

Environments for All Conference 25th March 2004

Key Note Speakers

Maeve Sherlock – Chief Executive, Refugee Council

Maeve Sherlock has been Chief Executive of the Refugee Council since August 2003. Prior to the Refugee Council, Maeve has been Chief Executive of the National Council for One Parent Families, Chief Executive at the Council for International Education and a full-time adviser to Gordon Brown, MP. In 2000 she received an OBE for services to the eradication of child poverty.



Marilyn Taylor – Chair, Urban Forum

Marilyn Taylor is the Chair of regeneration charity, Urban Forum, she is also Professor of Social Policy at the Faculty of the Built Environment in the University of the West of England. Marilyn has been involved in community development, third sector and partnership issues in the UK since the 1970s as a researcher, policy analyst and evaluator.



Tom Flood – Chief Executive, BTCV

Tom Flood, Chief Executive of BTCV, is overseeing the organisation's drive to become a more diverse and inclusive organisation and assist changes to its Board's Governance. He is a Fellow of the RSA and the British Institute of Management and a Board Member of ACEVO.





Judy Ling-Wong OBE – Director, Black Environment Network

BEN is established to promote Equality of Opportunity with respect to ethnic communities in the preservation, protection and development of the environment. It has forged a working philosophy for involving ethnic communities that is relevant to their needs.



Lea Halborg – Swansea Community Project Officer, BTCV Cymru

Lea has been in post for two years, supporting grass roots environmental community work in a very disadvantaged area of West Wales. During this time, she has built links with a wide range of local groups and individuals and has been amazed by the people who, despite everything that is stacked against them, still want to change their lives, communities and environment.

Rehena Begum – Volunteer, BTCV Cymru

Rehena is on a Community Work Traineeship placement with BTCV Cymru, but also volunteers many extra hours over and above her placement commitment. She assists with the running of a number of different community groups in the Swansea area and supports BTCV's work reaching out to local groups, helping to ensure that the opportunities we offer are relevant and accessible.

Huda Alarashi – Volunteer Officer, BTCV Scotland

Huda is part of Glasgow's large and culturally diverse community and is now an integral part of the Govanhill community. She has volunteered with BTCV for the past two and half years and is helping to ensure that BTCV stays aware of community opinions towards volunteering and the environment, bringing an additional perspective to the programme's direction and development.

Plenary Speakers

Chair: Richard Williams – Development Director, BTCV

Richard is BTCV's Development Director. He is also Chair of a Youth Enterprise charity and a trustee of the Environment Council. Richard has a wealth of experience in the sector and a personal commitment to diversity, playing a major part in BTCV's strategic development. He has researched and produced the Environments for All bid, co-ordinated the project and has acted as an agent for change. Recognising that there is still a lot to achieve, he is adamant that



leadership, transparency and measurement are all vital elements of achieving organisational change.



Trevor Phillips – Chair, Commission for Racial Equality



Trevor Phillips (OBE) began his career in television rising to become Head of Current affairs for LWT in 1992. Throughout his adult life Trevor has been involved in campaigning on equality issues and has combined his media career with a number of voluntary posts including work with several leading charities which serve minority ethnic communities. Trevor was appointed Chair of the CRE on 1 March 2003.

Peter Matthew – Head of Liveability & Public Spaces, ODPM

Peter Matthew became Divisional Manager of the Liveable and Sustainable Communities Division at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in late 2002. He is responsible for leading cross-government action to improve local liveability, and delivering ODPM actions for creating decent places.

Before becoming Divisional Manager, Peter led the ODPM's drive towards the greening of towns and cities. From 1999 he was Head of Urban Environmental Regeneration and Secretary to the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce.

Peter joined the British civil service in 1993, with the Department of the Environment as a policy research officer responsible for development control policy. In 1996, as Senior Planning Policy Adviser at DETR, he was responsible for planning policy on affordable housing, PPG6 - Town Centres and Retail Development, mixed-use development.





Chris Swales, Senior Community Affairs Manager, Barclays PLC

Barclays takes its social and environmental responsibilities seriously, supporting social and financial inclusion both nationally and at grass roots level to make a real and lasting difference to the community. In 2002 the bank continued to be one the UK's top corporate contributors, making global commitment of £32 million and one in four Barclays employees volunteered for their local communities. The relationship between Barclays and BTCV is long-established through the Barclays Site Saver Scheme. BTCV Environments for All is a natural extension of this programme and reflects Barclays' aim to be an inclusive organisation. Barclays intends to make financial and community services accessible by supporting innovative solutions which will make a real and lasting difference through partnership schemes such as BTCV Environments for All.



Green Gym Warm-up



- BTCV Green Gym offers people an alternative - the opportunity to improve their fitness by involvement in practical conservation activities such as planting hedges, creating and maintaining community gardens, or improving footpaths.

health and safety guidelines. People can join for an hour or more on a weekly or twice-weekly basis.



- Experienced leaders provide training in practical skills and encourage people to work according to their own capabilities.



- Green Gyms are open to people of all ages and from all walks of life.
- Health professionals, including GPs, nurses and health visitors, play a role in recommending the Green Gym to their patients.



The Lion Dance

This charitable performance group is part of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to develop and expand the Chinese Lion Dance and martial-art culture to a younger generation of whatever nationality.

The Lion dance dates back to 2000 years in Chinese history and there are many versions as to how the dance arrived. One popular theory was that a beast terrorised a village in China . After a while, the villagers decided to fight back and came up with the idea of a papier maché creature accompanied by noisy musical instruments likes gongs, drums and cymbals to scare away the beast. When this idea worked, the villagers celebrated with firecrackers. Thus the belief of lion dancing is to bring good luck and prosperity while driving away evil.





Indian Drumming

Throughout the day, percussionist Taj Seehra attracted the attention by playing the Dhol, an instrument used during the Mughal Empire to summon villagers to important events.



The Market Place



Helpers for the Day – BTCV Millennium Volunteers





Transcript of Conference

Tom Flood – Chief-Executive of BTCV **Welcome and Opening Address**

Well good morning everybody. I think you now realise you're in for a slightly different day. Today is about BTCV; it is actually a day for us first of all to thank you for coming, because this is an important moment in our history. It is the time in which we as an organisation have the self-confidence as an organisation to say to the world what we've done very well for 45 years, for a small part of society, is now something that can actually be shared by everybody who is in society.

It is also news to us today that for the first time, BTCV made headlines in Third Sector magazine, and that again is quite a novel experience for us. We tend to be a slightly invisible organisation that hides behind the communities we work with. Whilst I would never want to change that, because it is *people* and *communities* that are BTCV's passion, there is an identity which the organisation needs if it is to secure the resources to realise its charitable aims.

The second is I think about myths – I always liken BTCV to a story with a very happy ending. I attended an international conference some months ago and asked the audience what their image was of BTC. What emerged was an image of a van turning up with the volunteers getting out, mainly white, doing work in the countryside- it's like opening your favourite box of chocolates - you know exactly what's inside! While that image is a very important part of what we do, it is today a very small part of our actual delivery. In the next ten minutes, what I want to share with you is not just a programme; it is about a way or belief which this organisation has for its future.

The truth is that over the last five years particularly, BTCV has moved to where people live. Of course this happens to be the towns and the cities of the United Kingdom and also overseas, where we've worked in over 20 countries very year, with a passion for many years. I think the dream of the future of BTCV is to connect people with place. A lot of people do not have a connection in their lives with a sense of place. The place they walk through in their daily life is not a place that feels very good. I think all of us have had that experience of going through graffiti-land, litter-land, or open parks where you do not feel particularly comfortable in, either because of culture or because of their safety.

I'm also very passionate that we will protect what we do best at - which I believe as an organisation is understanding what people and individuals are, not statistics. They're not government programmes to deliver, they are people who have emotions, who have needs, and they need to feel very valued and included, but also involved in the actual delivery of an organisation.

We started 'Environments for All' 3 years ago, and it is fair to say when it first started it was a programme like many things we do in the organisation. We had things specifically to deliver. What has actually happened through 'Environments for All', has become a way of doing business for BTCV. It has actually become an aspiration around cultural diversity and that change has really happened in the last year. The people inside BTCV, who've not been part of the delivery of the programme, have actually begun to understand that what we have done successfully for so many years, with a small part of society, now needs to be offered out to everybody who lives within the United Kingdom.

I'll just share a couple of things with you in terms of the statistics from 'Environments for All'. We have published a benchmarking report carried out for us by the Black Environmental Network, which can be made available to you. BEN have actually been monitoring independently for BTCV what's actually been happening through this programme.

The first signifying that this is not just a 'blip', is that so far in the 'Environments for All' programme, we have directly involved some 38,000 people in this programme - many of whom are unemployed, many of whom have a disability. But, behind that there is the network of community groups, almost 1200, and indirectly 183,000 people have actually benefited from 'Environments for All'. So the conclusions we will draw from this programme are based on a



lot of people actually having an experience, but more importantly those are people communicating to BTCV what it is we need to do better into the future so they will remain part of environmental volunteering.

The second part is where these people have come from. I think the very good news for BTCV is that the majority have been in urban areas, in the most disadvantaged areas. They are the ones that get talked about so much, but I do worry about the discussions that you read in the paper about being 'disadvantaged' or living in a 'marginalized' area. Actually working in these areas and understanding the needs of those communities is hard work and it does require a commitment that I suspect has to be more long term than political cycles or funding will actually allow today. The good news for BTCV in this programme is that for the first time, the white community were not the majority of the workforce that we engaged with, and the population as you could see was extremely broad and has told us a lot about the needs of diverse communities.

The second benefit of 'Environments for All' is one I'm personally very proud of – it's beginning to change the representation of my paid workforce. BTCV is a large NGO; we employ over 700 paid staff and we will have at any one time three or four hundred volunteers who freely and give their time for six or twelve months. That's a work force of over 1000 people and we have seen the emergence of change in that profile of 3-5% BME representation. More importantly, this will change us fundamentally for the future, a shift in the volunteers we directly work with and the community groups that we actually engage. These are very significant figures and I would be very proud to say that we are well ahead of the sector which we've engaged in for so many years.

In preparation for this conference, the other thing we have done is to do some market research into communities in three urban areas within the United Kingdom. We did take a higher percentage of people from BME backgrounds as part of the population and the statistics which we published this morning in a press release, I would just summarise the headline areas.

The first is contrary to myth, people in BME groups alongside the mainstream population are interested in volunteering, but the level of interest varies depending on the categories and I think it's something we've not perhaps necessarily studied before, and we would need to discuss with communities where the interest appears to be low why that is the case. It could just be simply the way we present it; it doesn't appear to be of interest. However, what is very telling is the current involvement in volunteering by BME groups is very much lower than the mainstream white organisations who have engaged historically. Therefore, I think that is a challenge and an opportunity for an organisation like BTCV and the question it needs to ask itself, what would we do differently in the next five to ten years, to actually engage with the interest that is innately there.

Well I think we need to hear what the communities have said to us through this research and Environments for All. The first is they do want the presence and the offer to be very local, they need it to be within their communities and they need it to be within the language and the needs of the current community process as exists.

I personally challenged some of the government's approach, although welcome it is at the moment, to volunteering and community engagement. I don't think you will excite people if you talk about rights and responsibilities, linking it to citizenship, particularly if you are trying to engage people who are young. I think the fundamental engagement in volunteering, and certainly it's the heart of BTCV is fun. Most of the people who are part of this organisation stay with it because of the enjoyment, the social aspect, the fact you make friends and you do it in a safe and a welcoming environment. Of course the physical side is a part of what we do, as you found out this morning, but it isn't the draw why people remain.

The other reason I think which the government needs to hear, is the communities were saying that the offer needs to be where they actually are based locally. It wants to be on the notice board of their community hall, it needs to be in the places, the job centres that people actually are in.



Secondly, we need a local network of community groups which people will feel drawn to, either because they are made to feel welcome or that community represents the community of where they come from.

I've been quoted this morning in *Third Sector* and in the press release going out, that I am challenging the environmental sector to change. I think there is too much talk about inclusiveness, about engaging with excluded groups and I don't think enough is actually happening in practice. I believe many organisations in the sector do not even monitor the diversity of their work forces, and where they do they would be too embarrassed to publish the data, because it's so appallingly bad. I would suggest that across the whole sector, there's probably no more than 1% of the work force in the environmental sector that comes from this category of society.

What are we in BTCV going to do that will be different? Well we're in the middle at the moment of preparing our strategic plan which will be published in the autumn of this year which will unveil our aspirations for the next four years. Some of you will have the delight of finding that document in your post in the next couple of weeks and I hope you will take the time to read it and to feed back whether you think we're doing the things which would inspire you to actually support us.

But the plan does have some aspirations which will not shift, even if we get feedback which challenges it. The first is BTCV is about inspiring people, and it is about inspiring people to connect better with the place in which they actually live. People's sense of place varies greatly today in society, but it is also handicapped by the quality of the life you lead. The second is the hallmark of our next strategic plan. This will be to celebrate the diversity of culture which we are fortunate to have within the United Kingdom, and to link that better within BTCV to our work in countries overseas. This is so some of the communities here have the chance to actually link with the community of origin, where perhaps they came from but have never visited.

We will need help as an organisation to monitor and evaluate what it is we want to do. We are the 'doers', we are not very good at analysing the process of change and I will be looking for organisations to work with BTCV who have that level of expertise. I think a very good example is our work with BEN who have brought us both independence, but also an understanding of how to analyse the change process which we're actually engaged in. The plan for all its length and strategic plans tend to be terribly long, I think it's only the people inside an organisation who ever read it from cover to cover – it will have three very simple targets. Firstly, we're going to be very ambitious. We're saying that over the life of the next plan we will help enrich the lives of a million people through this programme. We will be very visible in supporting and sustaining local communities, either in organised or informal groups and we will remain visible always as BTCV in terms of physical environmental change in local places. However, we can't do this on our own. We rely, as every organisation does, on people giving us time and support and money. I really do question the current political cycle of short-term nature of decision making, reliance on narrow targets, and the local authorities unable with the pressures they come under to actually value the environment in which everybody lives. At the end of the day the quality of where you live fundamentally influences how you believe and feel about yourself.

The next steps then are very simple for us as an organisation. I think in the course of today, I'm convinced that when you go away, we will have convinced you that there is interest - that these groups do want to engage. But we are going to have to adjust in terms of our communication and our messages if we're actually to take them in; in a way which they feel is both enjoyable and on both terms.

We have established best practice through this programme and we don't hold that to ourselves, that is information which we will willingly share with partners who want to be part of our dream. And finally I think you can do something for me, which is help local funders value the investment which we make in our local staff and our volunteer networks. It is on the surface, an expensive way of relating to communities but I think recent research, the *Green Spaces Report* in England, which was commissioned for the work that my organisation did in Wales, proved some simple things. When asked, 43% of the community groups said the first organisation they relied upon was BTCV and the second was the environmental groups said



almost 70% came to us for advice and support. They want us to be there, they need us because they trust us at a local level, that we are the organisation of their first choice.

Finally, because money does influence my life occasionally, I was intrigued reading the Chancellor's Budget Statement, which you know I did one day, and there tucked in the middle of it was his reference to volunteering. I'm not sure how many times we've had a chance to talk about volunteering, but he does. He also talked about next year, which I hadn't known and I wonder how many people here knew, was the 'British Year of the Volunteer'. So whether he's decided that or somebody else decided it, I don't know. But let's take advantage of it, because he is the man with the purse strings! However, I am the person who would say to him let next year then be the year for everybody to volunteer, not just the people who have done so traditionally.

In the very best tradition of BTCV we are a volunteer organisation – I'd like to invite our first volunteer up here, Huda Alashi who is a volunteer officer from Scotland.

Huda Alarashi- Volunteer Officer for BTCV Scotland

"Salam aleikum" everybody, peace be with you. My name is Huda and I'm a professional Chartered Accountant and also a professional Arabic and Holy Koran teacher. I've got a diploma in a Scottish Law, work for an interpreting service and I'm also a Post Graduate in Business Administration.

I met BTCV Scotland initially through volunteering in Glasgow. I've now been volunteering with BTCV for two and a half years and the reason that I became involved was because I could use my professional skills. They use 95% of my skills which is why I volunteered with BTCV. I was also volunteering with five other organisations - SRC, Scottish Refugee Council and the NVA, the Hidden Garden, and the MWRC resource Centre and the central Mosque in Glasgow – all which I'd been introduced to as well through BTCV Scotland.

Actually, what made me stick to volunteer more with BTCV, is that I felt that I was one of the staff and felt very valued. I can say that I widened my horizons and I started to integrate with everybody and I felt more confident with BTCV as a representative for BTCV everywhere, without going back to my Projects Manager. I felt that I could organise everything and integrate with all other organisations. I made friends for life with BTCV and as well – they made me feel that Scotland is my home. I will just say come and see me in my workshop and in Glasgow.

Lea Halborg – Swansea Community Project Officer, BTCV Cymru

'Shuagatum', 'kroeso' and 'welcome' ("welcome" in Bengali and Welsh). They say a picture can paint a thousand words. Well if that's the case I think BTCV is going to paint you a few hundred thousand words today.

When I started work as a Community Projects Office working in West Wales for BTCV Cymru, I kind of never knew what I'd let myself in for. But it's fair to say that after two years it's been quite a special journey. Speaking for myself and the communities that I work alongside, I can't begin to tell you what a rewarding journey it's been. The communities that I work with truly amaze me, they humble me, and they inspire me. Because despite daily challenges, living in disadvantaged areas, dealing with poverty, stereotyping, being marginalized and even victimised at times, for one reason or another, in amongst all of this there are real gems because these people want to change their lives, their communities and their environment.

I read a BTCV poster when I first started and it said 'people are the local environment'. The first thing I thought of when I saw that, was people and the outcome was an improved environment. By working with people we can help make real and lasting changes. It's a kind of two-way process and I've had lots of experience over the last two years of actually helping make a little change on the ground. Working in West Wales, I tried to develop a sort of a



balance of practical help, but also support people. I've worked with individuals and groups from all walks of life. So often I come into contact with young people, and particularly young people, because they've been disregarded. They've often been told that they're a waste of space, or a waste of time; they've been kicked out of school, they've been disruptive, labelled anti-social. and yet many times when you look at these young people you think these are our future. With a bit of care, a bit of support, the right type of support, with a bit of guidance, nurturing, you know we can actually help these young people by providing the type of support we can help develop understanding and belief in themselves. My experience has been that communities that believe in themselves are strong because change doesn't happen overnight, it's a slow and gradual process.

I'd like to share an experience with you of one group that has made giant leaps. Before I say a few words about their progress, I'm going to hand you over to a volunteer, Rehena, who's accompanied me from West Wales and she's kindly agreed to read a poem that was written by one of the teenagers that was living on the estate. It's entitled 'Us Teenagers of Blahamys'.

Rehena Begum, Volunteer, BTCV Cymru

Us teenagers of Blahamys
People say we are not nice.
People judge us, people stare;
They all think we don't care.
Even though our lives are not fair;
Most of our parents are never there.
Some of us turn to alcohol underage;
That's why people shout and curse;
Which makes us feel a whole lot worse.
They all assume we're no good thugs;
We're nothing but trouble and just take drugs;
We can't get jobs because of our past;
That's why we grew up too fast.
For us no-one has any time
That's why we turn to crime.
All we ask is people to see
Not what we are but what we are going to be.

Lea Halborg – Swansea Community Project Officer, BTCV Cymru

I think that says it doesn't it. When I first read that I was really moved. That was a young person who came up to me and said here I'd like you to read this. That group is made up of 30 members aged three years to eighteen years. They meet twice a week and they work on environmental projects around their estate. They have volunteered literally hundreds of hours; I can't keep up with them! They've built four community gardens and they've blitzed and cleaned up their estate so many times. They were set up with the support of BTCV Cymru and they continue to work in partnership with us and the local BTCV group that's on the estate. Basically, over the last two years they have made giant leaps, they won three awards last year, one of them was a Home Office Award and last week I had a very excited member of the group, Runiston, say we've got an invite to Tony and Cherie! I thought it was a mistake... little did I know it means Downing Street! This is the group two years ago that was talking in their front room. Now they're building gardens, blitzing their estate, they've got pride, they've got passion and they want to make a change.

So in conclusion, from root to tip, BTCV helps communities develop and grow, when all they need is that little bit of support, the right type of support and in my experience and Rehena's experience, BTCV helps make a difference, they help make it happen.

Note from Chair Tom Flood



Well thank you both and before we come into our main speakers, something we felt was very important we did for you which was we allowed the people who we're talking about this morning, many of who do not have a voice in society, to be actually be heard. So thanks to the people who've made this programme happen, the Community Fund and to Barclays but also I must single out the creative efforts of Russell Hampton in Scotland and his patience for the DVD. Thank you.

I'd now like to invite our three speakers this morning up onto the platform.

One of the things that's very important to BTCV at the moment is we find new allies in the crusade which we've got as an organisation. I'm very pleased with the three speakers here this morning because I know when you hear them speak that they would be I think quite frank to say that a number of years ago they probably were slightly sceptical of BTCV's ability to make this particular journey.

Our first speaker this morning is Maeve Sherlock. I met Maeve when she was at the Treasury, full-time advisor to Gordon Brown. I convinced her to go to Haringey to see BTCV in action. Maeve ran the One-Parent Association and at her farewell party which Gordon Brown hosted for her, he said she was the person who had helped him change his mind on the benefit regime. She is now heading Directory G Council and I have no doubt will bring about a similar level of change through her leadership of that organisation.

Maeve Sherlock, Chief Executive, Refugee Council

Tom, thank you very much. I'm very pleased to be here, although, while I was sitting at the front, I carefully went through my letter of invitation to find the bit where it said, 'please come along for a work out in the Green Gym first' and I've yet to find that, so if those photographs appear anywhere other than in your private album there'll be trouble!

Tom's absolutely right actually. I also fully confess that my image of BTCV was completely wrongly a stereotype and I'm sure there are lots of nice gardens and canals out there that have been worked on for years. I had a fairly old-fashioned view of what was there and when Tom persuaded me to go and visit a project in South Tottenham, a couple of miles from my home in North London, it was a complete revelation. It was about halfway through the visit that the penny finally dropped, that BTCV was not about plants, it was actually about people and that it was it. Even where it was a bad environment, it was about using people's attitudes to their environment as a way of effecting social change, building communities. It took a while for the penny to drop and once it did it was as though the scales had been lifted from my eyes and I could suddenly see what a fantastic job they were doing and it was a brilliant visit.

It still sticks in my mind, I saw on that visit two extremes – I went to visit a fantastic centre where children, really quite young kids, from all kinds of communities, all sorts of backgrounds, were doing brilliant work in the garden in their crèche. I also went to the other end, to a home, a care home for elderly, very elderly and very disabled people and watched the fantastic volunteer. There was one woman there who was really very elderly, in a wheelchair and blind, and wasn't participating in the activity, and the BTCV volunteer said, 'come along' and the woman said 'I am blind' to which she replied, 'well you can feel can't you?' Of course she could, and the woman did. She helped to create baskets, hanging baskets and did fantastic things which was extremely inspiring, so I'm very pleased to be here and to have a chance to talk to you today.

Tom asked me to talk specifically about the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in volunteering. I'll try fairly quickly just to talk about what that means to us.

First of all, what is the definition of a refugee? It is someone who is persecuted or in fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion. I won't go through that in detail, but I think it's worth mentioning because one of the things I realised when I came to the Refugee Council was that most people thought that an asylum seeker, at least certainly young people in particular, think an asylum seeker is just a term of abuse for a foreigner. However, in fact an asylum seeker is somebody who has made



a claim to be a refugee and is waiting for it to be decided. It is someone 'seeking' asylum and I'm amazed by how few people know that.

One of the things the Refugee Council do is to try to tackle some of the myths about refugees. First off these are the countries, obviously the top three countries from which people come – Somalia, Zimbabwe and China. One of the things that surprised me coming in again is that the countries so clearly reflect what's happening around the world. Refugees come from countries where there is war, there are human rights abuses, where there is oppression and the countries they come from changes, change from time to time. One of the results of that is that the refugees and asylum seekers in your communities are an amazing group of people. I've met some fantastic people since I joined Refugee Council, and one of the things I learned was how much people had to offer.

One of the things I would like to just draw your attention to is when Tom and I had a fantastic conversation. We met at a dinner party a while ago and talked about ways in which we can involve our organisations in working together, and he told me about work he's doing in Scotland. I have a particular passion for reasons for why asylum seekers and refugees want to be involved in volunteering. One of the things you may not know is while someone's waiting for their asylum claim to be determined, they're not allowed to work. Now that can take months, in some cases even years and one of the effects of that is people come to this country, on average refugees are better educated than our own population and very often they are people who fled. They are not, as is usually the case, economic migrants. They didn't wake up one morning in their part of Iraq in Baghdad and say 'do you know darling what I really want is a 7th floor block in a flat in Tower Hamlets'. There was a sort of myth here that somehow people sit around thinking, flicking through 'Which Asylum Receiving Country Monthly' and thinking – 'you know darling I fancy France' – 'no no no Britain, Britain, we'd be better – you can work there sweetheart!' I mean, it just doesn't happen, people flee, often at no notice and end up suddenly destitute. One of the things we discover is quite often because the government has made it quite hard to get to the UK and to claim asylum. People are often in the hands of traffickers and smugglers and they frequently don't know even which country they're in until they are – they're basically put out of a lorry at the side of a road outside Dover. They often don't even know what country they're in.

We have out there potentially all this talent, people with experience, with incredible qualifications, a lot of just sheer expertise which can't be used for work and therefore is available for use in volunteering. The Home Office actively encourages people, asylum seekers to be involved in volunteering. They can't be involved in unpaid work, which is a distinction that needs a bit of work on. However, they clearly are allowed to be involved in volunteering, as long as it's genuinely volunteer programmes.

But even more than that, one of the things I think it can be really powerful for is that I've been very depressed. The single most depressing thing I do is to read my press cuttings in the morning and before I came to work at Refugee Council, like everybody else, I was aware of some of the worst headlines. Have you seen '*The Swan Bake*', one of the Sun's particular gems in which asylum seekers eat the Queen's swans? Or how about, '*Asylum Seekers Ate My Donkey!*', which was a particular favourite. One of the joys, we've been doing a lot of work trying to get is that we have finally got some Press Complaints Commission guidelines on reporting on refugees and asylum stories. One of my staff who was a journalist on a local paper when the guidelines on Reporting Race came out, said it was really stark. One day you said something like '*Asian Man Robs Bank*', next day it was '*Man Robs Bank*'. I mean it was that stark and yet it's still okay to say '*Asylum Seeker Robs Bank*', '*Asylum Seeker Stabs Baby*', '*Asylum Seeker Eats Swan*'. Routinely when these stories come out, we go and investigate, we often go and talk to the local police and time after time, either the stories never happened at all. Or they happened, but in a rather less lurid version than hit the front page of the tabloids. Or if they happen and it's nothing to do with asylum seekers, there was just somebody who only looked a bit like they didn't come from Kent and therefore probably must be an asylum seeker. But the press use it time after time and yet what happens, the effect of this is to of course quite effectively to de-humanise people. These are people who come to us.

We see people who have been through horrific experiences. We have 3,000 children, unaccompanied child asylum seekers a year who use our services, not to mention the adults



and some of these children have seen things that no-one should ever have to see and they're already so young. Some of them have seen all their families wiped out and yet they're amazingly resilient – they've done incredible things. They've somehow escaped, they've crossed continents and they're there doing wonderful things. We've had some fantastic success stories of young people with no formal education who are on the verge of becoming doctors just a few years after they've arrived in the UK, after hideous experiences.

British people are generally very decent; we have a strong sense of social justice and we want to welcome people in. But to persuade people that you have to turn – to harden their hearts and turn people away, you have to de-humanise them first. And the first thing is created by the stories that come out that say asylum seekers eat our donkeys, they eat our swans. The sub-text is what kind of people would do that? Not decent people like us. Why would people do this? So the overall effect is to make it somehow okay that we treat people in a way that is simply unacceptable.

One of the things that we, or I'm trying to do, is to look at how we can change people's opinions and just shift their perceptions so that reality comes in rather than the perceptions and the myths that are around. I'll mention one example. Trevor Phillips spoke at a conference - we organised a conference jointly with the Commission for Racial Equality, and Trevor was walking about having been to visit a school in Newcastle. He told us at our conference that he asked a group of white kids in the school about race relations in their area and they said, we don't mind the Bangladeshis, they're Geordies. They also said 'you know they have open shops, they give people jobs. But see these Kosovans? They hang around on street corners, they won't do a day's work, they're idle.' It was Trevor who said, '...look they're not allowed to work, the asylum seekers.' But the point is that the image was there; of people who are already established. The local people themselves here are groups of young men, mostly asylum seekers are relatively young, and who are hanging around on street corners with nothing to do, not contributing. The perception is then of a threat as opposed to people who want to contribute in their community.

So when Tom tells me about projects to focus on the environment and refugees I get incredibly excited. I know of communities out there where refugees – asylum seekers have been sent out to communities which have never seen anyone from a minority community before. One of the interesting questions, when you look at the polling attitudes to refugees and asylum, the very strongest opposition to asylum seekers is in areas where there aren't any.

I have an aunt who lives in a very posh bit of Tonbridge Wells and she's completely convinced that it is asylum seekers that stop her getting to see her local doctor. I say '*where are they?*' I know a little bit about the Home Office, what the Home Office will spend to house an asylum seeker and it doesn't run to the posh bit of Tonbridge Wells! However, there is still a perception that people are out there, so you could end up where there is a local community and a community of asylum seekers or sometimes refugees when they go on to get status who are united only by the physical space that they share. Could you imagine the power, if that group of Kosovans had been, instead of hanging around with nothing to do, were encouraged to get involved in projects and maybe say sort out the kiddies' playground, look at what happened to the town centre, do something to make the community better? All of a sudden that physical link, the only thing that links people together turns into a powerful transformative, a really powerful transformative experience that will change attitudes, make the refugees and asylum seekers feel part of the community; make the community feel that they're part of the same area.

So one of the reasons I came here today and I said that I would keep it short, despite the fact that's not my tendency, but it's because I wanted just to say two things. One is that asylum seekers and refugees have so much to offer. If you work in volunteering programmes, we have plenty of guidance on our website about ways in which you can go out and look to try to overcome the barriers people face. Please look at our website or get in touch with me and I would encourage you to do it.

But secondly, I just wanted to pay tribute to Tom and to BTCV. I went out to look at BTCV because I found Tom an inspiring, a really inspiring leader and I've been incredibly impressed by his commitment and your commitment in BTCV to transforming the organisation. It's not



an easy task. Diversity is easy to say and hard to do. In fact one of the joys about working with diverse communities is that you realise how much it enriches all of our lives. Once we learn genuinely to appreciate what each other brings to the party and go out there and take on a sector that has traditionally been very white and to embrace the challenge to get engaged in a diverse development the way that you have I think is fantastic. And I have to say this morning was just wonderful. I thought you were brilliant this morning and if I could ever have – if anyone ever paid a tribute to my organisation to say that they'd made a friend of it for life I would think I'd come home. I think it's absolutely fantastic, so many congratulations to you, I'm very glad to be here and I hope the conference goes well.

Note from Chair Tom Flood

Thank you Maeve and I think that website will get a lot of hits, it's an offer I think many of us would take up. I'm very pleased to welcome our second speaker, Marilyn Taylor who is Chair of the Regeneration Charity Urban Forum. She's also the Professor of Social Policy for the Built Environment of the University of West of England.

Marilyn Taylor, Chair Urban Forum

Well I'm certainly a convert to your way of running conferences. I spend an awful lot of my time at academic conferences which are very much about suits and being terribly serious so the next one I'm involved in I'm going to get somebody along to do a bit of Green Gym work with and – it'll be fascinating.

The Urban Forum is an organisation of people who are working to improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods and create change. Our role is to make sure that their voice is heard in national policy and we've welcomed government's commitment to neighbourhood renewal and worked hard to make sure that the view of all communities are reflected in both policy making and implementation. Our members are the kinds of groups that Environments for All have been working with and we've long been committed to trying to make sure that the diversity of local communities is reflected in our membership and that we work alongside organisations who represent that diversity at national level.

But my immediate reaction when I was asked to speak at this conference was to think that actually we don't do much on the environment do we, conservation, not – that's a bit middle-class – and that very few of our members were involved in environmental projects as such. But then I thought again because in fact tackling the problems, the environmental problems of disadvantaged areas is central to regeneration for three reasons.

Firstly, a poor environment is the most visible sign of the range of problems that communities face in these areas. Secondly, tackling environmental issues is often a very good way of getting people involved and giving them a sense of control and thirdly tackling environmental issues can also help to improve health, education, all those other targets that government wants us to meet.

So let me say a little bit more about each of these. Firstly, a degraded environment is a significant part of the problem of disadvantaged, deprived, excluded, whatever you call the neighbourhoods. A neglected environment tells the people who live there that they're worthless, that nobody cares. A neglected environment feels unsafe, causes stress and encourages anti-social behaviour. Abandoned cars and empty homes can encourage vandalism and crime. Pollution, poor design and damp housing are part of the catalogue of problems that lower income families have to live with. For example, many big social housing estates were built on the poorest quality land hence all the problems with damp that we're so familiar with. Too many areas of social housing are bleak and devoid of trees, flowers, wildlife and too many children who live there have never been near the countryside and the lack of green space within them means those opportunities for leisure, sport and exercise are extremely limited.



When the government first developed its national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, its key targets were related to 'worklessness', ill health, poor educational attainment, community safety. However, after extensive consultation they had to add one more and that of course was housing and the environment. This is because of the strength of feeling amongst communities and the extent to which they've taken this on board is reflected in the fact that they now have a jargon word for it. We now read about live-ability which I believe means – covers the range of issues that are concerned with the appearance of an area and its safety. In the many areas where communities are leading the development of renewal plans, the first priority is safer and cleaner streets, safe places for kids to play in. People want to clear rubbish, they want to clear the graffiti, they want to get rid of abandoned cars, they want – they want to bring derelict land back into use as a community resource and generally clean up the area. These activities have an immediate return, people can see what's happening and why the community can see that there's some value in all this stuff that's going on. They give people pride in their area and to use the jargon again they produce 'quick wins'.

So environmental activity is important for its own sake, but it's also an excellent way as we've seen from some of the – from the DVD and from those wonderful presentations earlier, it's also a good way of getting people involved. In one policing initiative they started out with a tidy gardens initiative because that was the way that they could get to know their communities and start to win their trust. In another, involving children in doing an environmental audit got parents interested. In a third initiative, children and young people were given cameras to take photographs as part of a place making exercise, to involve people in improving things locally. In a fourth children designed the security gates at the entrance to their estate which transformed what could have been a very forbidding feature into a real attraction to the area and one in which people could take pride.

One of the benefits of environmental activity, as Tom said earlier, is that it's fun. It also gets people meeting other people that they would never normally have met before and working together with them and can break down barriers between communities.

A third benefit that I mentioned is that environmental activity contributes to all the other targets. Reclaiming public spaces makes areas feel safer. Bringing derelict land back into use creates play areas and other local amenities. There's a proven link between environmental improvements and health. And schemes to get people growing vegetables and so on, save their money and encourage healthier eating. Getting people out of stressed environments to work on conservation projects can also make a significant contribution to health. Contact with nature has been shown to reduce stress, to build self-esteem and encourage exploration and adventure. City farms, environmental audits, wildlife monitoring initiatives also have an important educational role and some environmental schemes provide jobs while many as you all know better than I do provide volunteering opportunities. There have been some really important developments in developing green housing, using new technologies to tackle fuel poverty and reduce health risks.

Meanwhile of course managing environmental projects of all kinds gives people skills that they can use in other settings and a sense of achievement which gives them confidence.

There's just one other thing, which is many of these areas are places that nobody ever goes apart from the people who live there and environmental projects can change that by making it worth going and seeing what's going on in the area and reducing their isolation.

I want to end just by picking out three things that we can learn about involving people in environmental schemes and especially about involving the diversity of people who live there. The first is to value people's own expertise and experience in all its diversity. Many of the inhospitable environments that I've described have been designed by professionals, people who knew best, but the people who had to live there could probably have told them in advance what would work and what wouldn't. Professionals do have important expertise to offer but as one very well-known community activist once put it they should be on tap not on top and that applies to all outsiders who go into disadvantaged areas. People there know what they want, they know what they're doing, they need support, but they don't need to be told what to do. And all that gives them ownership and makes it more likely that improvements will be sustained and looked after.



A second thing we've learned and this relates directly to diversity is the importance of giving people a variety of ways in. People need to get involved in small-scale activities with people they trust and know and that gives them a sort of springboard which might encourage them to be more adventurous next time and to get involved in something more ambitious. A variety of schemes can involve different communities in different ways from the informal to the formal, from the small to the large.

And a third thing is that we've learnt and which you amongst others have taught us is the importance of imagination and creativity for involving people. Community involvement needs to be fun if it's going to work and certainly if anyone's ever going to get involved again, given all the barriers.

Finally, the question of resources. The importance of initiatives like Environments for All is that it gives people resources to put their ideas into action. You know that sometimes a very small injection of money can have results that far outstrip that investment. Often simply having a support worker to show an interest, help get something off the ground, provide advice, will make all the difference between people getting involved and doing nothing. But it will be important to think about what can happen in the longer term to maintain that support. People who live in disadvantaged areas are all too used to initiatives which come in and then go away again. I've interpreted the idea of environmental activity quite widely in this talk but I want to end where I started and come back to the point I made about environmental projects, not having a high profile in neighbourhood renewal, beyond the safe and clean initiatives I mentioned. In one of your documents it said that traditional environmental volunteering opportunities are not always appropriate to disadvantaged communities and I wonder if they're sometimes seen as a bit of a luxury in places where people are struggling to survive with high crime and poor schools and unemployment. But as I discovered – and Tom's right, I am now a bit of a convert – in preparing this talk, tackling the environment is really important if there is to be long term change. I really welcome the work that Environments for All has been doing. I hope that it will make us all, and certainly in my organisation, think more about what environmental projects can achieve in tackling disadvantage and creating healthy places that people want to live in, and that people want to visit.

Note from Chair Tom Flood

Our final speaker this morning is a very welcome guest here today. BEN, the Black Environmental Network has been an extraordinary ally for BTCV through Environments for All. I think they've both helped us, they've challenged us, they've chided us on occasions, but they've also been scrupulously honest. Judy you're most welcome this morning.

Judy Ling Wong OBE, Director, Black Environmental Network

First of all I'd like to say how happy I am today. It's a moment of enormous joy to celebrate the success of Environments for All. Environments for All is so important to us at this time in the development of society, where we speak so much of sustainable development. With sustainable development, so many people understand it very much from its 'green bits'. People understand by taking care of the environment and so on, but the spotlight has not been so much on sustainable communities and that it exactly needs. Through this project, BTCV has taken on the greatest challenge of all; to go to the disadvantaged community groups who have been the subject of neglect, of omission, of lack of action for them, of prejudice, of discrimination against a whole range of groups. From older people, ethnic groups, asylum seekers and refugees, young people, older people, to people with disabilities, all suffering from the ignorance and discrimination that is still at large in the environmental sector and in society.

Why is this initiative, Environments for All, so important? Well it's important because it has moved away from the idea that working with disadvantaged groups is about doing a favour to small groups of people. You can see it – here and there; there's the odd project and people if they wanted to can always point to something they have done. But this project Environments for All took off in a big way, it is ambitious, it is on a grand scale and hoping for an even



grander scale. It talks of organisational change, not just what the project officer is doing with projects on the ground. BTCV is changing the organisation at its centre, working with its board, its managers, all these other project workers, its senior people and so on and they say they want to change BTCV for ever.

And what do I say about it today? Seeing is believing. No more talk. If I look round the audience I have never seen a conference where the disadvantaged groups' representatives are so prominent. The people here are proud, arriving here in their wheelchairs to be part of his conference, where people from ethnic groups, people from lower income settings and so on. So what is the difference that this has made?

BTCV has really homed in the methodology of approaching disadvantaged groups. They've moved away from the traditional model of volunteering, of the privileged doing good to others who are not privileged. Volunteering has come a long way and has realised in the beginning it was about doing things to others, you don't even ask them, you just do it to them because you know better. It then moved along a little bit, volunteering was about... well ask them what they want and then we'll do it for them. But really, this is all very patronising and disempowering.

Volunteering has moved on to the next more wonderful stage- the idea of let's do it with them. But now the final stage, and BTCV acts as a leader here. BTCV are in the final stage where they realise not only doing it with them but seeing the organisation as part of the community. That is a different ballgame. To enter the community, to be part of it, not there telling it what to do but to become an intrinsic unit so that people lead when they want, BTCV can lead where they want as appropriate.

Now it moves into an area which any organisation working in a specialist field like the environment or some other sort of theme, we call the grey area. It's very insulting this you know when people say, 'oh you're working in the grey area', but I actually propose that the grey area in the context of sustainable development is the area to which we must pay most attention. We are very good at working on the narrow themes where we can be very neatly expert. We see all these things called grey areas everywhere in between, how can you have a sustainable community? The other thing is that people connected with the expertise volunteering through a specialism. We've had all of them now, we can't get any more of them, but what about the rest of the population? They too can contribute. The merging of people as a workforce for nature was nature as a force to change people's lives. This is what is so important about this project.

Merging enables members of disadvantaged groups to come forward. You cannot expect people whose basic needs are not fulfilled, who have problems that are overwhelming to leave behind those problems and take on that traditional thing of coming here doing good to something else outside their lives.

The formula of actually linking environment to life concerns in such a way that it's inextricable is the key, it's so inextricable that it draws people into this area of work because they can see it is about their problems, about their basic needs and about their lives. And through doing it they benefit as well as contribute.

I very much look forward to continue working with BTCV into the future and consolidating this work. It has begun on the largest scale that has ever been seen for this kind of work and yet much more needs to be done in every area they are in. They are under-resourced for the work and that is actually presenting itself more and more. There are many new areas where they are needed desperately. As for the grey areas; this is the role of an organisation that says it is environmental doing – combining the socio-environmental work. Why shouldn't this community based work that delivers other benefits, also be led by an organisation that is environmental?

In the context of sustainable development, it is very important to deliver work that actually homes in on and in particular focuses on. The environment is BTCV's focus, but by doing this work with communities they are actually switching on a huge force for environmental work. They are moving in new people in huge numbers into an environmental contribution. But this contribution is not just some kind of willy nilly work that can be done by anybody; it is led by



environmental expertise. So alongside this work of benefiting the community, we have allowed disadvantaged communities to contribute in a focused environment way that's led by experts.

I don't think I need to say more, but to congratulate BTCV on its achievements and to say that all of us here present today, that we need to use all of our powers to support BTCV. We need to present this message of success and significance and to urge all the funders out there to resource BTCV to go on because these grey areas are our golden areas of opportunity for the future.

Thank you.

Note from Tom Flood

Well thank you Judy, and a very warm thanks to all our speakers this morning including the volunteers of course and staff who've made this morning what it is. You'll be relieved there are no further exercises planned, you can just do the very simple exercise of getting up and going for refreshments and the workshops will be announced in our entry form, the drummer will tap gently, I think you'll hear and that will be the workshops. Enjoy the rest of the day and we'll see you later.

Plenary Session

Richard Williams, Development Director for BTCV Chairman

Before I start, the conference couldn't be a real conference unless we had an award and I'm very pleased today to be able to give an award to Neville Lilly from the New Environmental Ventures. They've been awarded £9486 by the BTCV People's Places Awards Scheme.

It's one of hundreds of awards given to date and this project will encourage and enable access for young people to basic agricultural skills in food growing. Through volunteering they will discover, experience creation and enjoyment of the environment. I think it means teaching young people to grow food. So Neville if you'd like to join me up here.



Now I'm not going to let him go yet because again in BTCV style we're giving him a bottle of champagne to share with his group. I did ask him to share it with me.

Neville Lilly

Can I say a big thank you on behalf of the board of directors of New Environmental Ventures and the children of course, many of whom are from the deprived areas in Aston and the neighbouring communities. A big thank you..

Message from the CRE Chair (Read out by Richard Williams)

Apology- I regret to inform you that due to unavoidable circumstances, Trevor Phillips, The Chair of the CRE is unable to join us today. He sends his sincere apologies. Nevertheless, he has kindly provided a message to be read on his behalf. As some of you might have noticed, we have amongst us the deputy chair of the CRE, but due to a conflict of interest relating to funding, she is unable to take the platform- I will therefore deliver the CRE message.

Congratulations to BTCV for this conference- this is networking with a difference, because today you have something real to network, talk about and celebrate.



Today marks a breakthrough not just for BTCV but for the mainstream voluntary sector. You have shown what can be done if there is a small desire to make a difference. Environments for All projects across the UK has demonstrated how easily this can be done if there is strong leadership from the top, sustained interest and appropriate support from key stakeholders. This kind of success has to be nurtured and sustained.

Today, all of you who made this happen can be proud of the fact that BTCV is not only known for its expertise relating to restoring stone walls in the Yorkshire Dales or fences in the Sussex countryside but that BTCV can also be an expert at building real communities, communities of people who have a sense of belonging- people who are made to feel part of Britain simply because they were given an opportunity to take part in creating or adding to the landscape of Britain.

You have been clever enough to recognise the immense richness that diversity can bring to every element of British Society and have capitalised on that to the credit of all. The role of the voluntary sector in engaging people and fostering civic pride cannot be overstated- since embarking upon the modernisation agenda, the voluntary sector has become central to service delivery- it is impossible to imagine life in Britain without the voluntary sector as key public sectors would collapse without your input.

Yet as with other aspects of British society, despite being grounded in goodwill, the voluntary sector too is scarred by the ugliness of discrimination and exclusion. Still over the years, it has been easy to go to meetings in the NCVO head office and speak to an audience which is a sea of white faces and not feel cynical.

These are good, committed, talented people. Yet missing out on a vital dimension to the key strength of the voluntary sector when it comes to reaching the parts that others cannot reach:

- involving people at the front line of service delivery
- drawing in people with a variety of experiences and skills
- getting out from behind the off-putting service-counter culture of officialdom.

You have shown that it can be done and this reduces the cynicism on the part of communities who, more often than not are sidelined and overlooked. With Environments for All you have confirmed our belief that there is a vibrant and strong ethnic minority voluntary sector- but unfortunately it often runs on separate tram lines- apart from and different to the rest. This does not have to be the case- you have illustrated how easy it is to run on the same line.

There is need for recognising the new and dynamic relationships between diversity and the voluntary sector in terms of the core business;

staffing practices and who is involved;
the way it provides services;
the people it seeks to serve;
the needs it seeks to address

But most importantly, it is sometimes good to break from tradition- as you have done. The mainstream voluntary sector has to reflect on traditional approaches, reorganise and refocus as you have done to be fit for purpose in 21st century Britain and indeed, to be able to take on the challenges that face 21st century Britain.

Whilst voluntary sector organisations have a key role to play in building inclusive communities, this cannot be done alone- this has to be done with other key partners- local authorities, private and public bodies. The range of your work suggests that you have already embarked upon this road. Such partnerships ought to bring about a common agreement around core values, outcomes and most importantly joint resourcing.

In this regard, our work on the modernising of our funding of Race Equality work is starting to pay dividends. We have assisted our Race Equality Council partners in building core quality standards, encouraged them to work more closely with both the public and voluntary sector to



deliver equality outcomes in a more consistent way. And more importantly, we have expanded and developed our equality network by inviting mainstream organisations like yourself to join our network. As you can see we too broke with tradition- after some 25 years of providing funding to ONLY RECs, for the last two years we have actively encouraged the mainstream voluntary organisations to bid for our funding.

Organisations like BTCV are well placed to deliver effectively on equality- as you have shown with Environments for All- you must lead the way by championing your success.

I would like to end by saying, that in my view across the voluntary sector there is a threat and an opportunity...

The threat is that organisations like yourselves lose out on public cash because you do not deliver the kind of service which is demanded of a 21st century organisation-ie; services which are not in keeping with the nature of British communities...

The opportunity is that you can tap into the strength and energy present across diverse Britain.- The churches, The weekend school, the community network, most important the young people with the desire and capacity to change the world.

Superficial change is easy, real change comes with sustained effort, I hope that you will continue to grow this project with the high level of enthusiasm and positive equality outcomes that you have demonstrated over the last three years. I wish you every success in your future years and we look forward to developing our own relationships with you.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share your in your success and giving me space to share some thoughts with you. Once again, my sincere apologies for not being able to be here in person. Enjoy the rest of you conference.

I'd now like to invite one of our guest speakers, Chris Swales, to speak to us. Chris has been liaising with the voluntary sector for three years. He's the senior manager of Community Affairs, Barclays, and he's been in financial services more than he cares to say. But I know he understands the sector very well and I know that he has an affection for some of the work that we've been doing. So Chris if you'd like to take the podium.

Chris Swales, Senior Manager, Community Affairs, Barclays Plc

Well thank you very much Richard, I must say it's a real pleasure to be here today and I've had a fantastic day actually. I'm actually a stand-in here today for our Head of Community Affairs who unfortunately couldn't be with us today and so I really didn't know what to expect when I was coming along, and actually I feel quite over-dressed in my regulation banker's suit and tie. Had I known that we would be disco-dancing this morning, I would have got my white suit out of the wardrobe where it's been since 1978! I have to say it was a fantastic way to start the day. The line- dancing, with the drumming, with everything that went on in the marketplace here, this lunchtime it just really typifies the energy, the creativity and the drive that you bring to your work and that you've brought to the conference here today.

Barclays commitment to the community is well-established and it's an important part of our corporate responsibility. Barclays' people live and work in the communities that we operate in and that's nearly 2,000 branches around the country. We find that it's important for us to help to try and create healthy environments in which to do our work. Our support is not only through funding. Although we did fund nearly £10 million direct to charities in 2003, but it's also about encouraging our own staff to get involved in community activities. We have a number of support schemes with which we help them do that either through fundraising or through volunteering. Again we have nearly 20,000 of our staff getting involved in their communities in 2003; it's quite an amazing amount. But also part of our role is encouraging others to support their communities through programmes such as Environments for All, through Barclays Site Savers in partnership with Groundwork and through things like CSV's Make a Difference Day, where we actively encourage other people to get involved from all backgrounds in their communities. That's why it's wonderful to be here today to see the impact that our support has had.



I won't go on too long so hopefully you won't get too bored but just a few impressions or things that I've picked up from today. The first thing is it's very challenging. This stuff isn't easy; there are no easy fixes and we found that ourselves as Barclays moved towards becoming a more inclusive and a more representative organisation. But out of those challenges come opportunities and when those opportunities are taken on and developed in partnership at least a change, real positive change in perceptions, in attitudes, in quality of life, the way people view themselves and the way they view others. Another thing that's come across really loud and clear today is passion. There's a real passion here for what you do, and a real passion for people; treating them as individuals not as numbers. There's a real passion for recognising the amazing skills and abilities and talents that people from diverse backgrounds bring and the way that you can tap into that.

So today has been a real inspiration for me. There's been some fantastic speakers here today that I've really enjoyed and indeed after the first session this morning I heard a chap who was sat behind me saying somewhat incredulously, 'the speakers are really good! They've said it all!' Now how often do you hear that at a conference?

So Barclays are very pleased and very proud to be associated in some small way with what you've achieved with Environments for All, it is amazing, you do a brilliant job, congratulations. I hope you continue to grow, to develop and to expand.

What I'd like to do is invite Peter Matthews to come and speak for two to three minutes. Peter is Head of Liveability and Public Spaces at the ODPM, the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister. He's not just a Civil Servant, he's also a very active person in his own right as a volunteer in his own community group where he lives. He has the advantage of having more than one perspective on community activity and he voices these very loud sometimes indeed. Peter I'd like to invite you up to the stage to talk to the guests.

***Peter Matthews – Head of Liveability & Public Spaces.
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister***

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for that Richard. I started off with a thirty minute presentation and it went down to ten and then I walked in and I was told it would have to be two to three. But I'm just going to throw in some things and I hope that we actually can pick them up in discussion. I cannot cover everything that I would like to say in two minutes, but I will pick up on the Liveability Agenda. The Liveability Agenda is something that the government is hugely committed to and it is in shorthand terms simply about improving the quality of people's lives by improving the quality of the environments. I think that in itself is a very powerful thing throughout the government's policies at the moment.

It is a strong agenda today but in a sense I think three or four years ago it wasn't a strong agenda – parks and public spaces were not on the political agenda and in a sense they were the poor relations in public policy. However, certainly since the year 2000, it has been this continuing growth in the agenda and the reason I wanted to explain that is that I believe that fundamentally that this is good for communities. It is good for voluntary and community organisations that the environment where people live is actually given that amount of recognition at the centre of government. I just want to mention this evolution very quickly. You can all look it up on the website or you can send me an e-mail and I'll send you all the reports, but the starting point for this, and I have to thank the Environment Select Committee in 1999 when they reported on town and country parks. It's not usual that I thank a select committee for sending me a very difficult report, which I have to respond to but the very good thing about that report is that it actually told a very clear message to government. The message was very simple. You are talking about an urban renaissance but no-one is talking about parks and green spaces, and how can you have an urban renaissance if we are not going to look after the quality of the spaces we have. Now that was a very strong message and I think rather than the classic Civil Service response, at the time it was called Sir Humphrey draft in – but what we actually said was we agree with you. We haven't got the answers and actually what



we'll try to do is actually find the answers by working with the communities with the voluntary organisations, with the people who understand the problems.

I think that is a fundamental stage. Certainly in the evolution of what has now become the urban agenda and it is – it was a real strong wake up call certainly for the government. We can move from that and you can follow the evolution of the agenda through the urban white paper, through the work of the urban green spaces task force, through the work of Living Spaces report, through the sustainable communities plan. But it is a strong agenda and I really want to make that very clear from the point of view of the government and we really need to engage with that.

Now you'll see I tend to talk about 'we' and 'government'. Now I cannot divorce the fact that I believe that communities have a strong role to play in delivering this area of public policy. In a sense – as Richard pointed out – I am a very keen community player in my local environment, but in a sense what I've done is I've brought that experience to my work. If we look at what the government's trying to do in terms of the Liveability agenda, we're trying to do six things.

The first thing we're trying to do very simply is that we want to see the creation of good quality parks and public spaces. We want to see a diverse range of green spaces. I think one of the big messages that came out of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce was the basic concept that actually there are different types of people who actually benefit from different types of green spaces and therefore we need to think about provision of that broad range and diversity of spaces.

That is a very strong and a very powerful message and I think we need to think through how we can actually deliver that. The second thing we're trying to do is really to improve the physical fabric of place and by that we're talking about the broken pavements, the street lightings which don't work and so on. These are the things that blight quality of life for people in many local environments in the places where they live.

The third thing we've got to do quite clearly is actually make places safer and we need to tackle anti-social behaviour. We also need to think about the needs of people and there are certain people in society who do not benefit from good quality provision and actually we know quite a lot about who those groups are and why they don't benefit. We know that children and young people are often put forward but then we have to think about the elderly, we have to think about the disabled and we have to think about black and ethnic minorities. Their particular needs that we need to think about in terms of how we plan provision and so on.

Underpinning all this is that we need to actually be better at managing and maintaining our spaces. I think that is the historic problem that we've inherited and that's the thing we need to overcome.

Then the final thing which is really the key, is that we can do all the above, but if we do not engage the communities, both in terms of encouraging more responsive social use of these places and at the same time engaging people in terms of civic pride and taking pride in their spaces, then I think we're missing a huge trick in terms of ensuring the sustainability of the quality of public spaces. I think I believe for one, that there are local people across the country who we know if they had the opportunity and the support, would take responsibility. They would take ownership of their public spaces. I think the key things, from the point of view of government, is how can we provide the support to community groups which is non-bureaucratic, and simple to access, so that they could play the part that we believe that they can. I can see Richard to my left and that means it's time to stop. Thank you.

Question and Answer Session

Q. Sarah Williams from the Ramblers Association. *We're talking about environment and obviously you're talking about planning with environment. How are you linking this up with the department for transport which is also extremely important in making sure that people walk more, cycle more and are able to walk to these public spaces quite safely?*



A. Peter Matthew. I think the short answer is that the first thing we've done is that we have linked all the departments who we believe have a contribution to make in terms of the quality of the environment. One of the things that was established two years ago was that there is now a ministerial group, a cross departmental ministerial group, which is ODPM,

Department of Transport, Home Office, Health, Education. Those ministers were given the task by the Prime Minister of joining up and I mean we say this all the time, but what we meant by joining up was in a sense can we actually get around a table as ministers and officials and try to understand well we have got policies at ODPM. You've got it at Transport, how do they relate? But I think just to answer your questions specifically, we – in terms of transport I think what we're trying to do with the Transport Department and the Civil Servants in the Transport Department, is actually trying to actually educate them if that's not a strong word, to simply try to recognise what are the barriers to people walking and cycling and the simple barrier to me is that if the quality of your local environment is poor, that is a big barrier to you actually wanting to go out and walk and so on. So it then comes back to the overall agenda well we all have a role in improving the quality of the environment. So I think that's the message that I put to Transport and in a sense they need to take that on board in developing local transport plans and so on. So I think we are very closely linked through the cross government arrangements.

Q. I'm Nuredin . *Maybe a question to Judy or maybe Tom is – we heard this morning about BTCV's aim to inspire people, which I really am you know very happy about and fully support but how can we also inspire organisations whether they are voluntary, whether they are statutory, or whether they are partners. Can we do it or how do we do it or should we do it? For Peter also if you can remind us how much money is available to make the world a better place, this Liveability fund?*

A. Judy Ling-Wong . Yes I think BTCV has a very important role to really make the environmental sector understand what it has achieved and what is possible. Having this high (inaudible – mike doesn't seem to be working in this case) in the environmental sector (inaudible) diversity (inaudible) – (mike clicks in again at this point) as what BTCV has done which is to infrastructurally and strategically change the organisation and having this way being shown and the success demonstrated I just think there's no excuse any more for the environmental sector's organisations to continually do bits and pieces. They all have good examples to show us here and there but the problem is it is not strategic and it is not an overall application to their work. People are allowed to do it if you wish, not do it if you wish, right through the organisations. So although every organisation you speak to has an example of addressing something of this nature. We have to lift it on to a different level and BTCV has shown the way so it has now a real role - Tom, for telling organisations, to speak to them and to say well this challenge is lying before you because it can be done. What are you going to do about it?

Chairman - Thank you Judy. Nuredin, I'm going to cancel out your question to Peter if that's OK because there were some people at the back also and we are running tight on time. There was somebody at the back with their hand up who wanted to ask a question. They don't want to ask it any more? Any further questions do we have at the moment? I swear I saw a hand from you David. Right say who you are.

Q. Yes I – David Jamieson from BTCV Scotland. *It was almost the same question as Nuredin was asking Judy and it was more about BEN. We've heard a lot about BTCV and how we're accepting and taking forward this challenge but I think BEN has an important role here to influence organisations like the National Trust and the Wildlife Trust and the Groundworks of this world and I wondered how far has BEN got in influencing the wider sector beyond BTCV?*

A. Judy Ling-Wong - It's coming along. But all at different rates because as you know BEN has been set up to establish full ethnic participation in the built and natural environment and where we start was nature conservation in the environmental sector. And actually BTCV is one of our first organisations that we worked with. We've worked with them for seventeen years and we feel that this step that BCTV has taken is part of the culmination of our work because I think that one of the things today that's being very very strongly recognised is the agenda of social inclusion and the addressing of institutionalised racism. I think the normalisation of the words, institutionalisation is very important for people to not feel that it is an attack but the raising of awareness. That which we call soft racism - when organisations are not going around beating people up, but they're just going around neglecting and omitting and not acting. That this is actually a very powerful effect on our lives and coming from a background of psychotherapy. I also use psychology in our work and you'll see that the work of BEN is very much marked by working with people at a possible rate of change, so we challenge organisations and say you have to be inclusive. It is institutionalised racism that you are you know addressing in your organisation. We on the other hand feel that although people may want to go along this road it is not an easy road so we have supported and respected organisations at their rate of change. I think we have positively worked with organisations like BTCV over the years, so that the taking-in of experience into that organisation, of contact and asked what can be achieved in various projects, has over the years within BTCV built up a critical mass of people to allow the organisation to arrive at that very high level and within the organisation to commit itself to change because in practical terms, commitment is not a magic, Commitment comes of contact, of awareness and by some organisations starting to do various things, the taking in of their experience into the organisation is the process of change.

So if you asked me about various organisations like the Wildlife Trust, English Nature, National Trust and so on, we are working with them at different levels and they do do projects with us and we now actually are moving on to a greater commitment with the National Trust and English Heritage and we're about to actually do a very ambitious programme with them. We're applying for funding at this minute, but they're going to be substantial partners with us in their commitment to again make a difference with the historic environment which of course addresses both the built environment and historic natural environment. So we are hopeful and of course there are many other organisations yet to come on board.

Q. Anthony McQuillan, BTCV Northern Ireland.

I was more I have to go and get a plane but I just wanted to give a word of thanks to Barclays and I'm not a plant, I promise I haven't been told to say this. A project like Environments for All which has been quite important to us in Northern Ireland in a big big way, needs funders and it's desperately difficult to fund something as risky as that and we have found that out by going round trying to get other bits of money together and I just wanted to thank – especially when Barclays don't really have a high profile in Northern Ireland – have supported the project and other projects in Northern Ireland as well. It requires a maturity of thinking and a strong confidence in your own belief of what you fund, to be able to take your organisation along with you and something like Environments for All, where you can't just measure the number of trees planted there or the number of – the miles of fence put up or something like that, I'd say a very mature project, I think to take a risk with and I just wanted to thank you for that.

Chairman - Thank you Anthony. Thank you very much for being here today and for your contributions. I'd like to thank you all because I know that Anthony has to catch his plane and that many other people are on tight schedules. I have the pleasure in a way to also maybe pick up some of the things that have been said today which have stuck in my mind, and having a very eclectic brain at the best of times, I was going to give you some of the things that I thought both made me laugh and also were very poignant. When Maeve said the asylum seekers ate my donkey, I just thought that was quite bizarre. Diversity is easy to say and hard to do. We had – I'm looking for funny ones – things to learn, to value people's own experience and expertise. On tap not on top professionals from Marilyn and I think from Judy the one I loved was urge all the funders to resource BTCV. Of course I would love that! To turn the grey areas into the golden ones, I thought what a wonderful way to finish a conference.



I'd just like to say a very special thanks today because as everybody knows who comes to events like this. Although I would suggest you don't go to too many events like this, that we have had a huge amount of effort and work from colleagues and volunteers in the background. I'd like to make a special thanks to the West Midlands team who have toiled endlessly to do all sorts of things. The MBs and the volunteers from Brent who came in and filled the gap at the last minute, all our partners, and most especially all of you here today. May you go in peace and have a safe journey home. Thank you very much.
