

Art and Nature in The Leys

Report of community event on 9th November 2024 at The Barn, Oxford.

What? A free, drop-in family-friendly event led by researchers [Martha Crockatt](#) and [Mattia Troiano](#), developed in collaboration with Natasha Summer, a local community champion, and in partnership with the Oxfordshire African Caribbean Multicultural Society. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's Festival of Social Science.



Why? The aim was to engage one of the communities in Oxford that had participated in Mattia's research, and also to provide a venue for community members interested in local greenspace and nature to get together and consider their neighbourhood, celebrating its strengths and opening a conversation on what people perceived as its downsides.

How? Attendees were invited to create collages of nature spaces; annotate maps of the local areas with what they liked about nature and view artworks created in walked interviews with local community members as part of Mattia's research.

What did people do? The collage-making portrayed green spaces that had a balance between people and nature, included treed areas, open spaces and water, and included recreation equipment for small children and benches, indicating the types of spaces that participants visualise. The participatory mapping, intended to allow people to share their favourite local nature spaces, resulted in a mixed picture of positive nature experiences, concern about losing greenspace to development and a feeling that the local community lack

agency in how their greenspaces are managed. Connection, knowledge and passion for the local area and the greenspace and nature within it were apparent throughout activities. Summaries of themes emerging from the activities are presented below, as well as images of the collages created by attendees and the maps to which they contributed.

Who came along? There were 26 attendees, including some families, representing diverse demographics. Event feedback was collected through an engaging traffic light colour system and was generally positive. All people who left feedback indicated that the event allowed them to learn something new, making them glad that they had participated. Constructive points for improvement included wider advertisement of the event locally, and the ability to clarify the intent of the day to participants and possible outputs or scope given the diversity of attendees and their roles in the community.

Partnership. Relevant local organisations active were invited to attend, including Community Action Groups Oxfordshire, the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and Only One Oxford. The event was realised from the support of the locally based Oxfordshire African Caribbean Multicultural Association. The event hosted the recently reformed group of Friends of Spindleberry Park with the intent to support the group's advertisement and recruitment of volunteers among local.

| Activity | Description | Themes emerging from activity |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Art collage-making | <p>Participants of all ages were asked to engage with an activity of collage-based landscape restoration making. The cut-outs that people could play with to build their collage were a mixture of green and grey infrastructural elements which emerged from the implementation of an art-based method during community engagement for the research project Community values in accessible urban green spaces and planning: An Oxford case. Participants of this workshop were however invited to go beyond the natural and infrastructural elements already provided and add their own by drawing directly on their collages. This was allowed and the collection below include only those collages which remained unclaimed by participants at the end of the event.</p> | <p>Most collages portray balanced spaces that accommodate both people, their accessibility to the spaces and recreation they can offer, and wildlife (Collages 2-5 below).</p> |
| | | <p>Most collages portray balanced spaces with both tree areas and open spaces; as well as with a blue space (see water pond in drawings 3-6 below).</p> |
| | <p>Drawing and art-based method are particularly suited to engage audience from across age ranges and stimulate reflection on the power of imagination and lived experience elicitation¹, also for different social groups and their relationship with nature²⁻³. Art-based approaches were found particularly effective in engaging communities in Oxfordshire⁴.</p> | <p>Wildlife: Herons (see drawings 1-3 below), badgers (see drawings 1-4 below), and muntjac deer (see drawings 1;5;6 below) were the species most used in collage-making. These are all species witnessed in Spindleberry Park in Blackbird Leys. People voiced that they are becoming less visible or present in the space as development in the area neighbouring the park continues.</p> |
| | | <p>Grey infrastructure: recreation equipment for the youngest (see drawings 3-5 below); as well as equipment to facilitate accessibility and usability of the park (see seating equipment in drawings 3-6 below) appear as essentials in these spaces.</p> |

¹ Boden, Z., Larkin, M. and Iyer, M. (2019) Picturing ourselves in the world: Drawings, interpretative phenomenological analysis and the relational mapping interview. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 16(2), pp. 218–236. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1540679>.

²⁻³ Cooper, N., Brady, E., Steen, H., & Bryce, R. (2016). Aesthetic and spiritual values of ecosystems: Recognising the ontological and axiological plurality of cultural ecosystem ‘services’. *Ecosystem Services*, 21, 218–229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2016.07.014>

Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2020). Participatory Research Methods – Choice Points in the Research Process. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.13244>

⁴ Healthwatch Oxfordshire. (2023). *Community Research in Oxfordshire an overview* [online]. Accessed on 3rd Dec 2024. Available at: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Healthwatch-Oxfordshire-community-research.pdf>

| | Description and summary of key themes | What people value and it is already locally provided | What people would like to see changing / developing in their area - what's not (yet) locally provided |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Participatory mapping | <p>Workshop attendees were presented with large (A1) maps of The Leys, covering the whole area and smaller portions in more detail (below).</p> <p>Post It notes of various sizes and pens were available for attendees, who were invited to mark up the map with places that they had seen wildlife, enjoyed being in greenspace or felt that details were missing from the map.</p> <p>A number of people contributed, some annotating the map directly, others using Post It notes. Attendees had been asked to contribute positive experiences and thoughts related to greenspace in The Leys, but what emerged was a mixture, with a number of suggestions for improvements and complaints, as well as notes of where wildlife had been seen and what was enjoyed about particular spaces.</p> <p>As well as using the map to make comments on the local area, there were a number of comments that provided more detail on the map itself, e.g. making up where new housing is being built, the location of landmarks such as play equipment and a willow structure in parks, etc.</p> <p>There were also some people who said that they did not use the greenspaces and felt that they had nothing to contribute to the maps. In one case the reason for this was described as a child having outgrown the local parks, and time now being taken up with other activities.</p> | <p>Across the neighbourhood as a whole there were positive comments about the parks, community, walking spaces and local clubs (map 4 below).</p> | <p>Concerns with respect to the impact of development in terms of losing greenspace (e.g. losing part of Spindleberry Nature Park to housing), and the impact of development on greenspace (e.g. the closing of a footpath making it likely that there will be high traffic from football fans through Spindleberry Nature Park) (map 2 below).</p> |
| | | <p>In Spindleberry Nature Park wildlife sightings (herons, foxes, badgers, egrets) were highlighted (map 1 below).</p> | <p>There were requests for more outdoor facilities (e.g. more sports courts), especially those tailored to those with different needs (e.g. accessible play equipment and a sensory area) (map 4 below).</p> |
| | | <p>Conversation with those contributing to the map gave a sense that attendees were proud of their local area, know it well, appreciated the greenspaces available locally and wanted to protect them.</p> | <p>There were requests for “more wildlife” and “more trees” (maps 2 and 4 below).</p> |
| | | | <p>Conversation with those contributing to the map gave a sense that attendees felt the local community to be overlooked and excluded from decision-making in the area.</p> |

Collage-based ideal urban green spaces

1







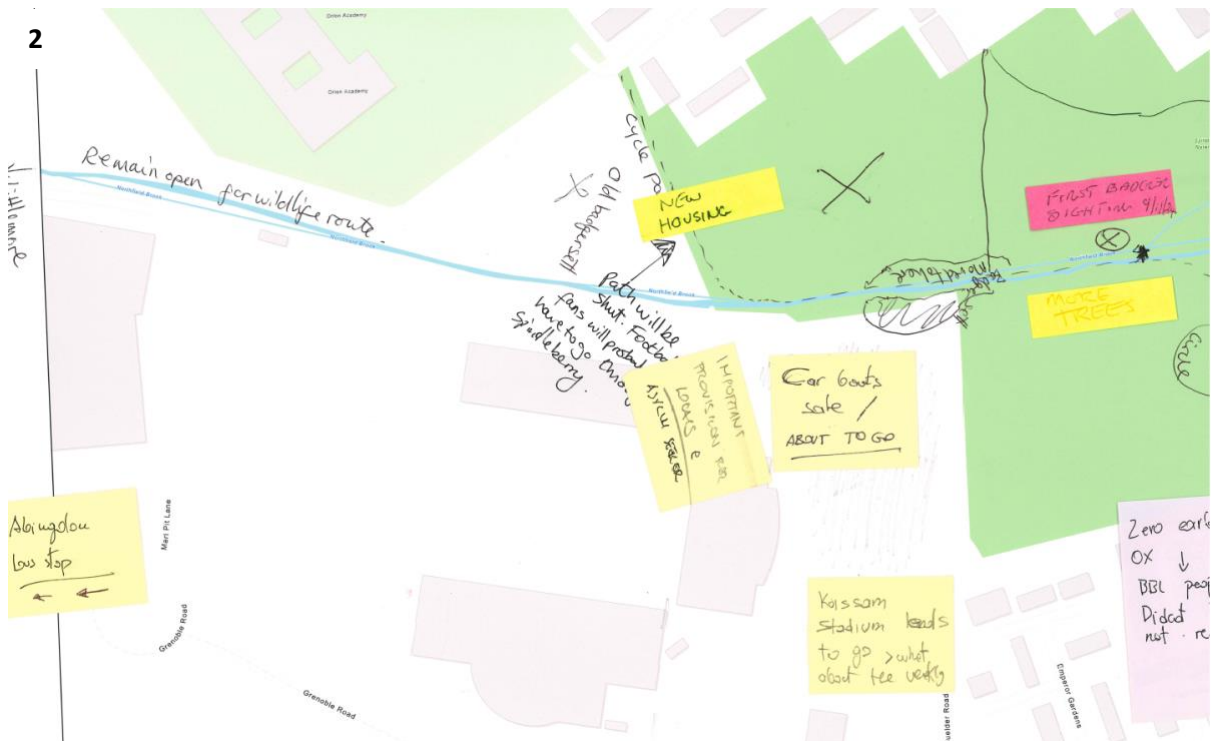






Participatory maps

Maps were scanned so that all comments are visible; portions of the maps without comments have not been included.





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