it was suggested that there may be bats inhabiting the arches and there may be slow worms on the site of the proposed garden. As these are both protected species, there was the potential of the garden project being significantly delayed or at worst being put in serious doubt.

To help address these potential problems we contacted Jenny Holden of Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Ecologist Tony Marshall in the hope that they could offer guidance and advice.

Jenny confirmed that there were soprano pipistrelle bats inhabiting one of the railway arches. The bats have become a major benefit to the project and we have been able to generate a great deal of interest from local residents, especially after we purchased bat monitoring equipment and bat ID charts and plan to conduct bat watching events.

Following recommendations from Tony Marshall after he conducted a reptile survey on the site prior to the construction work, we amended our plans and provided a boundary along two edges of the garden. This has created a natural wildlife haven and attracted various species including slow worms, lizards, hedgehogs, insects and small birds. As with the bats, this has generated a lot of interest in the wildlife of the Garden.



Condition of site before construction 2007



Construction progress February 2008



Construction progress April 2008



Construction progress June 2008



Nearing completion, including new fencing and gated entrance Sept 2008

We have become an affiliate member of Cumbria Wildlife Trust and are working in partnership with them in an effort to increase the interest in wildlife and to provide appropriate activities and possible educational opportunities. In particular the local schools and the Junior Neighbourhood Wardens are very much interested in potential activities.

### Exciting times

The project received a major boost recently in the form of a substantial grant from the Our Green Space scheme; a scheme supported by The Heritage Lottery Fund, Friends of The Lake District and Voluntary Action Cumbria.

This is really exciting because it can be used to enhance the completed Garden and is about helping people to participate in exploring our social, industrial and historical heritage as well as providing for potential educational opportunities and activities.

It will provide the opportunity for local people to learn more about the green on their doorstep and provide ways to find out about what is around us, how things are the way they are, the history of the area, the buildings, new and old, and recording what memories people have.

We are hoping that people can get involved in different ways; helping to protect the bat roost in one of the adjacent railway arches, learning about running a project, protecting natural habitats, learning about local history, learning about or even making a career in working with environmental issues.

On 4 July we held the official garden naming ceremony. The event facilitated by Colin Smith, Head Teacher of Greengate Junior School, included the school orchestra playing their own composition 'Pride of Barrow', a banner parade, dancers, a display of anchors decorated by pupils and culminated with the result of the name the garden competition.

Previously Greengate Junior School, Ramsden Infants, St George's, Sacred Heart and Greengate Infants were invited to conduct a 'name the garden' competition in which each school provided a name for the garden.

The final winning entry, The Green

Heart Den, was chosen by pupils representing each of the schools and announced at the end of the ceremony.

Construction of the garden is nearing completion and we are planning an formal handover for the end of September with the official opening ceremony to follow once the main pedestrian access route has been established, following the removal of a derelict property on Marsh Street.

### It's all about the community

Our committee has had to develop and to increase the capacity of its membership over the years and after seeking advice from Mike Brockbank and Neil Doherty of 'The Box', Barrow's Social Enterprise Network, we formed a community interest company (CIC) and registered with Companies House as a Company Limited by Guarantee. We now have a volunteer Board of Directors consisting of local residents, local businessmen, SDG Accountants and the General Manager, Marketing and Development of the Furness Building Society.

The Marsh Street Arches and Garden Community Interest Company now has a broad community representation across all sectors, and has built up a good relationship with the Arches freeholder Spacia (Network Rail) which we intend to transfer into a formal relationship, with the CIC hopefully being granted a long term lease on the Arches.

The Arches have a number of different and potentially significant themes; historical, social and economic.

- i. Historically, they remain a very large artefact representing the major phase of Barrow's growth, and the local based Furness Railway.
- ii. Socially, they offer an unparalleled opportunity for a great variety of activities both temporary and permanent.
- iii. Economically, the possibilities of a variety of activities in the Arches mean that there can be cross support from chargeable costs (rent, sales etc) to non chargeable (garden maintenance/community

development initiatives).

Our project could not have been as successful without the quality of support it has received from organisations such as Cumbria Constabulary, the MAST Community Group, Barrow Borough Council, Greengate Junior School, Cumbria CVS, Streetsafe, The Central and Hindpool Neighbourhood Management Team, Accent Northwest, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, Cumbria County Council, Spacia, the Furness Building Society and SDG Accountants.

In particular, Barrow Borough Council's Neighbourhood Manager Steve Robson has been very supportive of the project and provided additional funding and advice.

For the future, we will continue to progress the potential phased development of the railway arches, develop a working relationship with local historians and railway enthusiasts and to increase opportunities for participation in the project. We also have hopes and aspirations to build on our experiences and gain permission from Barrow Borough Council to transform the similarly sized area of derelict, council owned land to the north of Greengate Street Bridge.

This would provide a significant development and not only be of benefit to the local community but to Barrow itself.

If you would like to learn more about our project please visit our website at:

<http://marshstreetprojects.org.uk/>

**Graham Bromley  
Hugh Massey  
Graham Robinson**

“Pipistrelle bats have become a major benefit to the project and we have been able to generate a great deal of interest from local residents”