

Quarterly Penge Green Gym Report

October to December 2011

Introduction

This quarter has seen Penge Green Gym move towards its first autumn/winter in Winsford Gardens. Tasks have been concentrated on protecting the gardens for winter, and making preparations to increase colour and diversity of planting next spring. With all the exciting work in hand volunteer numbers have remained high, with a hardy core group braving the colder weather week on week – 10 volunteers have now attended over 20 sessions, with many others hard on their heels. The year was brought to a close with a Christmas party held in Winsford Gardens to thank all the volunteers for their hard work and dedication to the project. This quarter has been a successful time for securing funding to cover capital costs, resulting in plenty of work to occupy volunteers over the next few months including building a Growing Area and planting over 700 native trees.

Green Gym Activities (total 13 sessions)

Maintaining Ornamental and Vegetable Beds (10 sessions)

Work to maintain the ornamental and vegetable beds has been continued on a weekly basis through weeding, edging the lawn borders, removal of self-seeding saplings, and pruning the shrubs and rose bushes. To protect the ornamental beds over winter volunteers mulched the beds with a thick layer of compost and woodchip, which will also serve to improve the soil for spring planting. A strenuous but worthwhile task which was completed with enthusiasm in October was scarifying the lawns, removing thatch and moss, to improve them for recreational use next year.



Working in the rose beds surrounded by spectacular autumn colours

Willow Coppicing and Fence Weaving (3 sessions)

Five committed volunteers joined BTCV's Action for Croydon's Environment team for a day of willow coppicing at nearby Heaver's Meadow. The material collected at this additional session was recycled at Winsford Gardens where volunteers created rustic fences to discourage trampling of some of the most vulnerable ornamental beds.



Turning the compost regularly speeds up the decomposition process

Composting & Leaf Mulching (10 sessions)

Rather than waste fallen autumn leaves, volunteers swept these up on a weekly basis, storing them for use next spring once it has broken down into rich crumbly mulch. Turning the compost in the bins to speed up the decomposition process has also become a regular task. Unfortunately anti-social behaviour reared its ugly head again in Winsford Gardens when youths were spotted using compost bins built earlier in the year to climb fences into neighbouring gardens. Urgent action was taken by volunteers to move the compost bins to a new location, reducing this risk to the neighbours. The determined volunteers dismantled the bins, successfully saving all the materials, before re-erecting them in the new position.



Penge Green Gym volunteers begin work on the second wildflower meadow

Wildflower Meadow (4 sessions)

To allow as much space as possible for spring wildflower meadows to be sown, the turf was removed from a second meadow area thus lowering the soil fertility and ensuring our native species of wildflower will thrive without competition. These native flower borders will create a stunning effect in the gardens, attracting insects and in turn increase wildlife. The regular Penge Green Gym volunteers were helped out on this task for one session by a group of students from Bromley College.

Bulb Planting (2 sessions)

A fantastic contribution to the gardens was made through a corporate group team building day. The group brought with them thousands of native bulbs to plant, including species which naturalise beautifully in lawns such as wild daffodils and crocuses, as well as woodland species like snowdrops and bluebells to plant in the wildlife area. A planting scheme was followed allowing each bulb to be planted in its natural habitat which will result in the most beautiful display next spring.

Growing Area (5 sessions)

Work began in earnest in December to construct a Growing Area in an underused corner of the gardens. This fenced off area will contain all facilities necessary for the group to propagate their own plants to increase the diversity of planting, colour and interest in the gardens. This will also provide an important training tool for the volunteers both during construction, and through learning the appropriate plant propagation skills. The final four Penge Green Gym sessions of 2011, and one corporate team building day, have been dedicated to levelling and laying paved foundations to support a 12ft by 8ft polycarbonate greenhouse, as well as constructing half of the 6ft timber fence which will secure the area. This exciting project is being supported by the London Borough of Bromley.



Constructing the foundations to the greenhouse

Events

The first Penge Green Gym Christmas party was celebrated on the 21st December 2011. After a short work session, volunteers broke early to enjoy a rustic BBQ Christmas lunch, joined by members of the London Borough of Bromley Parks and Greenspaces Team. During the party certificates were handed out to 10 regular volunteers who have attended over 20 sessions. Further social events are to be planned for the volunteers in 2012 to strengthen group cohesion.

Community and Health Referral Partners

New partnerships have been formed with the following organisations this quarter:

- Bromley College – Following a successful group volunteering session at Winsford Gardens, a new scheme has newly been introduced for 2012 where college leavers with mild learning disabilities will attend weekly Penge Green Gym sessions as part of a practical horticultural placement.
- Community Service Volunteers (CSV)



Pruning overhanging trees

Funding Partners

Capital Shopping Centres

London Borough of Bromley

Wellbeing Comes Naturally Programme

Corporate Partners: Two team building days with RBS

Bromley College: One student volunteering session

Capital funding:

The Green Gym has been successful in winning funding for capital costs this quarter, as follows:

- £1984.97 through London Borough of Bromley to fund the Growing Area including greenhouse, timber fence, seed beds and growing equipment. Work to be completed by March 31st 2012.
- £150 through Capital Growth to fund seeds, compost and equipment required for food growing. To be purchased by March 2012 for the spring growing season.
- £2502.18 Greater London Authority funding for 705 native hedgerow trees, and 11 orchard trees. Work to be completed in February 2012.

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Publicity

With high numbers of volunteers attending each session and many new volunteers attending sessions through word-of-mouth, publicity has been stepped back this quarter and was primarily based on posting events on the standard websites. However, one notable publicity event was BTCV's national Big Green Weekend event, where Penge Green Gym was promoted at the successful regional event in Regent's Park.



Constructing weaved willow fences to protect ornamental beds

Looking forward

Over the next quarter Penge Green Gym will work to:

- Secure funding for the continuation of the project in 2012-13, looking to allow sufficient funding to develop a second Penge Green Gym session in nearby Betts Park to meet demand.
- Develop further health referral partners to target those most likely to benefit from the Green Gym, for example MIND and local GPs.
- Continue to recruit volunteers and develop their transferable skills.
- Develop facilities and further transform the garden for increased community use and biodiversity.
- Move further towards its aim of becoming self-sustaining: Volunteers will be trained to take on specific roles of responsibility in project sessions through on-site training and BTCV accredited training courses; volunteers will be involved in all aspects of project delivery; a volunteer led steering group will be set up in January to begin planning project days, events and sustainability.

Volunteer Statistics – October to December 2011

Penge Green Gym	
Sessions	13
Average registered volunteers per session	16
Workdays	208
New volunteers this quarter	10
Total registered volunteers attending this quarter	39
Gender	
Male	20 (51%)
Female	17 (44%)
Age (by person)	
<18	2 (5%)
<25	12 (31%)
<35	9 (24%)
<45	4 (10%)
<55	6 (15%)
<65	3 (8%)
Over 65	3 (8%)
Age (by workday)	
<18	4 (2%)
<25	36 (17%)
<35	43 (21%)
<45	38 (18%)
<55	55 (26%)
<65	13 (6%)
Over 65	19 (9%)
Ethnicity	
White British	82.1%
White Irish	5.1%
White Other	0%
Chinese	0%
Mixed/ White and Black Caribbean	0%
Mixed/ Other	2.6%
Asian or Asian British/ Pakistani	0%
Asian or Asian British/ Other	2.6%
Black or Black British/ African	5.1%
Black or Black British/ Caribbean	2.6%
Black or Black British/ Other	0%
Other	0%
Number of unemployed volunteers	22 (56%)
Number of volunteers with a disability	9 (23%)

Map showing volunteer locality to Winsford Gardens – October to December 2011

