

Letsby Avenue

A proposal by Hulme Community Garden Centre
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Introduction ...

Letsby Avenue, Hulme

Letsby Avenue is home to over 40 trees and forms an urban forest with its own ecosystem. The social, psychological and recreational benefits are many, including beautification and reduction of the urban heat island effect, reduction of air pollution, enhancement of property values and improved wildlife habitat. Residents living by Letsby Avenue appreciate the environment they live in which help them maintain their connection with nature.

Letsby Avenue comprises of 3 distinct areas (rooms) separated by 2 walkways at the centre, linking to Humberstone Avenue and to Humanby Avenue. Following numerous meetings and discussions regarding the maintenance of Letsby Avenue, the latest two organized by Greening the Redbricks project and the Greenzones Project, it is felt that

there are still no solutions to help facilitate the maintenance of the area by City South, since the area is overgrown and access to the shrubs and plants for maintenance is difficult.

The dense shade that the tree's canopy creates means that very little can be grown underneath, besides shade loving plants and woodland species. However there is a desire to see more colours and a more structured design to the area while respecting the already established urban forest ecosystem and the thriving habitats this has created and taking into account the context of the street which is in a dense residential area.

There are some willing residents busy looking after pockets of Letsby Avenue who have created beautiful car-

pets of spring flowering bulbs, such as snowdrops, bluebells, narcissi and tulips, woodland shrubs such as cornus and euonymus, photinia and chosya, but very little else thrives, even though there are signs of many attempts at growing hebes, rosemary and lavender. There are also a lot of hazelnut suckers, which need to be removed and perhaps relocated.

There has been a project at the entrance of Letsby Avenue, off Clarendon Road, in the first 'room' (Room One) as a result of the Greenzone Project's remit. This small project is described on page 34 of the Green Zone Toolkit handbook. It was led by HCGC along with their 20 or so volunteers in mid 2011. A small design was proposed of only half of the area, with the creation of a woodchip path, thus providing 3



area for planting, re-opening a fire exit gate, removing large clumps of brambles but leaving one large one for the benefit of wildlife and planting several woodland plants such as phlomis, actea, vincas, ferns and astrantia. This was well received and it is enjoyed by small children walking and cycling on the path and has created a more defined structure to this first 'room'.

The Hulme Street Project is also well underway and the street is being transformed into an outdoor gym with pockets of fruit trees and edible plants, planters and bulb planting and a community event area. The far end of Letsby Avenue gives onto Hulme Street, and it was felt that perhaps this would be the best area, (Room Three), to start work on and provide some design to help link the two streets together.

The following pages describe the existing plants growing in the area and the rationale for additional plants, and lists some ideas for hard landscaping. We are also making several recommendations for some tying work and improvements in Room Two. For each room a brief action summary describes the work to be done.

We understand that this proposal will form the basis for a public consultation in mid February 2012 by HCGC and City South to the residents. An important part of the consultation will be to find out which plants have been planted in memory of someone or for a special occasion. We will not remove any plants as part of this project.

A detailed plan accompanies this proposal.



Rationale ...

ROOM TWO ...

We propose the removal of 7 *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash) suckers growing along the fence bordering the back gardens on the left hand side. These cast a lot of shade to the flats. The large brambles could also be severely pruned as they stop access to any part of the far left of the site. Rubbish accumulates underneath and is therefore difficult to reach.

The two first right beds were planted with spring flowering bulbs in late 2011 and signage could be provided to help protect this area.

Paul, a resident at No 36 Humanby, has been trying to grow some plants

and has tidied and cut the grass outside his back gate. He has tried to grow plants but these got damaged by dogs. He would like to be provided with 2 raised beds so that he can grow more plants. As part of the Hulme Street Project, he will be moving a large sedge growing by his back gate to a border on Hulme Street.

It is generally felt on the whole of Letsby Avenue that seating isn't encouraged for fear of attracting drinking parties late into the night. We therefore will not propose seating on this occasion.



ROOM THREE ...

It was felt that the first path to the left leading to the exit gate needs replacing. The tree's roots have lifted many concrete flags. The first two beds on either side of the path could benefit from some spring flowering bulbs. The first bed to the left has been planted and maintained by Tim, a resident living opposite the site. His choice of planting is very appropriate to the area and the species of plants he has planted are all adequate and thriving. It was therefore felt that we could duplicate his planting choice on the other side of the path, thus creating a mirror image of the first garden.

A path should be created throughout both side of the gardens, encouraging people to walk and enjoy the gardens and which will provide a clearer route

for the maintenance of the gardens by City South, such as cutting the grass if necessary. Signage should also be displayed to describe the plants but also to protect spring flowering bulbs.

The last bed to the right has been covered for several years with old carpets by Georgina, a resident living opposite this bed. We would like to propose the creation of two further raised beds to help grow the plants she is so looking forward to care for. This will be far more enjoyable to look at than rotting carpets.

Throughout both rooms, two clearly defined areas for composting garden waste. However it is felt that residents shouldn't use the gardens to store barbecues, pipes, bricks and other materials. These should be removed for health and safety reasons also if these

items are left it promotes the dumping of further unwanted bric a brac and isn't pleasing to look at.



Concept/Action ...

ROOM TWO ...

1. The removal of 7 ash tree saplings along the fence
2. Taming the brambles
3. Signage on the spring flowering bulbs beds
4. Creation of 2 raised beds outside Paul's garden
5. Creation of composting area
6. Removal of barbecues, pipes, bricks and other materials

ROOM THREE ...

1. Creation of a new path to replace the existing concrete flags linking it to the main woodchip path throughout the garden on both sides
2. Creation of two raised beds (removing the carpet)
3. Planting on right side to mirror Tim's garden
4. Planting of spring flowering bulbs on the two first beds
5. Creation of composting area and plant signage



The planting ...

All the plants listed below are already growing on Letsby Avenue. These are listed in three categories: shrubs, bulbs and wild flowers and others. We would like to introduce a handful of new shrubs too. The next page will describe the plants in more details.

Shrubs ...

Aucuba, choisya, euonymus, hydrangea, photinia, mahonia, hebe, cornus, sedge, fatsia, ivy, clematis, buddleia, cornus, cotoneaster, magnolia, vinca major, lonicera ...

Bulbs ...

Bluebells, crocosmia, cyclamen, narcissi, snowdrop ...

Wild flowers and others ...

Saxifraga, myosotis, dandelions, geum urbanum, brambles, primrose, nettles, lesser celandine, tellima, docks, geranium ...

It would be good to introduce further wild flowers such as solomon's seal, geranium, bellwort, foam flower, wood violets, lamiums and trilliums.

Introducing new plants ...

Blackthorn (for the sloe berries), escallonia 'Gold Ellen', rosa canina (for the rose hips along the fence), Holly, Cornus and hawthorn as a standard feature to balance with the existing rowan.



Maintenance ...

Given that the area will be divided into planting beds with a path throughout, it will be easier to maintain. The area is a woodland and all plants are slow growing and require minimal pruning if at all.

Leaves are an important part of the woodland garden. Leaf mould is an excellent, free soil amendment. It is easy to make, simple to use, and has a huge impact on soil health. It increases the water retention of soils. Leaf mould also improves soil structure and provides a fantastic habitat for soil life, including earthworms and beneficial bacteria.

There are several wire bins on the estate and only the leaves from the

main path should be collected and composted. The leaves falling on the beds should be left until spring and removed by hand, if needed, to expose spring flowering bulbs.

Aucuba, choisya, euonymus, hydrangea, photinia, mahonia, hebe, sedge, fatsia, cotoneaster, magnolia and vinca major shouldn't be pruned at all.

Buddleia should be hard pruned in end of February. Cornus should also be pruned, only 1 out of every 3 stems to promote young growth and retain colour. Ivy should be cut to the required height, generally to reaching height, in spring. Climbers such as clematis and lonicera should

also be pruned to a bud in spring to keep in shape and promote new shoots. This pruning work is carried out with secateurs and pruning saw, not with a chainsaw.

All other woodland plants do not require any maintenance beside removing dead flower heads in spring. The spring flowering bulbs leaves should be left to die down completely before removing old leaves by hand. The bulbs benefit from the leaves energy to build up nutrients for the following year's bloom. It is good practice to plant perennials with bulbs so that when the bulbs' leaves die down they are hidden under the perennials, such as heucheras, astringia, geranium etc.



There are also several other plants in room one on Letsby Avenue such as *Ribes sanguineum*. This can be left unpruned, but for the best performance it is worth cutting the branches that have flowered back to a strong pair of buds just after they have bloomed. There is also a very large honeysuckle in room one and it should be cut down in spring as low as one can reach for easier maintenance in the following years. There are also several 'young loner' plants, such as a willow contorta stem, a *corylus avelana* and several hazel suckers. It would be an idea to move these plants to one of the beds created with a path instead of being grown randomly alone. We believe that the willow will not

thrive - it requires a lot of light and we fear it will not do well where it is.

Once the spring flowering bulbs have died down, wild flowers will start appearing. There will be a mix of brambles with nettles, dandelions and docks. We believe that these plants are necessary for the well being of the whole garden's wildlife and only 'taming' large clumps is necessary.

