Cultural Mapping Project: Neighbourhoods fact sheet

Milton Crescent Ball Court & Community Garden

Milton Crescent, Beaumont Leys, Leicester
Installation: December 2003

Artist

Tom Pearman
Ian Stemp (Landscape Architect), construction drawings.

Biography

Tom Pearman is an artist, furniture designer and silkscreen printer. His designs include projects for architectural and interior design companies, galleries and public environments. Since graduating from the Royal College of Art, where he specialised in printmaking, he has developed both his artistic and design skills, enabling him to undertake a variety of challenging commissions. His work ranges from specially designed folding tables and display desks for the Royal Festival Hall through to site-specific works for Broomfield Hospital in Essex.

Statement

"For Milton Crescent, Tom's approach was to create a design that reflects the energy and spirit of the community and area ... this evolved as a result of extensive research through community consultation and participation in the design development. Local residents said: 'A basketball court would be great... somewhere for children to play ... a peaceful garden that would be used by all... let's raise awareness via a fun-day in summer..."

Project Brief

A detailed feasibility study, which preceded and informed the artist's project brief and appointment of the artist, was commissioned through North West Leicester Single Regeneration Budget 5 (SRB5) programme funds. Research was conducted by a team comprising local residents, artists and the Leicester Housing Association (LHA) support team, who identified that local people wanted the Milton Crescent disused grassed area to be regenerated and transformed into a multifunctional and intergenerational recreational facility. Artists were invited to respond to the site and put forward proposals as to how they might engage the local residents and tenants in the development of the scheme.

Community Involvement

Throughout the project's design, development and construction, the project artist Tom Pearman, the project delivery team, Upper Temple Walk Residents' & Tenants' Association, LHA, public art Leicester (PAL) and local community services representatives; worked together to change a small grassed and under-used public open space into an attractive functional area, to be enjoyed by the whole community. Working in response to, and using the findings of, the feasibility study as an initial starting point, the artist devised a concept design and developed this into a detailed design over a period of time through a community based programme. The programme comprised consultative presentations and participatory art and design workshops, with young and older people, in local schools, residential and neighbourhood facilities. In tandem with this the project team delivered an ongoing update of design development through visual displays, presentations, talks and reports. The scheme involved many people and took several years to reach fruition. Today the Ball Court and Community Garden is well used and cared for, and is managed on a day-to-day basis by local residents. Recently the Upper Temple Walk Residents' & Tenants' Association was successful in securing funding for additional planting including a number of trees. Regular events, organised by the Residents' & Tenants' Association, are held in the Community Garden, such as bulb planting, barbecues and fêtes, bringing the whole neighbourhood together.

Purpose/Function

To provide an integrated public artwork/hard and soft landscape scheme for the whole community to enjoy, creating a multifunctional place that includes a picnic and seating area, a ball court, grassed and planted areas. The scheme has brought different generations and groups of residents together, celebrating and enjoying a space that everyone has been involved in creating.

Site/Location

Milton Crescent is located in the Leys area within Beaumont Leys, north-west of the city centre. It is a mixed-use district with residential housing and light industrial units. The residential area is predominately 1970s' housing stock, various pocket parks, leisure facilities and a large district shopping centre. Leicester Housing Association (LHA) owns and manages approximately 300 homes in Beaumont Leys, predominantly around the Milton Crescent/Calver Hey Road and Upper Temple Walk. In the immediate area are situated a further 500 local authority and owner-occupied properties. The successful Single Regeneration Budget bid for North-West Leicester (SRB5), which focused on physical investment in the fabric of buildings and the environment, together with social investment to foster a sense of belonging, ownership and influence, provided additional funding and facilitated partnership working for the Ball Court & Community Garden project.

Special Features/Points of Interest

- The community were involved at all stages of this project to ensure that their needs and wishes were incorporated in the final scheme.
- The site is located within an area with a strong local community interest in positive change for their neighbourhood
- The artist designed the Ball Court & Community Garden (hard and soft landscaped areas) with integrated artwork elements including decorative panels, tabletops, seating, concrete relief and vitreous enamel panels, and utilised recycled materials.
- The designs were translated into construction drawings by a landscape architect (Ian Stemp Associates).
- The main green retaining concrete (seating and planting) walls were constructed on site, which entailed making wooden moulds and then pouring the ready-mixed coloured concrete in situ.
- The enamelled panels are made from porcelain-based enamel fused to a steel plate (A.J. Wells & Sons, Vitreous Enamellers).
- The decorative concrete floorscape design (4.4m x 6.8m) was created through a two-stage process: (1) pouring two layers of coloured concrete (one on top of the other) and (2) when dry placing a stencil design on the top layer and then shot-blasting the exposed areas to reveal the design in the colour beneath (John Anderson Designer Hardscapes).
- The project was a finalist in the Leicestershire Property and Construction awards 2004.
- The local community have taken on the day-to-day management of the scheme, working together with Leicester Housing Association and the City Council's parks and arts teams to ensure that it remains a pleasant place for all.
- The scheme required and gained full planning permission.

Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- Where do you think the abstract patterns / designs originate from? How many different patterns / designs are there?
- How many colours are there and why do you think these specific colours have been used?
- What techniques were used to translate the artist's designs onto the floorscape and concrete panels?
- How did the artist apply his expertise, knowledge and understanding of printing techniques in a variety of different media?
- The artist was reliant on other skilled people to make the work on site. What do you think the considerations and issues might have been?
- What is meant by the term 'multidisciplinary teamwork'? Which skills do you think are needed? How does this differ from the case of an artist working in a studio situation?
- This is a very different work to some of the other commissions within the **Cultural Mapping** project. What do you think the main differences are?
- Do you think the involvement of the local residents & tenants played an important part in this project? If the project had been designed without local people's involvement how do you think it would be different?
- Which access, health & safety issues did the artist and landscape architect have to take into account before, during and after the project's completion?
- What are the physical and chemical properties of vitreous enamel? Where else can you see vitreous enamel applied, in the home and outdoors?
- This project took many people and almost three years to develop from first discussions to completion. Why do you think it took so long? Try to design and plan a functional project in your area, local club, or school playground using the Milton Crescent project / framework as a starting point.
- Imagine yourself to be the community representative, a lead artist and/or a landscape architect. What would your starting point be to design and implement a specific use or wider intergenerational scheme? Who would need to be involved and why?

For More Information

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

Toolkit author Jasia McArdle with input from Steve Cooke. Image © Tom Pearman 2005 for Public Art Leicester **Cultural Mapping** project.