

RUINS TO RICHES

Roman Gardens, Gamesley, Peak District



Source: Gamesley Residents Association

When Gamesley residents decided to improve their local estates, they used the area's historic connections and a 'can do' attitude to help create a neighbourhood garden and play area. The gardens provide much needed green space and bring a local community together. Mike Dewhurst, Vice-Chairman of the Gamesley Residents Association, explains how they did it.

How would you describe Gamesley as an area?

Gamesley is near Glossop on the northwest edge of the Peak District. It was originally an estate that housed people who were moved here to ease overcrowding in Manchester. The area has been described as quite isolated and it has suffered from spates of vandalism, alcohol-related problems and high unemployment. A significant number of residents claim state benefits. There was no open space for outdoor recreation and the houses only had neglected grass verges.

So why did you decide to create the gardens?

The creation of the gardens was very much linked to a wider regeneration programme for the estate, with the aim of bringing together several new amenities for the community. These included a new five-a-side football pitch adjacent to the gardens and renovation of the local community centre. We also hoped that by drawing people outdoors to enjoy the new green spaces and gardens they might be encouraged to explore the local archaeological remains of Melandra Castle (which is a Roman fort, hence the name of the gardens) and the wider countryside beyond.

The Gamesley Residents Association went into local schools on the estate to get children to help design the play areas. We held an open day where people came along and gave their views.



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How did you think the gardens would make a difference to some of the estate's social issues?

The gardens can't tackle all the social issues on their own, but they can be part of the solution. I knew it would make a big difference to this estate. We are isolated here, and we felt that when people had something that actually belonged to them it would change their lives. The gardens can bring communities and individuals together, create a sense of pride and ownership, help people learn new skills and generally improve mental and physical well-being.

"There are people who have had exercise prescribed by the doctor, but they can't go to the gym or go swimming... so they come and do some planting. It helps with depression as well."

Mike Dewhurst, Vice-Chairman of Gamesley Residents Association

What were the next practical steps once the residents were involved?

"When we saw publicity about Doorstep Greens we thought we would try for it."

We contacted Doorstep Greens (a funding programme run by the Countryside Agency) for help and we involved local residents. We had to get to grips with renovating the earmarked site. It was an overgrown and semi-derelict grass area on the perimeter of the estate. The heavy clay soil made it almost impassably muddy when it rained. We also wanted to somehow incorporate the nearby remains of Melandra Castle and the Trans Pennine Trail.

We installed some drainage on the site first, which helped to alleviate the problems with mud and clay. The task of planting and maintenance was partially undertaken by a BTCV 'Green Gym' run from the estate's new Healthy Living Centre.

Meanwhile, the design of the gardens has created links with the nearby Melandra Castle, incorporating stone block paths engraved with Roman-style patterns and a children's play area within a Roman fort. Local schoolchildren have worked on simple designs depicting Roman coins and people, which have been sand-blasted on to stone block seating.

What are the plans for the gardens' future?

The residents' hope is to maximise the use of this inviting space. It's important that all of the community and others can use it, so we want an area that appeals to everyone whatever their age or background.

The neighbourhood regeneration co-ordinator, Dave Bennett, says that, "We're trying to encourage more awareness of the ancient monument site. We are in discussion with High Peak Borough Council to extend the Green Gym activities to the Melandra Castle site and to improve the signage and information board at the site."

What were your best decisions?

1. Have a 'can do' attitude
2. Get as many people as you can involved from the community, and make sure they are involved in the running of the project
3. Don't be afraid to get help
4. Apply for funding and help, and talk to your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service)
5. Use the local historic natural and built environment to inspire the design

How to improve your local area

- If you want to know more about setting up a city farm or a community garden contact the FCFCG. They exist to support, represent and promote community managed farms and gardens. In addition they provide information, advice and publications. You can also visit their website www.farmgarden.org.uk.

Further Information

- You can get advice from your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) at www.navca.org.uk, and help with volunteer labour for planting and conservation work from BTCV at www.btcv.org.
- For further information on historic gardens, you can contact the Garden History Society. Write them at 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ or call 020 7608 2409. Alternatively, visit their website at www.gardenhistorysociety.org or the Historic Gardens Foundation at www.historicgardens.org.
- For information on supporting local diversity across the UK, you can visit Common Ground's website at www.commonground.org.uk.