



## Understanding Cities

### *Nature Spaces*

#### **Natalie Marshall**

This place is really it's like an oasis in the middle of the city, it's social, spiritual being close to the land, planting is fundamental really, feeding yourself, being able to feed yourself.

#### **Cecil**

I'm a happy man until I go back through the door because I enjoy my day, and nothing could sweet me more when I come through the gate and meet one of my fellow men, ladies or gentlemen, and say good morning.

#### **Surjit**

When you're growing your own vegetables the taste is a different than what you're buying from the shops. When you pick them up and cook them, when you're eating you do feel very proud, I have grown this.

#### **Steve Hinchcliffe**

I'm Steve Hinchcliffe examining a particular city nature formation – the Uplands Allotment in Hands worth, Birmingham. You've just heard from Natalie, Cecil and Surjit, three of the plot-holders who were talking about the enjoyment that gardening gives them. Now here's Linton Carby who showed me around his allotment.

#### **Linton Carby**

I'll show you in here.

#### **Steve**

In the shed.

#### **Linton**

Which you'll have a laugh.

#### **Steve**

Right.

#### **Linton**

You will have a laugh. No you're alright, you're alright, man, I'll go.....

#### **Steve**

Wow, look at this huge marrow.

#### **Linton**

Yeah. Garlic.

#### **Steve**

Right.

#### **Linton**

Everything.

#### **Steve**

What are these - gourds or what are they?

**Linton**

No, these are pumpkins...

**Steve**

Pumpkins, right.

**Linton**

Expensive stuff, these are... Japanese, man.

**Steve**

Do you sell some of them, or?

**Linton**

Oh yes, oh yes, yeah, yeah. They're nice in a pumpkin pie...

**Steve**

Yeah, yeah, right.

**Linton**

And that's where I keep my tools and all like that. So you know when you ever come down here in the summer, and you have a friend you can sit down on that seat.

**Steve**

And the newspapers?

**Linton**

Yes.

**Steve**

Have a cup of tea?

**Linton**

Yes. So you make yourself comfortable while you're here, I mean we have a stove in here sometimes, we have a bacon sandwich and all like that.

**Steve**

So you can spend the whole day down here?

**Linton**

You can, yes, and if you look we have a barbecue, you see it up there?

**Steve**

How much rent do you pay on a site this size?

**Linton**

Well if you reach, if you reach 60 you have a discount, but the normal price is about £10 - £4 for your hut a year... that's cheap in it?

**Steve**

OK, yeah, it's not bad, yeah.

**Linton**

Down here, I just keep this little thing here, and you can see I have seats and all these things here, a water butt, you can... Now this thing here, I show you. My missuss plant this in here for a cucumber and that's what... These things here, and we had dozens of them, I'm going to show you.

**Steve**

You don't know what that's called do you?

**Linton**

It's a squash; it's a squash, squash, squash.

**Steve**

I've never seen one in the shops.

**Steve**

Mario Rozanski, the Allotment Association's Secretary, outlines some of the social and natural benefits of the allotment. He describes a site of community and difference, rich in social and natural diversity.

**Mario Rozanski**

Our allotment site, being 38 acres, is large enough to have an impact on the community. With 400 plots there is enough people so that food-growing as an activity can have an impact with families connected through lots of social networks getting to know that there is a good pastime if you retire or if you have some spare time, or if you want to grow your fresh food, or if you're short of money for a whole range of different reasons, that there's the availability of land-space here.

If food-growing activity brings people into contact with trees and with birds and with foxes, and if they can co-exist, and if the allotment gardeners recognise the value of having a range of crops together with a range of shrubs and elderberries, and blackberries, and rowanberries, and all the berries, and this habitat providing a haven for animals, then I think we'll all get closer to understanding the nature of green issues, and what such technical terms as bio-diversity mean, and why we need to preserve habitats, and why we need to have action plans for particular species.

**Steve**

There's a wider context too. As Mario describes, the allotment is linked into many other activities within Birmingham and beyond.

**Mario**

Well our gardeners are now beginning to see their activity in a wider context, that it's a food-growing context, that it's an organic context, and that it's a socially valuable activity that, apart from producing cheap food, it's about a stress release, and it's an activity that the whole family can take part in, from young children right through to elderly people there is a common factor. And this sort of sets self-worth, actually means that they then have developed a confidence to carry out other projects. Our biggest project was when we raised money to have an arts event and we turned the allotment site into an art gallery to celebrate 50 years, and we had modern-day, performance timed-based artists mixing with gardeners from three cultures in a way that I don't think anybody could have imagined could happen, and it shows me that you can break down barriers between different groups, and different ages, and different cultures if you're prepared to do it, and if you can see the potential. Allotment land offers a nice space to get a clubhouse and a safe environment for a community facility, and this is what I think we're demonstrating.

**Steve**

So this allotment is changing in its character and its links, something Natalie Marshall points to when she talks about the allotment's attitude to broader participation.

**Natalie**

I think this Association has got a very positive outlook because there's a lot of women here from different backgrounds, different cultural backgrounds and ages, come here to do gardening, and historically women, particularly in indigenous cultures, have got a close relationship to the land, so perhaps in our society, city life, it may be it's seen as a male thing but I think that's not true. There's a lot of activities that go on in the centre, talk to other gardeners; it's a learning experience as well because older gardeners can teach me things about planting, growing, which foods to grow. We've got courgettes, got a Christmas tree, got some fruit bushes, some strawberries, and I've got small children as well so I came down with my daughter last weekend and we've made a scarecrow, so I'm acquiring lots of skills, so it's social, spiritual and it's fun as well.