

# NOT JUST ANY OLD IRON TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY GARDEN

A community garden project transforming a patch of wasteland is to benefit from a blast of heavy metal. Together with housing provider, Home Group, we have drafted in eminent North East artist and blacksmith, Graeme Hopper, to add some steel to the Chelsea Gardens project we are working on with residents of Deckham, Gateshead. Known for his extraordinarily unique sculptures, Graeme has been commissioned to create artwork for the garden, and so focused is he on making something loved by the community, he drafted in Carrhill Primary School pupils to inspire and shape his ideas.

The project is as a thank you to the community for its patience and support during improvements to drainage in the area. We hope it will provide an attractive area people can enjoy and be proud of as well as raise awareness of how surface water is managed in the natural environment in all weather conditions. The land to be developed, owned by Home Group, is off Chelsea Gardens in Deckham and the project is being spearheaded by residents as well as the school. Graeme spent the afternoon with a class of year five students at the school, who pitched up ideas ranging from bee-butterfly hybrids to lazy ladybugs.



He said: “With a project like this it’s so important to make sure the community are as involved as possible. Having the kids as the creative driving force of the sculpture means they’ll see an end product that they can say ‘hey, I did that’.

“Involving these young creative minds means they’re not only learning more about art and sculpture, but they’re getting to be a part of something that will stand proud for a long time – it’s my job to get the community feeling a sense of ownership for this project and these children are already excited about the final product.” A blacksmith by trade, Graeme came to art via industry and teaching. He specialises in functional and sculptural ironwork of all sizes for locations. His flair and talent have led to appearances on the BBC Small Town Gardens and DIY programmes.

Northumbrian Water project manager, Mike Ciaraldi, is delighted the community garden has sparked such excitement and praised the work of Carrhill School pupils. He said: “The community garden idea started out as a way to highlight the importance of managing surface water, in all weather conditions, following completion of a £1 million scheme to reduce the likelihood of flooding, but it has evolved into much more than that.

“Graeme’s work with local children has helped to bring a huge amount of creativity and excitement to a project that has already been embraced in Deckham. It will be wonderful to see that project come to fruition.”

Kathryn Forte, Home Group strategic neighbourhood co-ordinator, said: “We are delighted to work with Northumbrian Water to give people an opportunity to create a community garden with a sustainable focus. “The work with Carrhill wasn’t just about getting the kids to do the design work – they’re learning about ecology and art in the process so they can be the experts of their very own community garden and enjoy it for years to come.”

The designs will encourage wildlife to flourish in the garden and use native planting which will meet the needs of native wildlife by providing them with shelter and food.

Heather McClean, class teacher, said: “We are delighted to be getting involved with the community garden project – this class have a lot of experience with getting crafty and creative and have worked on outdoor projects similar to this in the past, so I expect Graeme will have a hard job ahead of him pulling together all of the ideas the class have put forward.”

The sculpture is expected to be completed and placed in the garden this summer, dependent on weather conditions, and will be given a special unveiling ceremony for the local community to enjoy.

The garden was designed by Deckham resident Alfie Elrington, who was selected in a competition judged by green services company Glendale..