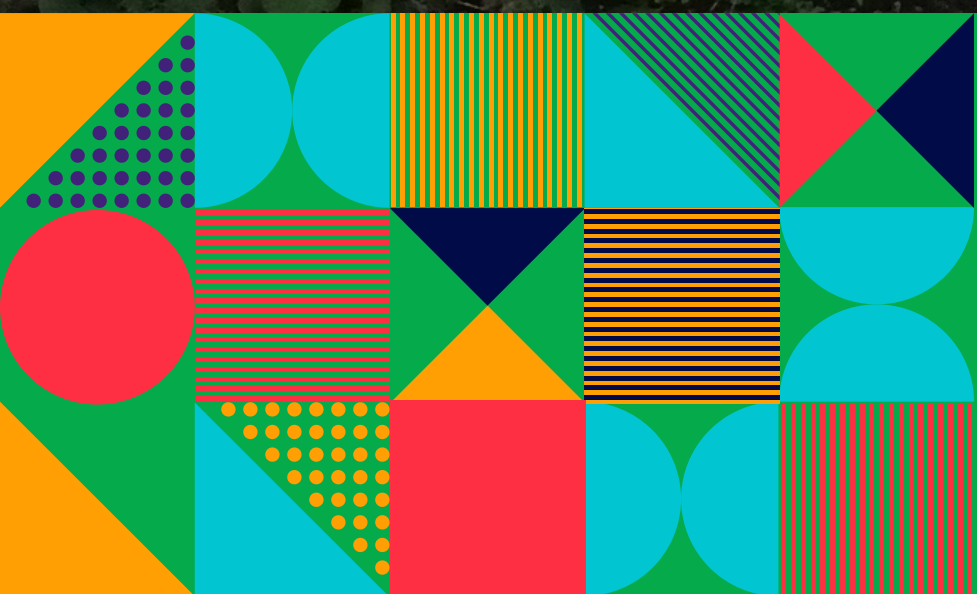




Edgbaston Neighbourhood Network Scheme Newsletter

March 2025



Feature Story:

"From Barren Land to Blossoming
Orchard: How a Citizen-Led Project
Transformed a Community"

>>> RECLAIMING FORGOTTEN GROUND

What was once a neglected patch of wild land, overgrown with weeds and strewn with debris, is now beginning to take shape into an orchard with fruit trees, vegetable patches, flower beds, pollinators, and a space for vibrant community life. This transformation didn't come from a government project or local organisation, it was the vision and effort of Chris Hoare, a North Edgbaston resident from the Waterworks Estate, and the local citizens who were determined to create a greener, more sustainable space for everyone

L-R Gemma, Store Manager (Tesco Springhill) and Marcus, Tesco Community Champion with Chris



>>> PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

Inspired by the idea of community orchards, Chris saw potential. "We wanted to create something that would not only beautify the neighborhood but also provide fresh, organic produce for generations to come and a space for families to come together," Chris explained.

The Waterworks Estate Orchard Project started with a clean up organised by Groundworks and volunteers from the estate. Chris also approached a number of sources for grants. Within a few months, they had raised enough interest and funds to purchase saplings, soil, compost, and gardening tools.

With help from Groundworks, Starbucks, HS2, gardening centres, Fortem, and the City Council, the community now has five raised beds including two for children and one specifically aimed at people with disabilities or wheelchair users. Over the course of multiple community planting days, families, volunteers, and seniors all pitched in to dig, plant, and water the saplings. What had once been an abandoned space was coming to life, one plant at a time.

Like any grassroots concept, the orchard project faced its share of challenges. But with Chris' community-minded approach and continuous engagement, regular clean-up events, and engaging workshops on wreath-making and spring baskets, support for the project grew. "We had to be creative, but every problem we solved made us more connected as a community," said Chris.

>>> A GROWING LEGACY

Although still in its early stages of development, the community is keen to turn it into a self-sustaining piece of land. It will also provide a space for families, for get-togethers at seasonal events and to take part in the many workshops on orchard care and flower arrangements planned across the year.

The orchard has also strengthened social bonds across generations. "We didn't just plant trees," Chris reflects, "We planted hope, resilience, and a sense of belonging." In keeping with the community spirit, Chris has also made partnerships with Tesco Spring Hill to distribute excess food to the residents on the estate.

Their story is a testament to the power of citizen-led action—proof that when communities come together with a shared vision, they can turn even the most overlooked spaces into something truly fruitful.

For those inspired by their journey, Chris has one piece of advice: "Start small, believe in your vision, and involve your neighbors. I couldn't have done it without the people behind me. You'll be amazed at what can grow from just one idea." Chris is now a citizen representative on our Steering Group too!

UPDATES

➤➤➤ RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY

For Random Acts of Kindness Day, we partnered with St Germain's Church and Legacy West Midlands for a day of kindness and community connection with creative pottery classes, arts and crafts, poetry, and self-care activities. The Real Junk Food Project served food, along with complimentary refreshments and an endless supply of pastries and baked goods. A wonderful day of kindness, creativity, and community spirit!



➤➤➤ MEET THE FUNDER

We had a full house to kick off the year at 'Meet the Funder' that took place on January 20th at Avery Fields Sports and Events. The event provided an opportunity for community groups to hear from national, regional, and local funders to learn about available grant programmes and tips for a successful grant application. Attendees had the chance to network with other community groups and speak to the funders directly.



➤➤➤ KEEP WARM AND WELL

Following the success of our first Keep Warm and Well event in November, February marked the return of this community event, this time in Bartley Green. Held at Milebrook Hall, the day featured a variety of stands from organisations across the constituency. Attendees were able to get free lifestyle checks, support with benefits, and much more!



➤➤➤ COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES

Another successful workshop around grief, loss, death and dying at St. Germain's Community Hub where participants made sock puppets with artist Sally Harper from Sharper Arts/Soothing Stitches and facilitated by Suzanne McArthur from Evolve & Flourish. Lots of conversation on how individuals coped with their loss, the challenges that come with it, but also laughter as we threaded our thoughts into the sock puppets we were making.



SMALL GRANTS FUNDING UPDATE

The following organisations have been awarded Edgbaston NNS Small Grants:

➤➤➤ FREE WHEELIN'

FREE WHEELIN An exciting year-long program bringing inclusive wheelchair dance to disabled adults (18-49) in Birmingham. By offering both in-person and virtual options, the program ensures greater accessibility, allowing individuals with transport or caregiving barriers to take part.

For more information, visit <https://propeldance.uk>

➤➤➤ TOGETHER MINDS CIC

This Is Us and Safe Steps. This Is Us is a 10-session mental health programme that empowers disabled adult participants to manage their well-being through creative activities, peer support, and self-care techniques

For more information, please contact jo.shellum@togetherminds.co.uk