

# What is the impact of the Parklife Project?

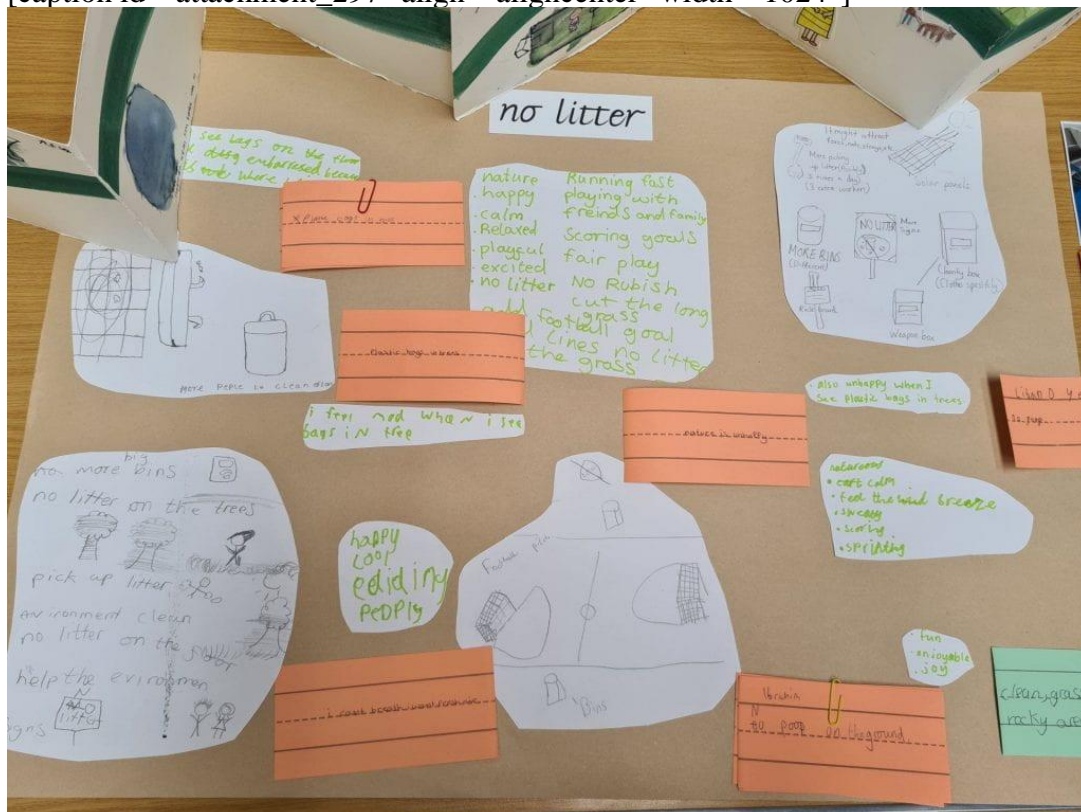
## A special report from Blue Gate Fields Primary School

It is June 14th 2024, and I am listening to the School Council of Blue Gate Fields Primary School practise their speeches in readiness to advocate for change in their local park. They have been working with the environmental charity [GenEarth \(formerly Volunteers for Blue\)](#) and advocacy charity [I Have a Voice](#) for past few months using the [Parklife research methodology](#). This has meant they have researched their local park in creative and more traditional ways, and used their creative outputs (such as poems/art/photographs/sculptures) to advocate for ways their park could be improved. Now, today, they are going to give speeches to their local councillor about what they would like to see in their local parks, of which there are a few: King Edward Park, St George's Park, and Wapping Woods.

### The students' creative work

I am surrounded by the work they have done for the Parklife Project. Here you can see a sample:

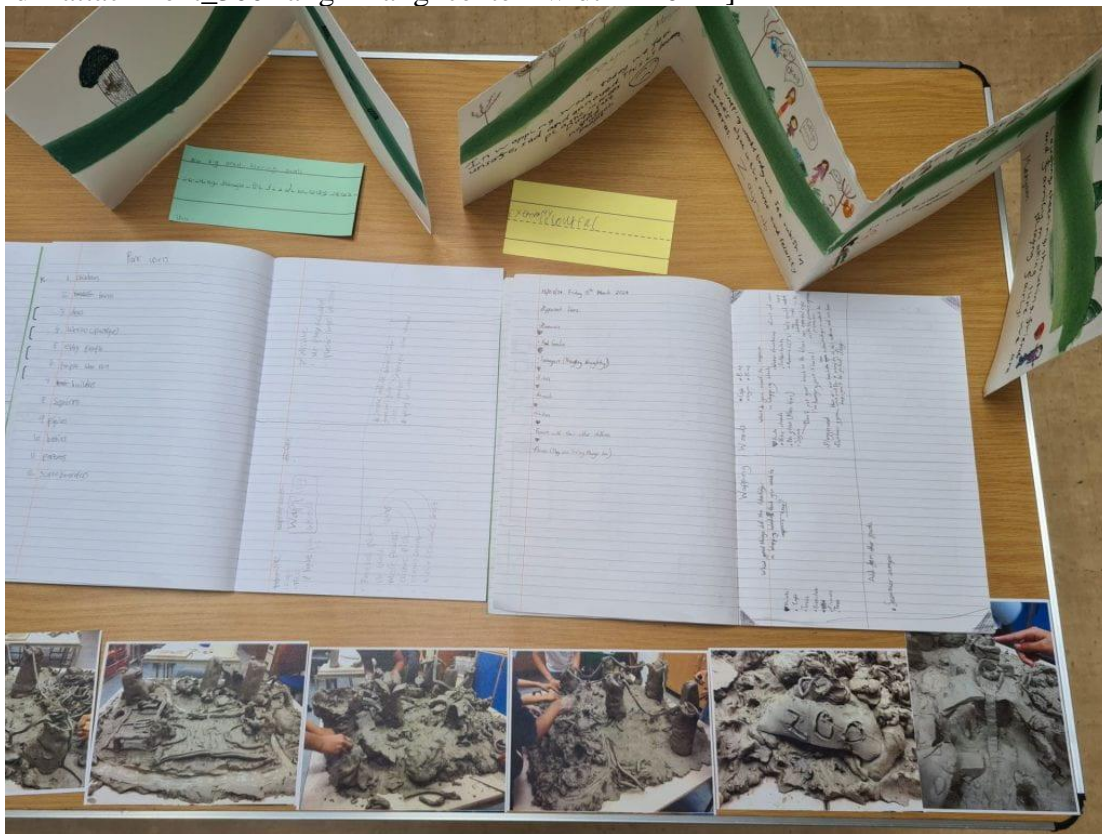
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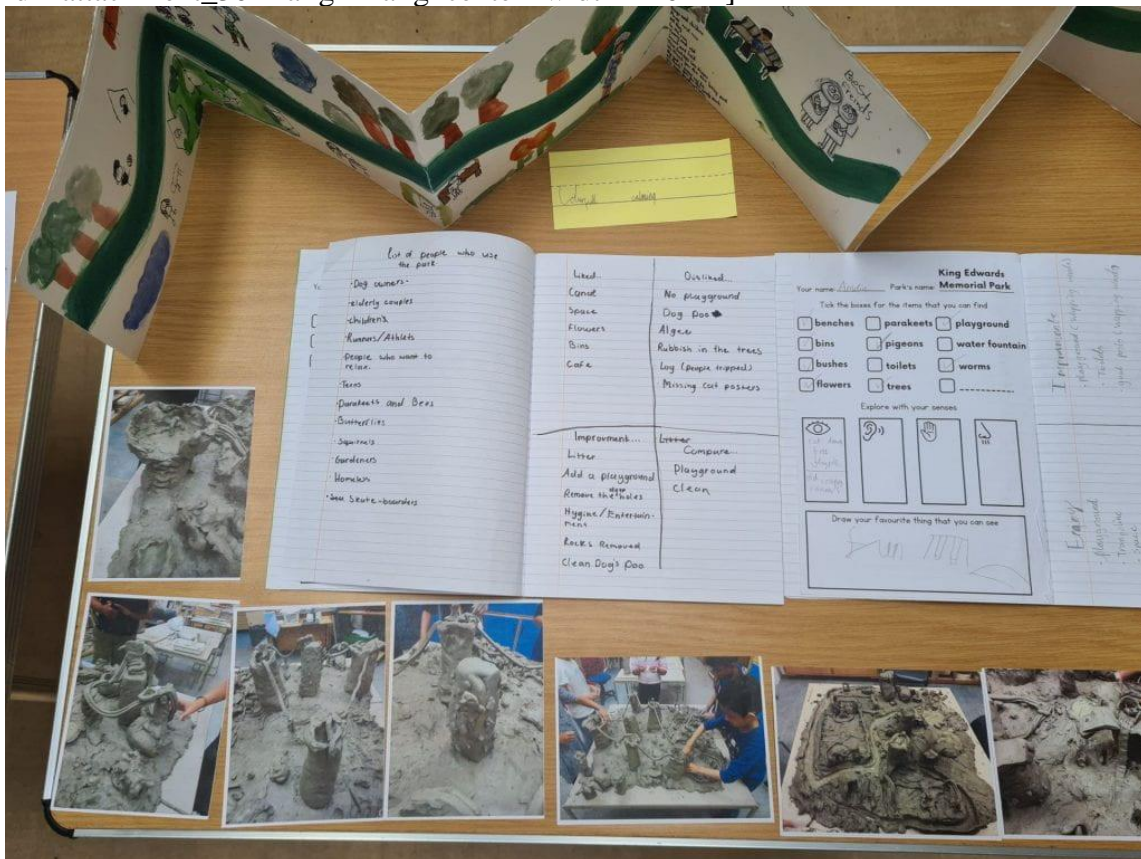
Students' advocacy for less litter in the park. [caption id="attachment\_298" align="aligncenter" width="1024"]



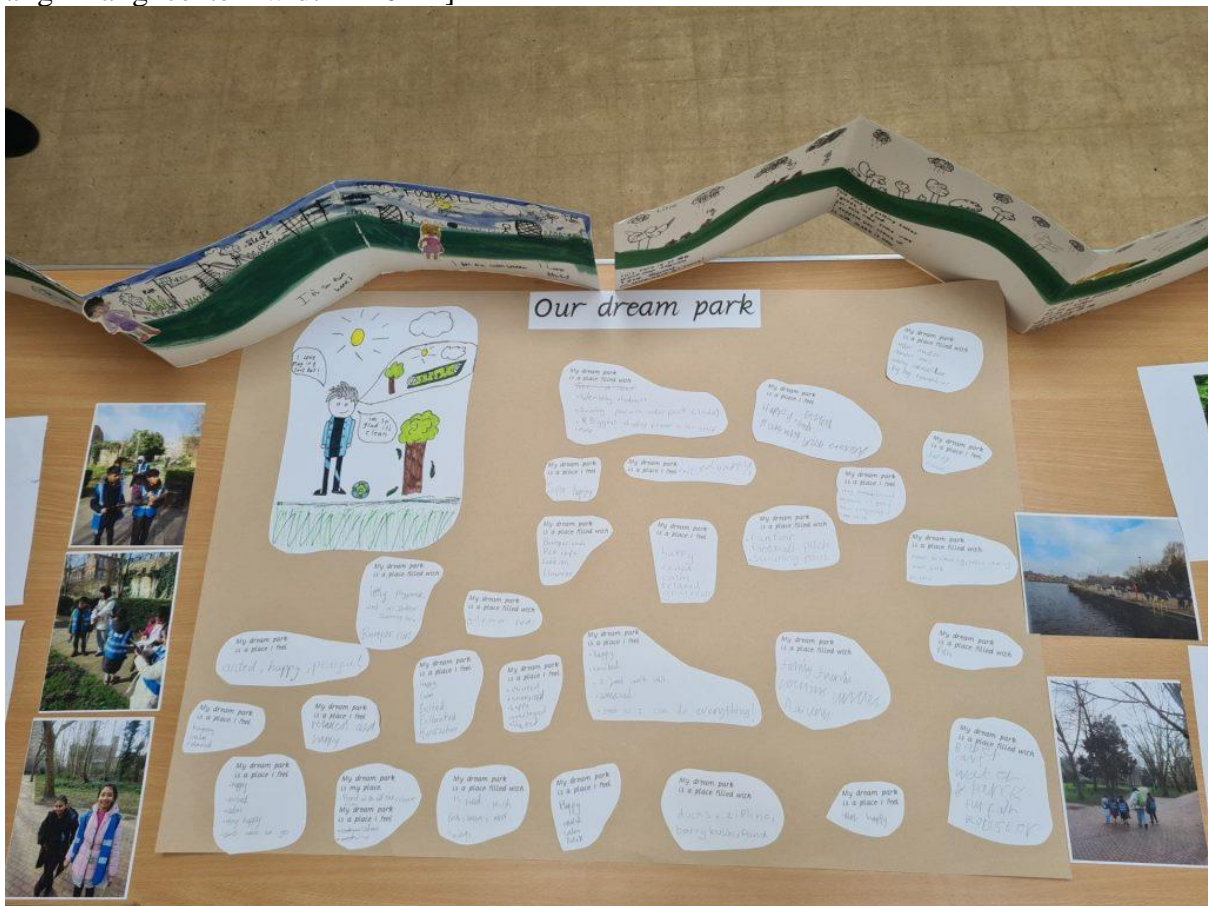
Students asking for a football pitch to be put into Wapping Woods. [caption][caption id="attachment\_300" align="aligncenter" width="1024"]



Students group sculptures and poems about their dream park. [caption][caption id="attachment\_301" align="aligncenter" width="1024"]



Students' sculptures of their dream parks.[/caption][caption id="attachment\_302" align="aligncenter" width="1024"]



Students' dream parks which they devised in groups.[/caption]

## Students' views of the Parklife Project

I spoke to the pupils who were all very enthusiastic about the Parklife project. It had certainly changed their views about parks, and their interest in trying to improve them. Liban, Year 5, told me: 'I have become more interested in parks because of the Parklife project. I have become interested in: making the parks more beautiful for people. When I grow up, I might make a park of my own. I liked looking at the three parks where we went, Wapping Woods, King Edward Park, and St George's. My favourite thing to do was writing poems and then making my own model park out of clay. My poems are now on display for everyone, including the councillor to see.'

Najifah, Year 5, told me: 'I enjoyed it when we visited the parks which were clean, such as King Edward's park. I enjoyed making a sculpture of our dream park, we did this in a group. We made the sculpture after planning out and thinking what our dream park would be. I am more interested in parks than I was before this project, I am particularly interested in how we might stop so much litter being dropped in the park.'

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Councillor Hssain with Rebecca Deegan from I Have a Voice.[/caption]

Councillor Iqbal Hossain introduced himself to the children, explaining how he emigrated from Bangladesh as a young man, and became an English as an Additional Language teacher in Tower Hamlets' schools helping Bangladeshi children to communicate in English before

becoming a Tower Hamlets' councillor in May 2022. He then listened to the children's presentations about what they would like for their local parks.

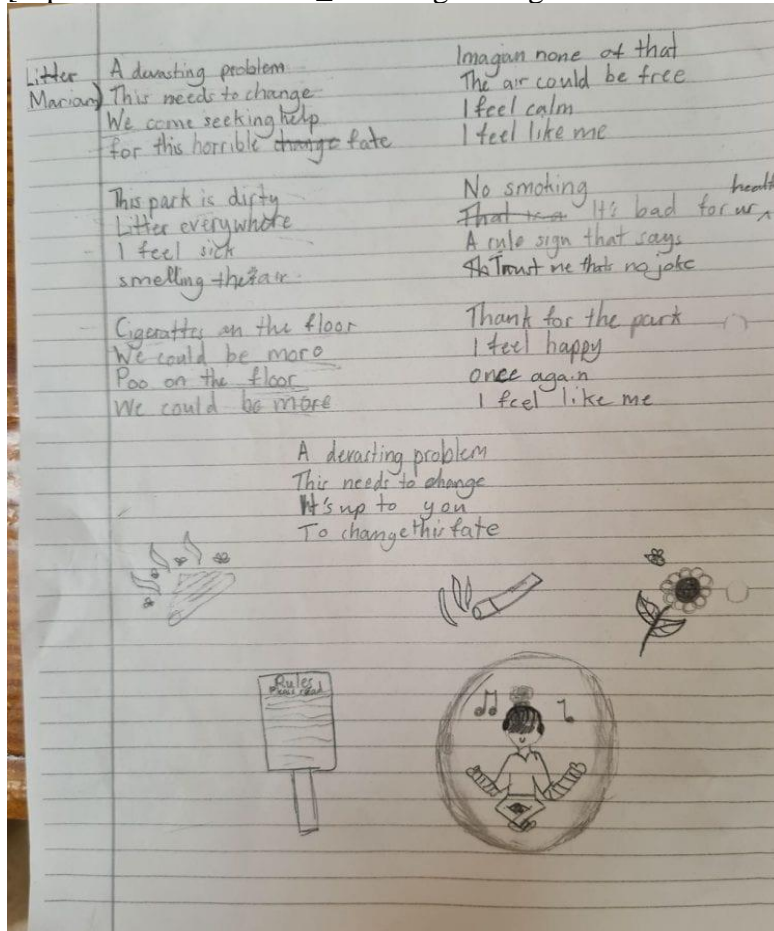
## The students' speeches and councillor's response

The students talked about what they would like for their local park in Wapping Woods, which included:

- Less litter
- More and/or better cleaners/litter pickers for the park
- A pond with colourful fishes and ducks, cleaner water
- Greater safety in the park
- A football pitch
- An abstract play area which could include some 'fantasy' objects such as volcanoes

Of particular power was a poem recited by heart by Mariam:

[caption id="attachment\_310" align="aligncenter" width="751"]



Mariam's poem about her local park which she recited from memory. [caption]

After the students' speeches, Councillor Hossain thanked the students, and said that he felt the children were more powerful than us, contrary to what I said in my introduction, where I said the Councillor was a powerful person who could take action if he was minded to do so. Councillor Hossain agreed that the students' concerns were valid. He pointed out that parks

are important for improving people's mental and physical health. He admitted that the borough is not the cleanest borough in London, but pointed out the council is planting more trees in the area, which will help with producing oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide. He talked about the £3m renovations happening in King Edward Park, which will include making a new football pitch, tennis courts, a cafe and toilets and the council's new policy of making it free for women who are older than sixteen. He said that he will collect all the students' questions, and respond in writing, and he will seek to address the students' concerns as best he can by liaising with other councillor members.

The students had plenty of questions and comments for the Councillor, including suggesting that people should be fined for dropping litter (a point the councillor agreed with). The governors of the school who were attending were also very impressed with their children's speeches and work.

## Impact

I asked the students whether the project had changed their attitudes and views about park. One student talked about how the project had made her look more closely at what was going on in her local park. Another student said that she felt a 'little more powerful' as a result of the project.

The councillor asked the children if we created a volunteer group for looking after the park, would you sign up? Lots of children put their hands up.

Nasima Khanom, teacher-governor, said: 'The project clearly has had a big effect on the children, it's made them really passionate about not just the park but their local area. They have had a chance to go out into the local area, talk to the public, and learn about what other people want as well as themselves. It has taught them about local democracy, and how to change things for the better, even in small ways. I'm really glad that councillor Hossain was able to attend as well as other governors, which shows all of us that the children's voices are being heard, and not just within the bubble of the school. To see how their voices are valued in the wider community is great for the children.'

Teacher at the school and postgraduate on the MA Creative Writing and Education, Maya Eadie-Catling said: 'It has been important for the school councillors to gain an understanding of their role in creating change for the better in the community, and how the school council is linked to the actual council. It's given the pupils a sense of agency and hope.'

Councillor Hossain said: 'It is great that the children have learnt that their voices count, and it has empowered the children to take a leading role in making changes for the better in their community. I really enjoyed the morning, and was pleased to see the wonderful ideas to improve their local parks.'

We ended the session with many of the students and teachers agreeing that a next step could be a campaign to make a volunteer group to improve the local parks, particularly with regard to their cleanliness.

By Dr Francis Gilbert, Principal Investigator, [The Parklife Project](#)