

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**January 2017**



## **Unlocking Nature**

### **A Conservation Foundation Gardening Against The Odds Initiative**

The Conservation Foundation is about to start a *Gardening Against The Odds* project to 'green' areas within HMP Wandsworth, one of Europe's largest prisons. *Unlocking Nature* will include three exercise yards and other central parts of the prison currently covered with tarmac and surrounded with stone walls in a project involving men, staff, members of the local community, leading horticulturalists and environmental groups.

There is currently little or no green space within the prison and men will be encouraged to suggest what they would want to see from their cells and in the areas where they exercise. The Foundation has appointed Adolfo Harrison, an award winning garden designer, to lead the project and Chris Collins, the former Blue Peter gardener and Garden Organic's Head of Organic Horticulture, as the project consultant. They will develop suggestions into plans which will transform the prison's environment in the hope of bringing a completely new atmosphere totally unknown in HMP Wandsworth's 160 year history.

In those years little has been done to bring any form of nature into the prison's life. The same views from the cells today will have been seen by the likes of Oscar Wilde and Ronnie Biggs and thousands of others who have served time in this world-famous South London institution. Research shows that contact with green spaces can reduce symptoms of poor mental health and stress, as well as violence, aggression and antisocial behaviour.\* The aims of the project include improving relationships amongst the men and staff, to provide work experience and communications, to build confidence, develop skills and qualifications and increase support of families.

*Unlocking Nature* is a unique and exciting project which the prison authorities are anxious to share with the world outside. The Conservation Foundation will also welcome any help in creating green areas from the horticulture trade. As well as growing food and health plants, the plans include places for chickens and bees.

The Conservation Foundation has been working at HMP Wandsworth in 2005 through its Tools Shed project which repairs broken and unwanted garden hand tools in a prison workshop and gives the 'new' tools to local schools and community groups. Tools Shed has been taken up since by Edinburgh and Dartmoor Prisons and will be expanded to further English prisons in 2017.

As David Shreeve, director of the Conservation Foundation, explained: "We have been presenting *Gardening Against the Odds* awards to other organisations and individuals for several years and always wanted to create some projects ourselves. Hopefully *Unlocking Nature* marks the start of other initiatives to show how practical gardening activities really can make a difference to minds, spirits and life opportunities. Creating a new environment within Wandsworth will not be easy, but there is a huge amount of enthusiasm to make it happen and we believe it is a challenge well worth undertaking."

\*Great Outdoors: How Our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space To Improve Wellbeing. A Faculty of Public Health publication in association with Natural England, 2010

ENDS

**Notes to editors:**

- **The Conservation Foundation** was founded in 1982 to provide a means for people in public, private and not-for-profit sectors to collaborate on environmental causes. Among its current projects are Morus Londinium, a mulberry project for London, The Great British Elm Experiment, Wessex Watermarks, Churchyard Trees, Gardening Against The Odds and Tools Shed.  
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