

“I saw that things wouldn't happen unless there were people there with the passion to get everyone together. Once Local Alchemy is gone, there will be things set up which can carry on the work that Local Alchemy is trying to achieve”.

Tony, Chair of the
New Parks Allotment Society
New Parks, Leicester



a green space to meet

Tony, a retired artisan, avid gardener and chairman of the New Parks Allotment Society, has made it his personal mission to “bring allotments into the twenty-first century”, and to maximise the social benefit for New Parks from their allotments.

Over the past 18 months, the New Parks Allotment Society (NPAS) has been working on the 38 separate projects that have turned the allotment site, which has been in existence since the early 1900's, into a thriving community asset used by local residents, local schools and politicians.

Patricia Hewitt MP is now the patron of the NPAS, and recently held her local Labour Party summer barbecue there. Other local groups make use of the brand new facilities, including a hall, outside patio seating and bathroom facilities. Children's parties, seminars, away days, food and gardening classes for disabled children, and cookery classes are held there every day through the week and on weekends.

The Local Alchemy enterprise support meetings also use the allotment hall, this being an accessible point for community members seeking advice and guidance. Russell, the Local Alchemy coach has been providing advice and guidance to Tony, and has gained the confidence of the local community, many of which meet on a regular basis in the allotment hall. These meetings give entrepreneurs a chance to discuss ideas and share experiences, to talk about funding and enterprise; creating an approachable and non-intimidating way to access support is an important feature of Local Alchemy.

“I saw that through these meetings”, says Tony, “that things wouldn't happen unless there were people there with the passion to get everyone together. Once Local Alchemy is gone, there will be things set up which will carry on the work that Local Alchemy is trying to achieve”.

“It opened up my mind again”, he continues, “and got the grey matter working. The biggest thing is not my own enjoyment, but the enjoyment of the people that are using the allotments. I overheard one old lady who has been living in the area for over 25 years say that she had not spoken to anyone from this area in all those years, and that the Allotment Society was bringing people together”.

“It hasn't all been plain sailing”, Tony reflected. “There have been issues and arguments, but from every argument came an idea. The input from the volunteers has been huge. Members have come and gone, and there are new members now who might not have been involved in the past, in particular the women of the community”.

Although still facing funding issues, which Tony expects will be an ongoing issue due to the difficulty of making the allotments self sufficient, Tony and the members of the society remain positive in looking for ways to bring in more revenue.

There have been more training courses delivered from the hall, including first aid and food and hygiene, all of which are beginning to make some additional income to support a facility that is bringing widespread benefit to New Parks.