



All images: John Little/Grass Roof Company



Above: Elderly residents have commented on the fact that they have not seen poppies and cornflowers since they were children, and the residents of other areas outside the estate have shown interest in having the scheme extended

Below: Cheap and easy signs were used to keep residents and the general public informed about the scheme. The Grass Roof Company used cheap boards and stakes that they could not only afford to lose occasionally, but could also move and change easily.

Clapton Park Estate, London

AN ESTATE IN London, Clapton Park, has seen the introduction of a vibrant, seasonal and biodiverse plant community that many other similar estates lack. The Grass Roof Company worked with the Clapton Park Management Organisation (CPMO) – a tenants organisation – on the planting or sowing of native and non-native herbaceous plants on the estate.

The Grass Roof Company suggested to the CPMO that they complete a large part of the work free of charge rather than wait for funding; CPMO was happy to contribute towards the cost of the plants used in the scheme.

Work began with a reconnaissance of the estate to locate underused, often dog-fouled, areas of grass with no real value. It was also realised at this time that there were many metres of iron railings that had for years been sprayed with herbicide, simply because the mowers could not get to them.

The areas under the railings, around lamp posts and trees proved to be a perfect site on which to sow annuals. They were already weed free, so £200 worth of seed was sowed on lightly raked soil for some 900m. Several different seed mixes were tried: native annuals; native/exotic annuals; and annuals/perennials. Annual climbers, such as ‘Morning glory’, were also added to cover some of the railings.

After meeting James Hitchmough from the University of Sheffield (who is working on the creation of novel plant communities through the *in situ* sowing of annual seed mixes) it was decided to combine some native planting with Hitchmough’s prairie seed mix (see GP 04, ‘Enriching urban space’ and GP 07, ‘Making an impact’). This gave a longer and showier flowering period in

combinations with the less obvious native wild plants.

Again, preparation of these areas was straightforward. Glyphosate was applied to the grass in September 2003, then after a three week wait, and without disturbing the sward, 30mm of sharp sand mulch was applied to the site. This provided a good medium for the prairie seed, as well as suppressing most of the annual weed seeds.

The Grass Roof Company had won the contract for the weed control before starting the scheme which meant it could leave beneficial weeds, as well as reducing herbicide use generally on the estate. The company was also prepared to hand weed, at least for the first year, unusual in a busy urban space with fertile soil.

Some of the areas had trampling problems which reduced germination – a disadvantage of a sharp sand mulch, and, in a few areas sprayed late in 2003, the glyphosate failed to kill some perennial weeds. These then appeared in full health in spring, so it was felt that a longer site preparation would have been beneficial. However, the combination of low cost and ease of preparation meant that new areas could be added to the scheme very easily.

The Grass Roof Company is now looking at suitable species for the joints between pavement and buildings, thus reducing herbicide use and challenging traditional maintenance practice.

The company was aware of the importance of informing the public/residents about what was being attempted so used a system of cheap wooden boards and stakes to display A4 laminated posters on the project.

According to the company, the most rewarding impact of the work has been

the comments from residents. The elderly have not seen poppies and cornflowers since their childhood; residents from areas outside the project have asked for the scheme to be extended; and the local school has made enquiries about using the wildflower areas. Clapton Park is now an estate where the residents have a reason to question and talk about the green spaces around them.

Visit: www.grassroof.com



FACTS AND FIGURES	
Project design and management:	Grass Roof Company
Area of project:	Around 900 linear metres, 600mm wide, and six areas totalling 600m ²
Start and finish dates on site:	Planning began June 2003; sowing completed April 2004
Project costs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design by Grass Roof Company free of charge ■ site visit and prairie seed selection by James Hitchmough, University of Sheffield, £405 ■ site preparation (herbicide Glyphosate), approx £190 ■ soil preparation including five tonnes of sharp sand mulch, approx £520 ■ seed mixes £450
Funding sources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design, labour and materials provided by the Grass Roof Company free of charge ■ Prairie plants paid for by Clapton Park Management Organisation