

I S L A M I C G A R D E N S



I N T H E U K

dynamics of conservation
culture and communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Using a mixed-methods approach, this research sought to demonstrate the ‘need, value and viability’ of Islamic gardens in the UK, with a view to promoting biodiversity conservation and better inter-religious understanding of Islamic gardening traditions.
- Surveys were made of existing Islamic gardens in the UK. These included public park-based gardens, as well private, temporary, and proposed gardens. We also examined a range of community gardening projects being undertaken by British Muslims. These case-studies were set in the context of the migration history, demographics, and current socio-economic situation of Muslims in Britain, and the recent development of British Muslim environmental organisations and initiatives.
- Our findings demonstrate that many existing Islamic gardens in the UK do not pro-actively promote ideas of biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability, but do nevertheless provide potential for educating Muslim, but especially non-Muslim audiences, about historic Islamic gardening traditions and heritage. There is considerable scope for existing gardens to make more effective use of passive educational methods to highlight the Islamic religious principles that underpin garden design and planting. Likewise, there is scope for Islamic garden designers to broaden and develop their design principles to take account of contemporary ecological and environmental challenges, thereby reflecting the Qur’anic imperative that human beings should act as responsible ‘stewards’ (*khalifah*) of the earth’s resources.
- Any efforts that are made towards the practical engagement of British Muslims with principles of biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability are most likely to be successful when developed outside botanic gardens, and within Muslim communities, and through the efforts of local grassroots organisations and networks that are able to articulate the principles of conservation embedded in Islamic discourses. There is a role for botanic gardens, with the support of organisations such as BGCI, in pro-actively supporting faith-based gardening and plant-based conservation projects. Furthermore, BGCI is well-placed to offer strategic advice about ways in which botanic gardens could become more accessible and engaging spaces for British Muslim and other faith-based audiences.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We could not have completed this project on which this report is based without the encouragement and support of many people and organisations. Firstly, we would like to thank Julia Willison and her colleagues at Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) for commissioning the research, which was generously funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. It is relatively unusual for researchers to have such a close and effective working relationship with commissioning organisations, and so we are grateful for Julia's helpful and constructive interest in the project at all stages.

Thanks are also due to our colleagues in the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University. We are grateful for the discussions about the research that have taken place during team meetings, for their helpful piloting of our research instruments, and for the thoughtful conversations about our emergent findings.

During the research, we have benefitted from the input of two consultants, namely Emma Clark and Fazlun Khalid, both of whom have international reputations for their work in the design of Islamic Gardens and Islamic conservation and environmentalism, respectively. They kindly provided feedback on our survey questions, and both took part in face-to-face interviews and on-going conversation by email subsequently. We are also grateful to IFEES (Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences) for including an article about our project in their monthly bulletin (*Eco-Islam*, Issue 7, April 2010, p4).

Throughout the project, we became aware of the work of pioneering individuals working on environmental conservation and gardening projects, inspired by Islamic sources and traditions. Often these individuals have been working in relative isolation and with few resources. We are thus especially grateful to them, for giving their time to share experiences and ideas. They have been truly inspirational. We would like to record our particular thanks to the following individuals, named in the order with which we had initial contact with them: Professor Charles Stirton, Peter Sanders, David Cansfield (Lister Park, Bradford), Ruth Jackson & Mrs Griffiths (St Mary the Virgin School, Cardiff), Rianne ten Veen (MINE), Joy Leach (Friends of Lister Park), John Roebuck (Roundhay Park, Leeds), Omer Williams & Masood Yousef and their families (WELCOME), Sufia Alam (Wapping Women's Centre, Tower Hamlets), Councillor Mohammed Iqbal (Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking), Mohamed Omar & Maqbul Hussain Mubeen (Gardens of Peace Muslim Cemetery, Ilford) and David Lewis (Kensington Roof Gardens).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGCI	- Botanic Gardens Conservation International
BOS	- Bristol Online Survey
BTCV	- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
FCE	- Forestry Commission England
IFEES	- Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences
LCOF	- Luton Council of Faiths
LINE	- London Islamic Network for the Environment
MINE	- Midland Islamic Network for the Environment
RITE	- Reading Islamic Trustees for the Environment
SHiNE	- Sheffield Islamic Network for the Environment
SLUGS	- Safeguarding Levenshulme's Urban Greenspace Society (formerly: South Levenshulme Underground Gardeners)
VITA	- Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts Programme
WIN	- Wisdom in Nature
WELCOME	- Welsh Environmental Link Creating Opportunities for Muslim Engagement

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 – History of the Project

This project formally began on 1st October 2009 when Mark Bryant took up a part-time Research Assistant position for 8 months at Cardiff University. However, like most research projects, it had a pre-history, and this is reflected in the successful application that Botanic Garden's Conservation International (BGCI) submitted to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 2009.

In this bid, BGCI recorded their involvement in a project to assess the progress of a 'Qur'anic Botanic Garden Project' in Doha, Qatar, in 2008, that was being carried out under the auspices of UNESCO.

The aim of this project was to establish a network of botanic gardens in the Arab region influenced by scientific and aesthetic concepts from the Islamic garden cultures and from the Holy Qur'an. The gardens would strive to combine cultural elements with ex situ conservation of the native flora of the Arabian Peninsula and the plants referenced in the Holy Qur'an. Garden design will reflect two major concepts of Islamic gardening philosophies, one based on desert environments including wadis, baadiyas, and raudhas, and one characterized by planned gardens, such as Persian concepts of sunken beds, chahar bagh, gulistan and bustan.

BGCI was invited by UNESCO to evaluate the project, in addition to an evaluation of two 'Qur'anic Botanic Garden Master Plans', one in Qatar and one in Sharjah (UAE). Following consultation with 54 regional and international stakeholders, the outcome was an awareness of the potential of the 'Qur'anic Garden' for linking traditional Islamic respect for natural habitats, the cultures inspired by the Holy Qur'an, and the conservation of plant diversity. The evaluation also confirmed the significance that a Qur'anic Garden might have in education, communication and public awareness.

Based on these insights and experiences, BGCI became interested in how the concept of a 'Qur'anic Garden' could be adapted and developed outside the Arabian Peninsula, in particular within the UK. Informal consultation with a diverse range of organisations and individuals during December 2008 confirmed considerable interest and enthusiasm for

exploring these ideas further, especially in a context where much research funding (and media coverage) involving British Muslims is orientated around policies directed towards Prevention of Violent Extremism and counter-terrorism. Furthermore, BGCI's initial conversations highlighted the lack of academic research about the extent to which British Muslims were engaged in projects concerned with environmental awareness and plant conservation.

In their bid to Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, BGCI outlined the potential for a research project, especially where this might contribute to the evidence-base of research with British Muslims, from a positive standpoint. Furthermore, it was envisaged that the outcomes of the research, which might lead to the establishment of 'Qur'anic Gardens' in the UK (either within or outside botanic garden settings), could provide potential social benefits, such as:

- training opportunities, for example in horticulture and flower arranging.
- encouraging social integration of Muslim women into society.
- increasing involvement by Muslims in local environmental issues.
- enhancing respect by the local community for Islamic heritage and plants.
- encouraging interfaith dialogue.

Having secured funding from Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to explore these ideas and possibilities in more depth, BGCI approached the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University. The outcome of several initial discussions led to a small-scale commissioned study to establish: "the need, value, and viability of establishing 'Qur'anic Gardens' in the UK". We were aiming to evaluate the extent to which the concept of a 'Qur'anic Garden' might resonate in a UK context, and especially with British Muslims. In order to address these issues, we used a mixed-method approach with a view to gathering a range of different kinds of data from a diverse audience. These methods are outlined in more depth below.

However, a strategic decision was made in the early weeks of the project to promote the study as primarily about 'Islamic Gardens in the UK', rather than 'Qur'anic Gardens'. This was for a number of linguistic, conceptual, and practical reasons that are important to document in detail.

Firstly, when we first began to talk about the project to our colleagues, very few understood what a 'Qur'anic' Garden was (or might be). There didn't seem to be a broad consensual awareness of what might be involved in such a concept. This perplexity gave us cause for concern, in terms of how effectively we might engage external audiences and

participants in our research whilst using unfamiliar terminology and concepts. Secondly, we were mindful of the precedent set by Emma Clark in her book *'The Art of the Islamic Garden'* (Clark, 2004). Emma has an international reputation for her work, and her volume was positively reviewed in the British Muslim press when it was first published. On that basis, we felt it would be preferable for our project to be linked to the more familiar concepts and terms associated with 'Islamic Gardens'. Additionally, an early literature search revealed the absence of an established body of writing on the theme of 'Qur'anic Gardens', whereas we found an abundant literature about the idea of Islamic gardens and Islamic conservation. Thirdly, there were linguistic difficulties with the term 'Qur'anic'. There isn't an Arabic word that equates to 'Qur'anic', because 'Qur'anic' is a transliteration of the Arabic word 'Qur'an' with an English ending 'ic', so from a linguistic point of view, the term is problematic.

However, our most substantial concern was that the concept of a 'Qur'anic Garden' could be rather restrictive, especially if narrowly interpreted. At the International Seminar held at the Alhambra Palace in Spain in 2009, a professor of ecology from Cairo University, Prof. K.H. Batanouny made a presentation on Islamic and Qur'anic Gardens. According to Prof. Batanouny

The Qura'nic Botanical Garden means a garden that gathers all the plants mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and those mentioned in the Hadith of the Prophet or his Sunnah (Batanouny, 2009).

Plans for a Qur'anic Botanic garden have been developed in Qatar in the Middle East, and the concept of a 'Qur'anic Garden' was exhibited at Kew Gardens in London in 2010. But aside from these developments, the idea remains novel. In our initial discussions with key experts, concerns were expressed regarding the botanic suitability, ecological sustainability, and theological underpinnings of Qur'anic Gardens (on the lines being proposed by Prof. Batanouny), within a British context. For example, both Emma Clark and Prof. Charles Stirton (former scientific director at Kew Gardens) indicated that focusing exclusively on plants from the Qur'an and Hadith represented a restrictive view, indicative of a particular, literalist interpretation of Islam that does not necessarily reflect the diverse views of Muslims in Britain today. As Fazlun Khalid director of IFEES noted:

I think it is wrong to make the assumption that for an Islamic garden to be viable only plants mentioned in the Qur'an should be used. The Qur'an says this: "the herbs and the trees bow in adoration (to the creator)". It doesn't say which herbs or which trees.

While the Qur'an makes reference to a variety of *specific* plants, this quotation indicates the principle that all of nature is in some sense 'in submission' to the creator. Although the ecological sustainability of 'Qur'anic Gardens' in the Middle East still needs considered thought, at least the majority of Muslims in places such as Sharjah and Qatar, are following broadly the same Islamic religious school of thought. In contrast, Britain's Muslims are a minority group who represent a variety of different Islamic traditions and viewpoints, making it probably one of the most diverse Muslim populations in the world (Baksh et al., 2008). Establishing a consensual view about the religious principles that might underpin a 'Qur'anic Garden' in a UK context (and indeed, how these might be expressed in practice) would probably be complex, if not impossible. Furthermore, in a Middle Eastern context, by forming a collection made up exclusively of plants mentioned in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, one is essentially representing the biodiversity of *that* region. However, in the British context, focusing too narrowly on plants from the Middle East will not necessarily give British Muslims the opportunity to appreciate the biodiversity of their own locality. In addition, a focus on the Middle East is counter intuitive to contemporary ideas about community cohesion, since this would reinforce the assumption that Islam is about 'elsewhere', rather than an integral part of British life and history.

Having discussed these initial issues with BGCI, the project proceeded to investigate how, and to what extent, 'Islamic Gardens' in the UK might contribute to greater British Muslim involvement in biodiversity conservation and sustainability projects (especially in relation to plants), and increased public understanding of Islam and inter-religious dialogue.

In order to explore these ideas, our research questions were initially shaped by a process of mapping and reviewing as far as possible, the available literature on Islamic gardens, and Islamic views of environmental responsibility and conservation. The outcomes of the mapping process are reflected in the bibliography, whilst the major themes arising from this review of the literature are discussed below.

1.2 – Literature Review

- *Islamic Environmentalism*

A body of literature covering Islamic approaches to environmental issues has emerged in recent years as the environmental crisis has deepened. Muslims are looking to Islamic sources for possible answers. Just as there is a growing interest in ethical 'Islamic' banking based on religious texts, so too there is an interest in ethical environmentalism rooted in the traditions of Islam (Mohamed, 2007; Zaher and Kabir, 2001). A number of authors have explored the Qur'anic basis for an Islamic environmental ethic (Al-Hafiz, 1992; Ammar, 2001; Izzi Dien, 1985; Izzi Dien, 2000; Mohamed, 2007; Özdemir, 2003; Wersel, 1995)

Muslims derive guidance on all ethical questions - including their environmental responsibilities - from their ultimate source of religious guidance, the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an and Sunnah (examples and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) provide a basis for understanding ecological issues, the role of science, the correct way to interact with the environment, and the responsible use of the earth's resources. In the sections that follow, appropriate excerpts from the Qur'an will amplify the important guiding principles that underpin Islamic environmentalism.

The Qur'an directly addresses and anticipates the tendency that humans have for environmental irresponsibility, as well as highlighting the imperative to take care of the earth's resources.

Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back (Surah 30:41).

The central tenets of Islam, namely *tawhid* (God's oneness) and *khilafah* (trusteeship) are at the heart of the Islamic environmental ethic (Hope and Young, 1994). *Tawhid* expresses the unity of reality where there is only God and his creation (Ammar, 2001), while Özdemir goes on to suggest that as nature is created by God it is an indication and sign of His existence (Özdemir, 2003). This is in line with the guiding principles of deep ecology in which humans are seen as part of creation, but not superior to it. However, in contrast to deep ecology, Muslims do not see nature as divine. The Muslim philosopher, Seyyed Hossain Nasr, makes it clear that Muslims do not worship nature, but rather respect it as part of God's creation (Nasr, 2003). In this sense, it is sacred. In fact, he argues that nature is a sign or revelation of the greatness of God.

The cosmos itself is in fact God's first revelation, and upon the leaves of trees, the faces of mountains, and features of animals, as well as in the sounds of the winds and the gently flowing brooks, are all to be found signs of God (Nasr, 2003: 95).

As well as respecting nature as part of creation, Muslims have also been entrusted with the task of acting as *khalifa*, or vice-regents on earth. As the Qur'an states...

Thus We have made you to succeed one another as stewards on the earth, that We might behold how you acquit yourselves (Surah 10:14).

In traditional Islamic thought, it was initially claimed that the earth was created for the exclusive use of humankind (Wersel, 1995). However this position has changed in recent years and the emphasis has shifted towards a view of humanity as having particular talents in the role of 'nature's caretaker', but that humans have no superiority over nature. In Islam, all of creation equally worships the creator.

Don't you see that to Allah bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals, and a great number among mankind? (Surah 22:18).

Related to the concept of *tawhid* is the notion of balance. The balance of nature reflects the balance between God and His creation. The following Qur'anic verse illustrates how it is the responsibility of the *khalifa* to keep nature in balance

The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses; the plants and the trees submit to His designs; He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance: weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance (Surah 55: 5-9).

The role of God's vice-regents involves "managing the environment and conserving its resources to the benefit of all inhabitants of this planet" (Khalid and Thani, 2008: 41), whilst for Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq (Siddiq, 2003) the role of *khalifa* is a religious duty, and as can be seen from the Qur'anic verses above. Muslims will be held accountable for the degree to which they have fulfilled their duties on earth. For Muslims, responsible environmental behaviour is nothing less than a devotional act.

There is now a developing discourse emerging which suggests that the Islamic environmental ethic is becoming a viable alternative to current and predominant Western scientific responses to the environmental crisis. Seyyed Hossain Nasr argues that the European Renaissance and the associated scientific revolution brought about a shift in the way that nature was understood (Nasr, 1996). Where the natural world had once been appreciated as part of a religious worldview, it was increasingly being understood in more

secular and entirely scientific ways. This process ultimately alienated humankind from the divine in nature (Özdemir, 2003). In contrast, Islamic approaches see nature as providing seemingly endless signs of God (Mohamed, 2007). Thus the role of Islamic science is to explore creation in order to better understand the greatness of its Creator (Negus, 1992). According to Islamic sources, God can only be experienced through His creation. The Qur'an repeatedly directs Muslims to look to the signs found in nature in order to understand God.

He causes to grow for you thereby herbage, and the olives, and the palm trees, and the grapes, and of all the fruits; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect (Surah 16:11).

The modern world largely resorts to scientific and technological solutions for the current environmental crisis. But Muslim environmentalists, such as Mawil Izzi Dien, argue that science separated from God, and humankind detached from nature, represents the core of the problem. As a consequence, Western science alone cannot offer lasting solutions. To scholars such as Izzi Dien, it is the prevalence and dominance of Western science in the modern world that has made the environmental crisis a global phenomenon. Meanwhile, Nasr points to the pervasive nature of modern Western culture to explain the current failure of many Muslims to embrace the environmental ethic rooted in their religion (Nasr, 2003). For him, the solution requires a rejection of the modern Western-based scientific paradigm, and a return to an awareness of the sacred dimensions of nature. For Nasr, rediscovery of 'sacred science' applies as much to other religions as to Islam. Özdemir notes that "the global character of environmental problems, has encouraged members of diverse world religions to cooperate with each other, to see the problem in the real context (Özdemir, 2003: 4).

Though modern reliance on technology is seen by many to be at the heart of the environmental crises, ironically, many Muslims are learning about, debating, and promoting Islamic environmental ethics using modern electronic media. As we will see later in this report, Muslim environmental groups pro-actively articulate their message through websites, forums, blogging sites and social networking sites. So for example, an article about a so-called 'Green Sheikh' in Syria who is committed to the importance of the connection between Islam and the environment (Akkad, 2009) can be accessed throughout the world. Many of the websites dedicated to Islamic environmentalism include links to scholarly articles and other relevant published material on the topic. As people engage with emerging forms of information technology, new avenues for the transmission of ideas become available. For example, video-sharing sights such as YouTube are providing a platform for scholars to disseminate knowledge. Fig. 1 shows a

video on YouTube about Islamic environmental initiatives currently being implemented in the USA.

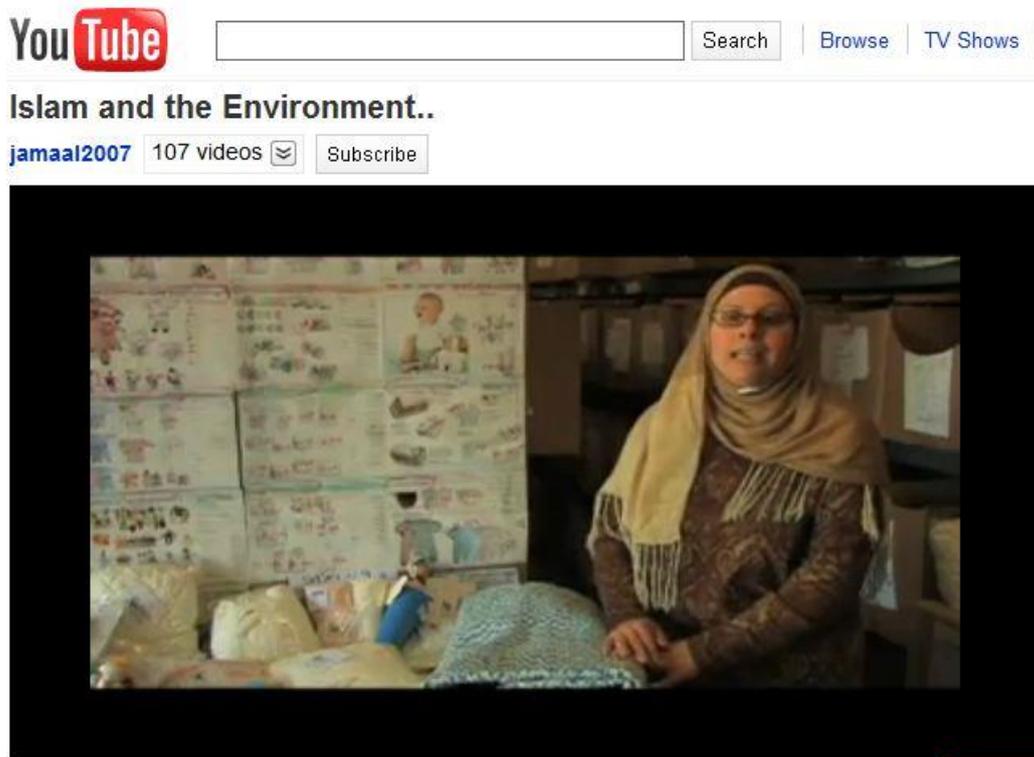


Fig. 1 YouTube clip – Islam and the environment.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoAOIX60Ot8&feature=related>

There is evidence of increasing attention on environmental issues within Muslim media, including publications produced in the UK. For example *Islamica* magazine, a now discontinued quarterly international publication, carried a six-page article on the IFEEES project in Zanzibar (Wolinsky, 2009).

The British Muslim lifestyle magazine, *emel*, brought out a special issue themed around 'Eco-Jihad' in June 2009, and this included articles by prominent Islamic scholars as well as profiles of individuals working on projects at the cutting edge of Islamic environmentalism. Subsequently, *emel* has had a series of articles about international Islamic gardens, profiles of British Muslims living and working in the countryside, and it has recently 'reviewed' the Qur'anic Garden exhibition at Kew Gardens (June 2010 issue). Following a brief introduction to the project, this is what the reviewer had to say about the Kew project:

The exhibition was a pale comparison to its green surroundings as the interior was not a lush garden or filled with musky fragrant plants, but rather an open, white

sterile environment. With no flourishing garden insight [sic]; the exhibition had glass casements containing dry plants mounted on stands with short quotes from the Qur'an and Hadith. These short quotes did not necessarily convey the beneficial purpose of the plants. Despite all this, Qatar Foundation should nonetheless be commended in taking the first step in forming a botanical garden which references plants mentioned in the Qur'an as well as initiating the first international forum on the Qur'anic Garden (Miah, 2010).

The mainstream media have also been engaged in raising awareness about Islam and Muslims, but unfortunately with little reference to the contribution that Muslims might make to environmental issues. For example, the *New Statesman* (February, 2010) brought out a special issue entitled 'Everything you know about Islam is wrong' which included over ten articles by leading Muslim thinkers. The articles revolved around familiar themes concerned with countering negative representations of Islam. Sadly, the editors felt that the positive message of an Islamic environmental ethic did not warrant inclusion.

Finally, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences in Birmingham publishes an Islamic online environmental magazine *Eco Islam* dealing with all aspects of Islamic environmentalism with contributions from leading figures in the movement. When conducting research for this project, numerous links were found to this publication on wide variety of environmental websites, blogs, and newsgroups ranging from British Muslim groups to international interfaith sites.

- *Islamic Gardening literature*

Literature regarding the development of Islamic gardens is highly inter-disciplinary, and reflects the work of historians, archaeologists, garden designers, architectural historians and religious scholars. Meanwhile, the overall significance of gardens and horticulture in Islam is most evident in the body of literature that now exists on these topics. There are by now definitive works on the plants mentioned in the Qur'an (Farooqi, 2003), and the medicinal, aromatic and food plants mentioned in the traditions of the Prophet (Farooqi, 1998). Meanwhile, James Wescoat has identified 166 references to gardens in the Qur'an (Wescoat, 2003), which can be categorised in three ways. Firstly there are the *gardens of this world*, generally used to illustrate God's bounty on earth. In these descriptions the gardens referred to generally resemble the oasis gardens still found in the Middle East today. These gardens consist of palm groves where vegetables are grown between the palms. As modern shade houses are used in horticulture today, the canopy of palm fronds serve to diffuse the desert sunlight and aids in retaining moisture (Fig. 2)

Second and third are the *gardens of creation* or 'Eden' and the *gardens of the hereafter* or 'Paradise', although as Millard points out these two are essentially synonymous in Islam (Millard, 1984). In addition the Arabic word '*jannah*' means both garden and paradise (Clark, 2004). Brookes points to the obvious appeal of the Qur'anic descriptions of paradise as an enclosed haven of cool shade, lush vegetation, and running water to the first Muslims living in the arid Arabian Desert (Brookes, 1987).



Fig. 2 Oasis Gardens, Bahrain

As the Islamic world expanded it reached into areas such as Persia and North India, where a tradition of formal garden architecture already existed. Utilising this existing know-how, gardens emerged that were designed to be reflections of heaven on earth filled with the symbols of paradise as described in the Qur'an (Brookes, 1987; Clark, 2004; Lehrman, 1980). It is interesting to note the similarity between the typical form of the four quartered *chahar bagh* garden divided by water channels symbolising the four rivers of heaven and the biblical description of heaven

The Garden of Eden is described in Genesis 2.8-10 as being "planted" by God, who thereby created "a paradise of pleasure from the beginning"; he then

"brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of." In the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and there was a "river" which "went out of the place of pleasure [loco voluptas] to water paradise"—a river diverted into four streams (Rhodes and Davidson, 1994: 71).

Both Islamic and Christian representations of paradise refer to a garden surrounded by a wall and in fact the word paradise comes to us from the Persian *pairidaezas* which literally means 'walled area' (Clark, 2004).

The influence of these Islamic "Paradise" gardens reached Europe when the Muslim empire moved into Spain (Dickie, 1968). Authors have argued that beyond aesthetics and religious symbolism many Islamic gardens have had a wider botanic and horticultural significance. Expiración Sánchez describes how utility plants, vegetables and medicinal plants were cultivated as part of medieval Islamic gardens (Sánchez, 2008). Andrew Watson goes as far as to argue that botanic gardens may not have been a European invention, as was previously thought.

Evidence is now appearing from many different regions which suggests very strongly that early Muslims made gardens that were the sites of serious scientific activity and may thus be considered true botanical gardens. Some might even be called experimental farms (Watson, 1995: 105).

Early Muslims appear to have been great collectors, snapping up all the good things that the world had to offer and displaying them in sometimes remarkable collections; and nowhere are these collecting instincts more in evidence than in certain great gardens where plants of all kinds — local and exotic — were collected and studied. Sometimes we learn that there were associated with these gardens botanists who herborized in the surrounding areas, assembling large collections of indigenous plants (ibid., p107)

Gardening practices of the Islamic civilisation have made an impact on horticulture over history. With its roots in the deserts of Arabia, Islam has a tradition of effective water management (Bino et al., 2001). The control of water has historically been a source of power and influence. Wescoat points out the potential benefit this Islamic example may have in further water management, as this increasingly becomes a global issue.

Beyond the influence of Muslim Spain, Britain has had a long association with Islamic civilisation not least through centuries of colonisation of the Indian subcontinent. This

has resulted in a variety of Islamic material culture coming to Britain and influencing architectural traditions (Petersen, 2008). This was recognised by Sir Christopher Wren (1750).

What we now vulgarly call the Gothic, ought properly and truly be named Sacacenick Architecture refined by Christians (Wren, 1750: 306).

When Sezincote House (see below), the model for the royal pavilion in Brighton was built in 1809, it was part of a movement that venerated the oriental aesthetic.

By the 19th century, the infatuation with Islamic culture had become a glamorous fashion: it was extensively exhibited in World Fairs, chosen as the “official” architectural style of thermal resorts, and eagerly showed off first by the bourgeoisie and then by the masses (Petruccioli, 1998: 349).

Edward Malins has written a detailed paper on Indian influences on English houses and gardens at the end of the nineteenth century (Malins, 1980). Some examples of this movement are no longer extant such as The “Alhambra” and “Mosque” built by William Chambers in Kew, and the “Alhambra Court” at Crystal Palace. However many further examples still exist such as: the ‘Arab’ hall in Leighton House, the ‘Arab’ room in Cardiff Castle (designed by William Burges), the Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking, and Muslim Burial Grounds, Woking (Salamat, 2008).

We can see then that Islamic built spaces, such as gardens, form part of an enduring and shared Islamic and British heritage ¹, and this is now reflected in a project to record ‘Islam in Britain Stone’ (<http://www.islaminbritishstone.co.uk/>). The Asian Youth Alliance, with funding from the National Lottery, are recording and promoting British Muslim heritage sites and buildings influenced by Islamic design.

Additionally, Britain is also home to a leading international author about, and designer of, Islamic gardens. In her book *The Art of the Islamic Garden*, Emma Clark illustrates how Islamic gardens were historically developed combining art, symbolism and spirituality. Using her involvement in the design of the ‘Carpet Garden’ at Highgrove House as a case study, Clark situates this heritage within a contemporary British context by offering guidance on how to build such gardens in the UK.

¹ Similarly, there is a current interest in the contribution of Islamic thought to scientific and technological discoveries (Al-Hassani et al., 2006), and this is reflected in a book and exhibition currently on display in the Science Museum, London. The exhibition web site covers all aspects of Muslim heritage, including Islamic Gardens (www.muslimheritage.com, accessed 25/5/2010).

No in-depth research has yet been conducted into how British Muslims view their built heritage, but were this to be undertaken, it would no doubt illustrate widely divergent views which reflect differing Islamic ‘schools of thought’. An illustration of the spectrum of Muslim views can be seen in the contrasting reactions to Islamic cultural heritage between followers of a literalist form of Islam in Saudi Arabia and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Saudi Arabia has seen the destruction of important sites associated with the rise of Islam (such as the house in which the Prophet was born), as part of an effort to stop such places becoming sites of worship (Aslan, 2006). On the other hand, the Aga Khan Development Network (Trust for Culture), headed by the spiritual leader of the Ismail tradition of Islam, has been involved in the restoration and preservation of Islamic historical sites around the world, including the gardens of Emperor Humayun's Tomb in Delhi (Kassam, 2003).

1.3 – Methodology and methods

This project sought to gain views and ideas about the ‘need, value and viability of Islamic gardens’ from a wide range of Muslim and non-Muslim perspectives, based on mixed-methods (largely qualitative) research. Within the scope of a small-scale project, mixed-methods can sometimes be a time-consuming disadvantage in terms of gathering information of depth and reliability, but in a context where we wanted to gather some basic facts and hear views and attitudes from a range of diverse audiences (via focus groups and an online survey), as well as evaluate existing British Muslim gardening and Islamic garden projects (via case-studies and interviews), the mixed-methods approach was the only means of gaining answers to our key research questions.

We wanted to benefit from the contributions and input of:

- established experts in Islamic garden design and Islamic environmentalism (our two ‘consultants’)
- members of regional British Muslim environmental organisations who were likely to be able to offer insights and advice derived from the experience of ‘grassroots’ local activism
- those associated with existing (and proposed) Islamic gardening and park-based garden projects: what could they tell us about their experiences and/or visitor feedback?
- members of conservation/horticultural organisations, and directors of botanic gardens (most likely to be non-Muslims) concerned with plants, botanic gardens, and the environment: how might they respond to the idea of ‘Islamic gardens?’.

Having completed our initial literature review, we developed a semi-structured interview schedule to form the basis for discussions with our two consultants in the early stages of the project (interviews held on 14th and 17th January). We used the data deriving from their interviews to help in the design of a short online survey on the themes of our research. This was distributed via email links in March 2010 to 16 British Muslim organisations, and 6 plant/park networks, alongside a survey on the BGCI website. Appendix 1 lists the recipients and respondents to the survey.

The Bristol Online Survey (BOS) service provides a platform from which to develop, launch and analyse web-based surveys. The service was chosen for its ease of use, user-friendly interface and flexibility in survey design and data analysis. BOS has a track-record for providing secure, stable online surveys and has been used successfully in many British universities. We encouraged those managing Muslim environmental and horticultural e-lists and networks to distribute the survey link as widely as possible, meaning that we cannot know how many *potential* respondents there were - which would have enabled an accurate assessment of the overall response rate. However, we successfully achieved 157 responses, with the large majority of Muslim respondents (of which there were 99) arising from the relationship we established with Fazlun Khalid at IFEES (71 respondents via this link).

The software underpinning BOS collates data to enable the display of results via graphs and percentages, making it an efficient and accurate means of gathering quantitative information for the purposes of analysis. But for our project, some of the most useful data came from the open response comments and 'feedback' on the themes of our research. In this way, we gathered some 5,000 words of extremely rich material, discussed in more depth in section 3.

In addition to the interviews with consultants and the online survey, we set out to conduct recorded focus group discussions with two British Muslim environmental organisations based in cities with botanic gardens as well as large local Muslim populations (namely Birmingham and Sheffield). To supplement these focus groups, we were also intending to hold focus group discussions with other Muslim organisations in these cities (e.g. youth and/or women's groups), with additional interviews with parks and gardens staff in the local authority and botanic gardens. In other words, we were going to conduct intensive fieldwork in two cities, carefully chosen because of the size of the local Muslim population, the presence of a botanic garden, and the existence of a Muslim environmental group.

However, having made initial contact with the relevant Islamic environmental groups, it became clear that neither the Sheffield group nor the Birmingham group were meeting regularly. As the research progressed, it was increasingly evident that other British

Muslim environmental groups were equally sporadic in their activities and membership, and focus groups became a less viable means for data collection. The sheer amount of frustration voiced by some of our contacts around the UK in their efforts to facilitate our project was itself indicative of the issues and barriers that prevent Muslim engagement in conservation and plant-related projects overall. This was data in itself. However, our own local group in Wales went to considerable efforts to gather a few people together and thus one focus group went ahead on 4th April. It was not ideal in terms of the number of participants (4), and the presence of young children made clear recording difficult. However, since two experienced Muslim environmentalists were participants in this discussion, useful data was forthcoming and we have presented this in our overview of the work of WELCOME in section 2.

When it became evident that trying to organise focus group discussions was time-consuming and unproductive, we made a strategic decision to concentrate our research efforts on data-gathering via key informants working on existing Muslim gardening projects, or working in parks with ‘typical’ traditional Islamic gardens. In many cases, the relative isolation of these informants meant they were keen to share their expertise and experiences with us, and so via telephone discussions, email contact, and in some cases via a fieldwork visit, we were able to gather information from a much wider range of ‘case-studies’ than we had originally envisaged. To that end, we surveyed:

- six traditional ‘Islamic’ gardens, or parks containing gardens associated with Muslim cultures, in most cases designed by *non-Muslims*, but rarely with regard for environmental sustainability or plant conservation
- three British Muslim gardening projects (including a cemetery) and one ‘Islamic garden’, in all cases designed by *British Muslims*, and often concerned with aspects of biodiversity conservation and environmental awareness
- four traditional ‘Islamic’ garden projects under consideration/not yet in existence (two of which are associated with future mosque/Islamic centre developments), and in all cases initiated by *British Muslims*, but not necessarily with regard for conservation principles
- two temporary Islamic/Qur’anic garden exhibitions, one designed by a British Muslim, the other not, but neither having particular regard for plant conservation or environmental awareness.

Our descriptions and evaluation of these various ‘case-studies’ forms an important core of this report. However, this evidence is supplemented by consideration of important data which is indicative of the extent to which British Muslims are engaged in other kinds of projects relating to green spaces and plants (such as woodlands), and environmental issues more generally (e.g. ‘green’ mosques). The extent to which these projects have, or have

not, been successful, provides yet another yardstick for considering the 'need, value and viability' of Islamic gardens in the UK.

Finally, telephone interviews were conducted with three directors of botanic gardens based in either Sheffield or Birmingham. The selection of these interviewees was guided by recommendations by BGCI, and our initial hope to capture the views of those managing botanic gardens in cities with large Muslim populations. Interviews typically lasted 20-25 minutes and detailed notes were made during the course of each conversation. In one case, a follow-up telephone interview was conducted.

A note about the project was placed on a British Muslim blogging site <http://islaminbritain.blogspot.com/2010/03/islamic-gardens-in-uk.html> in March 2010. As at 21/5/2010, there had been no responses, but a longer-term project could have tried to actively simulate more traffic and discussion as a means of data collection, most probably from British Muslims.

In terms of data analysis, we have tried to identify recurring patterns and themes in our data, especially in terms of the criteria or circumstances that have shaped either the success (or the difficulties) of Islamic gardening or plant conservation projects (real or proposed). In this way, we can begin to evaluate the 'need, value, and viability of Islamic gardens' in the UK, particularly where these might promote the aims of BGCI in terms of plant conservation, environmental sustainability, and widening access.

SECTION TWO – CONTEXT

BRITISH MUSLIMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

2.1. – British Muslims in the 2001 Census

In order to establish the ‘need, value and viability’ of Islamic gardens in the UK - for the purposes of increasing inter-religious dialogue, and encouraging more British Muslims to engage in conservation projects (especially related to plants) – it is essential to understand the migration history and contemporary socio-economic situation of British Muslim communities. Their engagement in such projects will inevitably be affected by factors such as income and educational attainment, language use, employment and residential patterns, gender, religious understanding, and so on. A thorough examination of Census and other statistical surveys provides an important starting point, but this needs to be set in the context of historic patterns of migration.

Muslims have been coming to Britain as students, traders, and migrant workers, for at least the last two hundred years (Ansari, 2004). Many of these Muslims were temporary residents in the UK, often unaccompanied single males, and many were employed as seafarers working on shipping routes associated with the British Empire (Lawless, 1995). However, the character of British Muslim settlement in Britain changed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, after the Second World War. A number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors drew increasing numbers of Muslims to Britain, especially from the Indian sub-continent (Ally, 1981; Werbner, 1990). They were later joined by their relatives (especially wives and children), and thus temporary male residence was replaced by more permanent family settlement. With this, came the development of religious and other community infrastructures, which in turn had an important effect on worldviews and future aspirations. Though transnational links and extended kinship networks ‘back home’ remained important (and still are), more energy was invested in a future life in Britain. A new generation of ‘British Muslims’ were being born and educated in Britain.

Most Muslims arriving to Britain during the post-war period were from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Most Bangladeshis were almost entirely from the rural Sylhet area, whilst Pakistanis were from a wider geographic area (such as Mirpur in Azad Kashmir, Campbellpur (the Chhachh) and to a lesser extent Jhelum, Lyallpur and Rawalpindi). Most were small-scale landowners in rural towns and villages, and they saw their migration to Britain (initially, on a temporary basis) as providing a means to substantially

increase their material and social prospects 'back home', and most intended to return at some point. A Select Committee on Race Relations report during the 1960s found that Pakistani Muslims in Britain were annually sending between £50 million and £60 million back to Pakistan annually (Dahya, 1973). Life at this time revolved around hard manual work in the textile mills and manufacturing industries of northern towns and cities, the West Midlands and London. The settlement patterns established during this time have been reinforced and perpetuated subsequently, so that now particular neighbourhoods and particular streets of some towns and cities in Britain are almost entirely inhabited by Muslims who share the same sub-continental origins, often being from the same village or kinship group.

Alongside Muslims of South Asian origin in Britain, there are also significant communities of Arabs (especially in London), Africans, Iranians, Turks, Malaysians, and Afro-Caribbean and white converts (about 22,000), and others. Within this ethnic diversity, there are also wide variations in terms of religious 'schools of thought'. Not all British Muslims will actively identify with one of these 'schools', but previous research has shown that a high proportion of those who identify as 'Muslim' regard their religion as 'important' or 'very important' to them (Modood et al., 1997: 301). For older generations, one recent study attributed this to the rather passive need to 'belong', rather than active engagement with Islam itself.

For many Muslims of the older generation, the observance of Islam was less about piety, and more to do with participation in communal life. Whether sincerely undertaken or not, the performance of rituals, the attendance at mosques and the undertaking of fasting during Ramadan were aspects of social life which established a semblance of community for the older generation of South Asian migrants, and the dense network of relationships that such activities helped to sustain would provide them the stability and support they needed in an unfamiliar environment...it seems that this collective observance is what motivated the older generations in their adherence to Islam rather than any particular sense of personal religiosity (Mondal, 2008: 48).

This contrasts with the findings of recent research about young British Muslims, some of whom now actively identify themselves as 'British Muslims' (rather than as Pakistanis, or Arabs), and who have developed a different relationship to their faith, compared to their parents and grandparents (Jacobson, 1998; Lewis, 2007). The nature of Muslim communities in Britain is thus changing with time, and is increasingly shaped by the cumulative experiences of those generations born and educated in the UK.

The inclusion of a question about religion in the 2001 census (for the first time since 1851) has enabled social scientists to gain a more detailed understanding of the contemporary demography, health, educational, and employment situation of religious communities in Britain. Clearly, nearly a decade has elapsed since the 2001 Census data was gathered, but it nevertheless continues to provide a useful socio-economic picture of British Muslim communities today. A detailed analysis of Census data as it relates to British Muslims was undertaken as part of doctoral research in 2003-6, and unless otherwise stated, many of the statistics reported below are taken from this subsequently published source (Hussain, 2008).

The 2001 Census recorded the British Muslim population at 1.6 million, and representing 3 per cent of the total UK population. However, new figures from the 2009 Labour Force Survey reflect the increase in the British Muslim population in the intervening period, and it is now estimated at 2.4 million, and constituting 4 per cent of the population (Kerbaj, 2009). The increase is generally attributed to the higher birth rate among British Muslims, rather than other factors (e.g. conversion, or new immigration). Compared to other faith groups, households headed by a Muslim are more likely to contain children; 63 per cent of Muslim households had at least 1 dependent child at the time of the 2001 Census, and 25 per cent had 3 or more dependent children. The Muslim population in Britain is therefore demographically 'young', and some 50 per cent of Muslims are under 25 years of age. In contrast, only about 5 per cent of Muslims in Britain are over the age of 60 (compared to the average – in England – of 20 per cent). Men outnumber women by a ratio of 52 per cent to 48 per cent, but among younger Muslims, there is a more equal proportion of male and female genders.

On the whole, Muslims tend to live in inner-city, run-down areas characterised by high levels of housing deprivation (Anwar and Bakhsh, 2003). Among the key issues are overcrowding and poor housing quality. Relatively few Muslims living in such inner-city areas are likely to have a garden, or easy access to natural open space and greenery. Their excursions away from the city are likely to involve visits to relatives in other large cities. Organisations such as the Forestry Commission England (FCE) are conscious that 'trips to the countryside' are not a popular leisure activity for many British Muslims, and the case study documented below provides a good example of efforts to make woodlands more accessible in the face of this evidence (Hand, 2007).

Only 52 per cent of British Muslims are homeowners and they are more likely to be living in social rented accommodation than any other faith group, according to Census findings. This is a reflection of both migration patterns and employment opportunities. Poor housing quality is directly related to reports of ill-health, and compared to all other

faith groups, Muslims suffer disproportionate levels of ill-health (especially respiratory and coronary diseases).

Many post-war South Asian Muslims came to Britain to work in textile mills and factories, and so the decline of these industries in the 1970s and 1980s had a significant impact on the economic prosperity of Muslim communities. This has been well-documented in a study of changing employment patterns in Oldham: *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks* (Kalra, 2000). Younger South Asians have had to find alternative means of income, particularly in the service sector (catering, market-trading, taxi-driving). These are of course occupations with relatively few prospects for career progression.

Compared to all other faith groups, Muslims in Britain are less economically active, and there is a particularly high rate of youth unemployment. Nearly 18 per cent of Muslims aged 18-24 were economically inactive at the time that data was collected for the 2001 Census. In 2001-2, Bangladeshi Muslim men had the highest rate of unemployment in Britain (at 20 per cent), which is some 4 times the rate for white men (Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market, *Cabinet Office*, 2003). To some extent, overall rates of economic inactivity can be attributed to the relatively low rate of female Muslim participation in the workforce...a direct reflection of the value that Islamic traditions accord to motherhood. However, rates of unemployment are also a reflection of educational attainment: in 2000, only 35 per cent of children from Pakistani backgrounds and only 37 per cent of children from Bangladeshi backgrounds achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C, compared with 47 per cent of students overall (Osler and Hussain, 2005).

The general picture that emerges from Census data is that British Muslims suffer from a range of cumulatively disadvantaging socio-economic circumstances to a greater extent than all other faith groups in the UK (Beckford et al., 2006). This is especially the case in some towns and cities. Clearly, this is a generalisation that masks the economic prosperity and educational success of many others, but the grim reality of multiple deprivation suffered by many Muslims in some parts of the UK provides an important backdrop for contextualising the remainder of this report, and particularly the findings described in section three.

2.2. – British Muslims, environmental action and awareness

Over the last three decades, British Muslims have developed a wide range of community organisations and institutions, mainly to support their religious identity. Particular energy has been invested in the establishment of mosques, Islamic supplementary schools, retail outlets for the purchase of halal meat and ‘Islamic’ merchandise, and charities. In the overall landscape of British Muslim institution-building, projects concerned with Islamically-inspired conservation or environmental awareness are small-scale (DeHanas, 2010). This is indicative of the priority given to the issues, especially in relation to other community-development activities that currently (and understandably) still take precedence (such as developing Muslim schools).

There is no means of accurately knowing how many British Muslims are actively engaged with, or are members of, national organisations concerned with biodiversity conservation, environmental awareness, or indeed gardening and horticulture, such as Friends of the Earth, The Woodland Trust, or the Royal Horticultural Society. These organisations would not record the religious identity of their members. However, the fairly limited extent to which British Muslims have established organisations concerned with Islamically-inspired conservation is probably a reasonably good indication that they are under-represented in national conservation and plant-orientated bodies.

There are now five regional Islamic environmental groups (Reading, London, Sheffield, Wales, and Birmingham, West Midlands) and one national body (Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, IFEES) also based in Birmingham. These environmental groups are primarily organised by and for Muslims, and are inspired by the principles of conservation and environmental awareness embedded in Islamic sources. At the start of the project, we had envisaged the *regional* groups as important potential focus group participants for our study, but as we came to learn more about the nature of these groups, it became clear that they were not necessarily meeting regularly, and were often headed by enthusiastic individuals struggling with the apathy of less committed members who, whilst sympathetic in spirit, were less inclined towards direct action and regular involvement. Some groups meet only rarely, and are little more than electronic networks. Our relatively unsuccessful efforts to engage them in focus group discussions about the themes of our project have already been documented.

In addition to Muslim environmental action groups, during the course of the project we also became aware of a number of ‘green’ mosques engaged in pioneering efforts to engage their congregations in environmental action and awareness. One of these was

particularly effective in this effort, and was specifically working in relation to plants and trees. Below, we have profiled the various regional groups, and the work of some especially pro-active 'green' mosques, as a means of charting the current extent to which British Muslims are engaged in environmental action and conservation projects. We have also sought to document the involvement of a mosque congregation in Manchester, in a local community 'Peace Garden' project.

Finally, this section of the report explores how a well-established national organisation concerned with the environment, in this case woodlands, has sought to increase the accessibility of forestry sites to members of different faith communities in Britain. We evaluate the lessons that botanic gardens and other organisations concerned with plant conservation might learn from the case study of 'Faith Woodlands' (Forestry Commission England, 2007) undertaken in Luton in 2006-7. Although this was an inter-faith project, the Luton area has a substantial number of Muslims, and a 'Faiths Worker' employed by Luton Council of Faiths to promote the project, Yasmin Ahktar, was herself a Muslim.

It is worth noting as a preface to the following sections, that new global communication technologies have facilitated the involvement of British Muslims in regional, national, and international networks devoted to ecology and conservation. The internet, Islamic radio stations (most large British cities have one), and British-based Islamic satellite channels provide a vehicle for Muslim environmentalists to share the messages of conservation, and this has been occurring to some extent (Ball, 2008). To this end, the London-based 'Islam Channel' undertook a pilot project in 2007 enabling Muslim women to explore the environmental implications of Islamic teaching called 'How Green is your Deen?' (Ball, 2008). *Deen* means 'way of life' in Arabic, and Muslims will often talk about their faith as 'the *deen*' or '*din*'. We have not been able to ascertain the success of this project, as yet. Similarly, the 'Clean Medina' project in Birmingham (an IFEES project) has used powerful audio-visual means (alongside other efforts) to stimulate and encourage the Muslims of the city to improve the urban landscape, mainly through rubbish collection.



Fig. 3 'Clean Medina Campaign, IFEES'

(http://ifees.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=50)

Finally, a Muslim community radio station in East London made the theme of environmental responsibility the focus of its broadcasting during Ramadan in 2007, especially through a 'Woman's Hour' slot. A detailed research study was conducted on this project, and it found that 'sacralising' environmentalism through the invocation of Islamic traditions and Qur'anic verses was a powerful means of engaging local Muslims, and especially women (DeHanas, 2010). By promoting the idea that "positive environmental activities are deeply Islamic" (DeHanas, 2010: 148), the project was, amongst other things, successful in tackling the problem of litter in the Tower Hamlets area². The spirit of self-discipline that is cultivated through fasting practices made listeners especially responsive to the messages being conveyed. Furthermore, the radio programme encouraged women to take action collectively, and in a way that "matched with local Islamic social structures" (ibid.: 152). This meant gender-segregated projects, including a gardening project (see below), and promotion of events related to the well-being of their children. A conclusion of the study was

Muslim mothers are typically the predominant influence in the socialisation and values education of their next generation. Based on the high profile environmentalism in Women's Hour programming and the apparent enthusiastic response among listeners, there is room for a healthy optimism that an Islamic environmentalism can take root, if it is not already underway (DeHanas, 2010: 153).

The following section maps some of the formal efforts that British Muslims have made towards the organisation of environmental action and biodiversity conservation.

² Leaving rubbish in the streets reflected habits and practices typical in some Bangladeshi villages where there is no rubbish collection. The neglectful environmental behaviour of Bangladeshis in Britain was understood as a result of "lifestyles from an impoverished nation being transplanted to London" (DeHanas, 2010).

2.2.1. – British Muslim Environmental Groups

- *Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES)* , Birmingham
(www.ifees.org.uk)

IFEES is a well-established international organisation committed to the promotion of better understanding of environmental issues from an Islamic perspective. It publishes a newsletter (*Eco-Islam*), produces guidance and resources for Islamic organisations (including advice for developing ‘green’ mosques), and has undertaken many national and international campaigns. Some of these projects have involved plants, such as the campaign to promote biodiversity in Indonesia through tree-planting, a project that is still current.



Fig. 4 ‘Greening Indonesia’ – IFEES campaign

A number of sections of the IFEES web site are ‘under construction’ (especially about history and origins), and so the full history of this organisation is not recorded here. However, the founder of IFEES kindly took part in an interview for this project, and his perspectives on the specific issues in our research have contributed to the writing of this report.

What becomes evident through the IFEES web site, is the degree to which IFEES has been a catalyst for the development of many local British Muslim environmental groups, and other local initiatives. This places it at the forefront of conservation and environmental efforts in the UK, and indeed further afield. A number of key points emerged from the interview with Fazlun Khalid from IFEES, including:

- signs of change and hope for the future among British Muslims, mainly because schools are engaging with conservation and environmental issues as part of the curriculum. To the extent that young British Muslims are part of school communities, they will be increasingly conscious of the issues.
 - British Muslims are collectively no more or less environmentally aware than any other social group in society. However, because of the environmental imperative in Islam, there is more potential to ‘activate’ them.
 - The role of Islamic scholars is crucial, in this regard. IFEES has tried to encourage imams and others to become more aware of the *implications* of key verses from the Qur’an and Hadith. They may be knowledgeable about Islamic sources (any may know them from memory), but they lack sufficient awareness of environmental issues, climate change, biodiversity, to appreciate what they need *to do*, in order to fulfil their Islamic obligations and educate their communities. Educating the imams and religious community leaders is thus important, and IFEES is well-placed to undertake that role (as it has done, successfully, in Zanzibar, and through distributing Friday sermons for use in British mosques on the theme of environmentalism).
 - Obstacles for future developments are primarily financial. Where ‘Islamic banking’ has become well-funded and lucrative, for example, ‘Islamic environmentalism’ has been less so, “because there is no money at the end of it”.
 - When it comes to ‘Islamic gardens’ and plant conservation, Fazlun Khalid notes the inter-connections that need to be made between ecology and Islamic teaching. They should not be “static displays”, but should be sites for pro-active engagement and educational activity, underpinned by Islam.
 - There was positive support for the idea of developing Islamic gardens within botanic gardens, especially where this might encourage Muslim visitors. However, no detail was given as to how this might be done from a practical (and political) perspective, and no evidence was forthcoming which suggested that it could actually be successful.
- ‘*Wisdom in Nature*’ (WIN) (<http://www.wisdominnature.org.uk/>), formerly known as *London Islamic Network for the Environment* (LINE)

WIN was established in November 2009, having evolved out of 'LINE'. LINE was initiated at a meeting involving just three participants in January 2004, and it arose as a consequence of an Islamic environmental e-list called 'Ecobites'. The chair and founder of both groups, Muzammal Hussain (at that time working with IFEES), has documented the history of the group/s, and the reason for the more recent change in name. His article provides important insights about the extent to which British Muslims have been engaged in environmental awareness over the last two decades. He reflects that

In the 1990's, there were very few people who were actively promoting awareness of environmental ethics amongst Muslim communities in the UK. There was the occasional public talk at which after a bit of listening, the nodding of heads, questions and answers and momentary inspiration, the audience would return home and re-immense themselves into their normal routine. Of course, whilst seeds would have been sown, the dispersed and rare nature of enthusiastic environmentalists in Muslim communities meant that any progress would confine itself to a small sphere of possibilities.

This situation began to change in the 2000s as more British Muslims, perhaps influenced by the wider environmental/ecology movement began to reflect upon the contribution that Islamic sources and principles could make to local, national, and global campaigns. Following a meeting in Reading in 2003 on 'Islam and the Environment', where Muzammal Hussain gave a talk about GM foods, there was initial interest in the formation of a Reading-based Islamic environmental action group. However, as Hussain notes

...whilst the potential and enthusiasm seemed strong, the effort within the group was not sustained long enough for the group to properly form at that time. However, several years later, in 2009, the seeds that were sown began to bear fruit as RITE (Reading Islamic Trustees for the Environment) was initiated.

LINE appears to have been driven by the energy of a small group of individuals, committed to the principle of local group activism. Hussain regarded the imperative of local grassroots action as "lacking within IFEES" (Hussain, 2009) hence his decision to establish an independent, regionally-focused group. It is clear from the LINE/WIN website that the group was meeting regularly throughout the mid-2000s (one Sunday per month), and most of its work revolved around social events (picnics, with organic food to share), lobbying (e.g. at climate change events), and high-profile, media-friendly 'stunts' and demonstrations timed to coincide with wider national events, such as 'Islam

Awareness Week'³. LINE co-operated with IFEEES under the auspices of a 'London Sustainability Exchange' project in the mid-2000s, and this involved the distribution of low-energy light-bulbs and leaflets to mosques in the city (Ball, 2008). WIN events in 2010 appear to have been irregular so far, and the well-established monthly open forum meetings seem to have ceased, for the time being.

- *Reading Islamic Trustees for the Environment (RITE)*

RITE was launched in June 2009, to coincide with World Environment Day. It is "a community group whose vision... is to bring a wider appreciation of our environment (Allah's creation)". (http://www.rite.btik.com/p_Home.ikml). RITE endeavours to work with mosques and Muslim community organisations to raise awareness of environmental issues and to assist with the organisation of events that will promote its aims. Judging by the RITE website, the group is not meeting regularly, and has no forthcoming events on its calendar. However, it is promoting meetings and events being organised by other environmental organisations, and is encouraging members to attend. In the first issue of the RITE newsletter, published in the Autumn of 2009 (during Ramadan), it provided links to news reports about 'green' initiatives being undertaken at two UK mosques, both of which are profiled further below.

- *Sheffield Islamic Network for the Environment (SHiNE)*
(<http://groups.google.com/group/shineysheffield/web/shine-projects?hl=en>)

SHiNE resembles RITE in directing its energies towards local, grassroots environmental projects. It operates through a 'google group', and as of April 2010, there seemed to be relatively little activity by its 48 members, and virtually no information about its history or organisation. According to Muzammal Hussain, who has been instrumental in the formation of a number of Islamic environmental groups, SHiNE most probably came into existence sometime in 2005.

Sometimes small initiatives can have a disproportionate impact, and this is most clearly evident through the outcomes of SHiNE's involvement in a national 'Big Clean' campaign in April 2009, that involved collecting litter from the streets around one of the local mosques (Masjid Umar). In the words of the organiser, these were the highlights of their efforts:

³ This included wearing goggles, flippers and snorkels on Brick Lane in East London, to raise awareness about climate change and rising sea-levels in Bangladesh (Vidal, 2005).

- *Guy coming up to Jamal out of the blue on the street who was white/English looking to shake his hand saying "I really appreciate what you're doing".*
- *The couple who gave us cake and tea and then had a picnic and invited us over with them!*
- *Volunteers from the street who came out and helped us. This was the biggest surprise and really made our day!*
- *All the smiles/nods of approval we got from residents from their windows - who hadn't braved out but were clearly intrigued with what we were doing).*
- *Particularly nice to see Sister Khadijah in her wheelchair helping. Sorry I had to mention this but it was a personal thing for me...*
- *Nabeel bringing his family along, what an excellent example to set the kids.*



Fig.5 SHiNE's 'Big Clean' event, April 2009

What is striking about this particular practical project is the degree to which it reflects a sense of belonging to, and investment in, local spaces by a particular group of British Muslims. Whereas many post-Second World War Muslim migrants to Britain had relatively little engagement in local community life (beyond their own networks), efforts such as this by ShiNE reflect changing worldviews, and a commitment to improving the appearance of inner city environments. It is also a good example of British Muslims visibly and publicly contributing to the betterment of the local community in a way that

is beneficial for all. It is clear that this project had considerable local public relations benefits.

- *Midlands Islamic Network for the Environment (MINE)*.
<http://muslimbirmingham.wordpress.com/mine-and-homeplanet-show/mine-faith-environment-whats-up-in-brum-and-elsewhere/>

There were efforts to establish an Islamic environmental group in Birmingham on a number of occasions in the mid-2000s, but these lacked a critical mass of members with sufficient commitment to enable stable continuity. However, when Fazlun Khalid, director of IFEES, returned to Birmingham in 2005 after a period of time abroad, there was renewed interest in the idea of forming a Midlands group. This is when MINE was initiated, with Rianne ten Veen as the primary point of contact.

Rianne ten Veen, a Dutch convert to Islam, was inspired to become a Muslim on account of the environmental messages enshrined within the Qur'an and Hadith. She asserts that environmental sustainability

...is as much about caring for people as it is about the planet. The fact that many Muslims currently are not aware of the powerful environmental message of our beautiful faith only motivates me more to do my bit to change this, as we can do this, together, if we want to. (Mohamed, 2010)

Her work in establishing a blog, 'Green Creation' has led to her being profiled on the international website (IslamOnline.net) and in a range of other media, including the Muslim lifestyle magazine, *emel* (June 2009, special issue on the theme, 'Eco-Jihad'), as well as *Sisters* (a magazine for Muslim women, reflecting a largely *Salafi* worldview).

MINE appears to have been especially pro-active via its contribution to local inter-religious environmental initiatives, of which the following is a good example.

On Bank Holiday Monday, May 26th 2008 people of faith and residents of Birmingham came to the Botanical Gardens for 'Believing in our Environment' organised by Birmingham Friends of the Earth as part of the Faith Leaders initiative "Faiths for the City". Family Fun was the highlight of the day – with craft activities using recycled materials, origami with re-used paper, face painting and henna tattoos. We all had a chance to talk about environmental concerns and participants left their messages on our tree of hopes. Rianne ten Veen (Midlands Islamic Network for the Environment) and David Wetton (Birmingham Jubilee

Debt Campaign) gave a presentation on the Islamic and Christian perspective of *Debt and Climate Change*. (http://www.faithsforthecity.org.uk/more_events.html)

The report about this event on the 'Faiths for the City' website does not give any indication of visitor numbers or their religious backgrounds, so it is difficult to ascertain how many local Muslims went to the Botanic Gardens and Glasshouses on the day. There is also no indication of how the event was promoted among local Muslims, but had there been publicity about the day via local mosque networks, this could have been an especially successful way of bringing Muslims into the Botanic Gardens, perhaps for the first time. Most crucially, the event included family-friendly activities that would have no doubt appealed to Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds (for example, henna is widely used among South Asians, especially on the occasion of marriages).

It is difficult to know what lasting impact this event had upon Muslim visitors in particular, but at the very least, it seems that Rianne ten Veen's contribution might have helped to raise awareness about the principles of conservation and care of the environment in Islam, to a wider inter-religious audience. It is fitting that the Botanic Gardens provided a context in which this could happen, and it shows especially effective 'outreach' on the part of the Gardens, and a willingness to engage with religious communities in the locality. Further research would be necessary to establish how and why the Botanic Gardens came to be the venue for this event, but it is likely to be a reflection of well-established Birmingham-based social networks. When Muslims are given the opportunity to engage in and with this form of social capital, it reflects an important stage in their integration within, and recognition by, local communities. This particular project is also a good example of the way that environmental and conservation projects can provide means of bridge-building between Muslim and non-Muslims: "the environment is an issue through which commonality and mutual understanding can be built" (Ball, 2008).

- *Welsh Environmental Link Creating Opportunities for Muslim Engagement (WELCOME), Swansea*. [Interview with key staff: 3rd February 2009]

WELCOME was originally started in 2009 as a project to share information and understanding about Islam by two committed activists and their relatives. Like other Muslim environmental groups however, WELCOME struggles to involve committed, regular members, and as a consequence, the emphasis is now upon supporting other voluntary groups, and using these as a means to spread information about Islamic environmentalism.

Mindful of the difficulties of sustaining on-going membership, the pioneers of WELCOME have been pro-active and successful in organising day trips for local Muslims and their families, especially to places of significance for conservation. For example, WELCOME recently organised a particularly memorable day to the Wetlands and Wildfowl Centre (Llanelli). The day included a (halal) barbecue, and activities such as nature walks, pond dipping, and a treasure hunt for the children. The extensive nature of the site gave a feeling of space and freedom which the group enjoyed, combined with plenty of child-friendly activities. During interview, those involved in WELCOME noted that the behaviour of the group at the Wetlands and Wildfowl Centre was very positively noted and commented upon by the staff (e.g. they were tidy and considerate of others), and they felt this had helped to create a positive impression. For the staff to have made such observations is an interesting commentary on what their initial expectations of the visiting Muslim group might have been,

Other garden and park visits have been organised by WELCOME, for example, to Bryngarw Country Park (organised through the Gateway Gardens Trust, www.gatewaygardenstrust.org) and the National Botanic Gardens of Wales. Feedback from WELCOME on the National Botanic Garden of Wales visit was illuminating. On the whole, the group found them less inviting than the other venues, describing them as “sort of formal”. There was a sense that the experience could have been more “hands-on”. Ideas for widening participation included the hosting of more community events (such as weddings).

In addition to organising family-friendly leisure events, WELCOME has also hosted meetings where guest speakers have included Muslim environmentalists such as Fazlun Khalid and non-Muslim environmentalists such as Jake Purches (Wind Power). Like other Muslim environmental groups, the key activists at WELCOME are closely connected to inter-faith activities and organisations in the locality, and promote the idea that their members should also engage in non-Muslim community-based activities.

2.2.2. ‘Green’ mosques in Britain: two case-studies

- *South Woodford Islamic Centre, London: a ‘green’ mosque case-study (1)*

This mosque is the first ‘carbon-neutral’ place of Islamic worship in Britain. To that end, it has installed energy-saving light-bulbs, reduced the thermostat on the heating system,

and installed solar-powered heating panels for hot water. The imam publicly uses a bicycle within the local community, and Friday sermons encourage the congregation to walk rather than drive to the mosque. This is a powerful and challenging message in a context where British Muslims perhaps make disproportionate use of private vehicular transport, relative to their socio-economic position. This is likely to reflect larger family sizes (and the consequent challenges and expense of using public transport), and the fact that many families rely on the income derived from sole-trader businesses that require a car, e.g. taxi driving, or market-trading. The ablution area in the mosque reminds worshippers of the Islamic injunction to use water sparingly.

However, perhaps the most challenging initiative is the action being taken in relation to the carbon footprint of each individual, and the mosque itself. The imam and the mosque committee are asking members of the congregation to calculate the carbon emission of their household, and offset their 'footprint' by donating money to tree-planting projects in other parts of the world, especially in the Amazon rainforest. This has been extremely successful, and led the Foreign and Commonwealth Office media outlet 'British Satellite News' to feature the initiative in one of its broadcasts. This can be viewed at: <http://revver.com/video/670349/london-mosque-goes-green-in-a-big-way/> (accessed 14/4/2010). This video-recording has been viewed 85 times since 11/2/2008, but the initiative has captured the attention of local news outlets which are likely to have reached a much larger audience (but unfortunately, not the British Muslim press). Here is what one local newspaper had to say:

In a bid to combat climate change, all of the carbon emissions produced by the South Woodford Muslim community centre through use of gas and electricity will be offset by the charity Tolerance International, which will plant trees in the rainforest to eliminate the centre's impact on global warming.

Dr Mohammed Fahim, chairman and head Imam at the mosque and community centre in Mulberry Way, said: "We are the first mosque in the country to be carbon free and we are trying to be pioneers. We are going to ensure that we promote environmentally friendly things so people will start to recycle more and not be wasteful. And people at the mosque will have to start to think about how to be carbon free in their lives as well". (Reynolds, 2007)

Drawing on the sources of Islam, a quotation from Dr Fahim posted on a local social networking site uses the metaphor of trees and planting to inspire others. He said: "I

want every Muslim to be like a tree, which provides fruit not for himself, but for other people to benefit from it.” (<http://forums.redbridge.gov.uk/default.aspx?g=posts&t=407>).

Central to the vision of this project, is the education of the children attending the supplementary school at the mosque. Their classes stress the environmental responsibilities that God has placed upon them, and they are being encouraged by their teachers to share messages about recycling and conservation with their parents. According to the deputy imam, the children are the most important educators of the older generations when it comes to climate change.

This project highlights a number of criteria for effective ‘good practice’ when it comes to engaging British Muslims in conservation projects. Firstly, where Islamic environmental groups tend to have an informal and dispersed membership structure that can be difficult to sustain over time, this particular mosque-based initiative is able to work through an existing and committed membership that is meeting regularly, and for many, daily. Secondly, the conservation messages of Islam are embedded within the religious life and social action of the congregation in such a way that there is a continual reminder about the personal responsibility of each member (e.g. the notices in the ablution areas). This seems to be leading to direct action and positive changes in behaviour. The presence of young children in the supplementary school is also a reminder about the future of British Muslim communities in Britain, and the value of making changes that can positively influence the well-being of later generations. Thirdly, it is clear that the religious teachers at the mosque are leading by example. Although there is good evidence that Islamic religious authority is becoming ‘democratised’ both within and outside the UK, local imams continue to be important sources of religious advice and authority for many. When they ‘practice what they preach’, this is clearly effective in encouraging their congregations to follow their example. While mosques continue to be at the heart of Muslim communities in Britain, they have considerable potential for influencing and engaging the attention of British Muslims in relation to projects concerned with conservation and environmental sustainability. It is the combination of these factors and criteria, revolving around a self-directed ‘grassroots’ initiative, that seems to make this particular project so successful and pioneering. However, it should be noted that the initiative taken by the imam (probably of Arab rather than South Asian origin) is exceptional in a context where many other (mostly South Asian) British imams tend to have conservative views of their role, and may have difficulties communicating effectively in English (Geaves, 2008).

- *Muslim Khatri Association, Leicester* (<http://www.mka.org.uk/htm>): a 'green' mosque case study (2).

The Muslim Khatri Association in Leicester has received a number of awards in recognition of its efforts to make its premises more environmentally sustainable. Its web site reports

The MKA Community centre carried out a range of environmental improvements including PV Solar Roofing, internal cavity wall insulation and roof. Sensor lighting, heat recovery air ventilation and low pv based paint decoration and environmental friendly flooring. In recognition of our hard work we were awarded the Leicester Environment City Best Demonstrator Building AWARD 2002/ 2003.

One image from their project (Fig. 6) seems to suggest that they are concerned to raise awareness about a range of environmental issues, some of which might involve plants. This is apparent from the use of the BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) logo on their display panel.



Fig.6 Muslim Khatri Association, Leicester

2.2.3 – ‘Green’ places: Levenshulme, Manchester

- *The Peace Garden, Chapel Street, Levenshulme*
(<http://levenshulme.wetpaint.com/page/Peace+Garden+Document>)

In 2007, a group of local residents in the Levenshulme area of Manchester began to lobby the City Council about their proposal to turn the site of a former community centre into a ‘Peace Garden’. The project was spearheaded by a group that called themselves SLUGs (South Levenshulme Underground Gardeners), but now re-named ‘Safeguarding Levenshulme’s Urban Greenspace Society’ with the strap-line: “leaving a trail of creation”. They defined their mission as follows:

To promote cohesion within an ethnically diverse neighbourhood, to encourage a sense of ownership and empowerment amongst the community, and to enhance the residential environment and biodiversity in the area through the creation of a wildflower garden and peaceful meeting place.

<http://slugsociety.wetpaint.com/>

In their carefully-constructed and well-argued proposal to the local authorities, they outlined numerous ways in which the Peace Garden would improve the area. What is especially important is the way in which local Muslims were so evidently engaged in the project.

We will draw on local people and resources to contribute elements to the Peace Garden, working with members of the Madina Mosque in Barlow Road to develop an Islamic theme in the garden design and collaborating with Chapel Street School to engage children in project work consistent with the garden’s theme of peace.

***Designing the Peace Garden will actively engage local people and promote community integration** (emphasis original).*

(<http://levenshulme.wetpaint.com/page/Peace+Garden+Document>)

It was also evident that the mosque provided an important initial local community meeting place for the development of the ideas.

A meeting held about the Peace Garden proposal held in the Madina Mosque on Sunday 10th June 2007 attracted 40 people, including local councillors and members of the Mosque. There was support and enthusiasm for the proposal. A working group was established to develop the Peace Garden proposal, including

representatives of the Delamere Neighbourhood Group, Cromwell Grove and Chapel St. Residents Association and the secretary of the Madina Mosque.

(<http://levenshulme.wetpaint.com/page/Peace+Garden+Document>)

For several years, the group has been actively liaising with South Manchester Regeneration Team about the Local Development Plan, in the hope that the Council might permanently allocate the land to the local community. During this time, whilst facing on-going delays and bureaucracy, local community members nevertheless set about the sowing of wild-flower seeds on the ground, and quietly working to improve the area without waiting for Council approval, hence calling themselves ‘guerrilla gardeners’ (Bainbridge, 2009).



Fig. 7 “The wild flower seeds keep growing and the site looks better everyday”, Levenshulme, Manchester (<http://levenshulme.wetpaint.com/page/Community+Garden>)

If this is how the garden looks now, this is how they visualise the future

Fig. 8 Imagining the Peace Garden, Levenshulme



In November 2009, the local council said that it was preparing a short-term lease to the local community (Bainbridge, 2009). Since then, SLUGs reported to us that the licence

still has not been issued, and the initial enthusiasm for the project among the local community seems to have waned (email: Jamie Summers, 26/5/2010). Watch this space.

- *The EcoMosque (al-Markaz al-Najami), Levenshulme, Manchester*
(<http://www.ecomosque.org.uk/sustainability.html>)

Returning to the theme of 'green' mosques, an important example in this regard is the new 'EcoMosque', also in the Levenshulme area of Manchester. As well as the solar panels, the use of wood from sustainable sources, and the use of recycled materials, there is an important and distinctive holistic philosophy that underpins the ethos of environmental sustainability.

EcoMosque encompasses economic, environmental and social aspects. By fusing a desire to combat environmental damage with a passion for delivering key services and products to students and the local community, EcoMosque will achieve a surplus over expenditure which can then be used to develop better and more focussed services. EcoMosque will be open to everyone, irrespective of faith and background and will nurture inclusivity and build community cohesion. It is hoped that the model will become an exemplar for community and faith centres everywhere.

Community lies at the heart of the EcoMosque concept. Salford brings together a diverse community and this very diversity is essential to the future well-being. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) elaborates the concept by stating: "...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature"; it becomes "one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence".

By creating an EcoMosque that caters for the needs of youth, women, for Muslims and non-Muslims, we aim to deliver a radical and innovative project that will grow and prosper with the wider community.

The British Muslim public intellectual, Professor Ziauddin Sardar, praised the initiative in the *New Statesman* in June 2008 (Sardar, 2008), and provided compelling evidence for his argument that such projects were the kind "that young British Muslims will embrace and run with". This is because they provide a space not only for religious worship, but also

for neighbourhood activities, social gatherings, counselling, life-long education, and perhaps more especially, “a sense of identity and moral responsibility”.

2.2.4 – National Environmental Organisations and ‘widening access’ (Forestry Commission England - case study)

BGCI is not the first conservation/environmental organisation interested in the question of widening access and engaging with faith communities. As a consequence, there is some merit in considering how other organisations concerned with landscapes, green spaces and public engagement have set about this process and with what result, especially in relation to British Muslims.

A particularly good example which serves as a case-study is Forestry Commission England, which was forced to expand its profile and outreach activities in the mid-2000s when the cost of wood-pulp fell, thereby reducing the profitability of FCE-managed woodlands. Faced with falling income levels, the organisation was forced to find other means of increasing its relevance and significance to government and the general public if its continued funding was to be justified. It was partly against this political background, that a project was initiated in Luton, to develop ‘Faith Woodlands’.

FCE staff recognised that people in Luton, a city comprising diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds were, like many British Muslims, living in “densely urban areas with little access to natural open space and greenery...[and] sometimes perceive themselves as excluded from woodland” (Hand, 2007: 4). The project initiated by FCE sought to “demonstrate how woodlands might be enjoyed by different faith groups working together...thereby learning about themselves, their environment and each other” (ibid.). The idea was that nature, environment and spirituality could provide a common ground for people of all beliefs, and none. “All religions teach a respect for the earth and nature, and from this starting point the similarities between religions could be explored, rather than the differences” (ibid.).

FCE set about engagement with local stakeholders, especially with the Luton Council of Faiths (LCOF), a local inter-faith organisation. With initial support in place, a funding application was made to the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (Communities and Local Government) to employ a Faith Worker (who happened to be a Muslim), who could work with FCE to develop the project. The next task was choosing an appropriate existing woodland site, and listening to various ideas about how a ‘special space’ within

the woodland could be created that might be meaningful to all and could provide a setting for activities such as ceremonies, story-telling, or poetry-reading.

The success of this project so far demonstrates important criteria for engaging the interest and involvement of religious and ethnic minority groups. For example, accessibility was essential. The woodland that was chosen was just out of Luton, on a well-established, regular bus route, but also with extensive parking. Some of the paths in the woodland were all-weather surfaced so that wheelchair-users and families with buggies and young children could still enjoy the woodland. A mobile cafe at the entrance meant there was a 'human face', and a place for coach-drivers to congregate. There was an information board and leaflet dispenser in the car park, and a picnic area with tables and benches. All this gave those unfamiliar with wide open spaces a feeling of welcome, and of safety. Faith community leaders from mosques, temples, gurdwaras and churches were invited to the woodland, with the intention that they could act as advocates for the project to their congregations in a context where the woodland was not 'owned' by any single faith group. Finally, a professional public relations company with experience of conservation projects was employed to assist with promotion.

The project is still on-going at the time of writing, but having completed the first development phase, there are plans for engaging a range of different audiences in the future, especially school groups.

Local school children will be involved in faith based environmental activity...talks and woodland walks are planned for them, leading to a greater understanding of different faiths and of environmental issues such as climate change and energy use, and the vital importance of trees and green spaces in urban and suburban settings (Hand, 2007: 11).

The FCE project demonstrates many well-established principles of 'good practice' for engaging with faith communities. For example, stakeholder consultation is essential (in this case with religious leaders), and working through existing organisations (such as inter-faith groups) provides access to, and good advice on, working with faith diverse faith communities effectively. For example, the initial plans for the project were presented by Luton Council of Faiths in Luton Central Mosque, while also engaging with other organisations (e.g. women's groups). The LCOF Chair, Zafar Khan, was able to promote the project not only to local Muslims, but also to those connected to the inter-faith movement in the area.

There are more than 700 verses in the Quran that urge believers to reflect on nature. All faiths believe in the preservation of our earth, this is one of the many

things we have in common, and this should encourage us to work together to break down barriers (cited in, Hand, 2007: 3).

In many ways, the efforts of Forestry Commission England in Luton, are now being replicated in other Forestry Commission areas, which is a good indication of the success of the project. For example, Forestry Commission Scotland has been encouraging members of faith communities in Glasgow to enjoy the health benefits to be derived from taking exercise in woodlands. As noted on their web site:

Forestry Commission Scotland has launched efforts to engage the BME (black and minority ethnic) community to highlight how getting active in this environment can help reduce the risks of health problems, including heart disease and diabetes.

We have identified there are a number of barriers which tend to prevent people from ethnic minority backgrounds from visiting woodlands and forests, including issues over transport and lack of information.

Over recent months, we have attempted to break down these barriers, highlighting the fantastic natural resource which, in many cases, exists on our doorsteps.

This has been achieved by the organisation of guided walks in local urban parks (such as Pollok Country Park).

Commenting on the Commission's efforts, Dr Mohammed Iqbal Anwar, Project Manager of the Muslim Day Care Centre, Glasgow Central Mosque, who attended one of the organised walks, said: "We fully support the efforts being made by Forestry Commission Scotland to engage with ethnic minority groups. The visit was a wonderful experience for everyone involved and a great way to educate people on how they can connect with this natural environment and benefit their health through undertaking activities such as walking.

The projects described in this section tend to revolve around social networks (electronic and physical), and efforts to share the environmental messages within the Islamic tradition with a wider audience – usually with the aim of bringing about direct change in collective behaviour. However, the efforts of individuals seeking to improve their local environment should not be overlooked. To that end, the work of Muhammad Jamil, a Customer Service Attendant at Edgware Road Tube Station in London, provides a final and moving closing case-study. Mr Jamil was photographed by the British Muslim photographer, Peter Sanders, for his 'Art of Integration' exhibition. He was shown tending his small garden beside the railway line, with the accompanying caption: 'Tracks

of My Tears'. The caption went on to note that Mr Jamil was one of the first to help the victims of the London bombings of July 2005.



Fig. 9 'Tracks of My Tears'. Peter Sanders/Art of Integration.

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SECTION THREE – KEY FINDINGS

This section describes and evaluates the findings derived from our ‘case-studies’, the online survey, and interviews (by telephone and in person). As noted in Section One, we focused much of our research effort on identifying what made existing (or proposed) projects either successful or problematic in terms of BGCI’s aims and objectives, and thus the core of this section critically examines a wide range of garden and park case-studies.

Early in our analysis, we found it helpful to group these according to whether they were built or designed by British Muslims (or by others), and then in terms of how and to what extent they promoted ideas of biodiversity conservation and environmental principles. Following the historical emergence of these various case-studies, we begin by looking at those Islamic gardens in the UK that have characteristic and traditional ‘Islamic garden’ features within their design, most of which have been designed by non-Muslims, with aesthetic rather than environmental objectives in mind.

3.1 Case studies of some existing Islamic conservation and Islamic Gardening projects

3.1.1 Existing gardens, primarily developed by non-Muslims

- *Sezincote House and Gardens, Gloucestershire.* (Built: 1809, designed by Samuel Pepys Cockerell.) <http://www.sezincote.co.uk/>



Fig10 Sezincote House and Gardens

Sezincote is an early 19th century house in the Cotswolds built in the 'Indian style' (Malins, 1980) by Sir Charles Cockerell (1755-1837). It includes a large formal Islamic style garden. The website for the house and garden says:

It was in 1795 that Col. John Cockerell grandson of the diarist Samuel Pepys's nephew, John Jackson, returned from Bengal. John Cockerell died in 1798, leaving as heir his youngest brother Charles, who had been with him in the service of the East India Company. Charles Cockerell (created a baronet in 1809 and a member of Parliament for Evesham) employed another brother, Samuel Pepys Cockerell, to build a house in the Indian manner. S. P. Cockerell was already an architect of some standing, and surveyor to the East India Company.

It would seem that the house and garden are designed to reflect more of a sense of India without any particular attention to Islamic religious heritage. For example, where Mughal gardens are designed as a representation of heavenly gardens, filled with the symbolism and spirituality inspired by the Qur'an, the design of the garden at Sezincote reflects a religious hybridity. It conforms to the layout of an Islamic garden in many respects, but also includes dissonant elements, such as a temple to the Hindu goddess Sourya and bronze 'Brahmin' bulls, all suggesting an interest primarily architectural and aesthetic in nature. Reducing Mughal culture to such a simplified romanticised image, whilst ignoring factors such as the religious underpinnings of the style, can be said to be an example of what Edward Said describes as Orientalism (Said, 2003).

- *Kensington Roof Gardens, London* (built: 1939, designed by Ralph Hancock)

This is one of three themed gardens built on a 1.5 acre site 100 feet above Kensington High Street. It is currently owned by the 'Virgin Group' and used for private and corporate functions. These gardens have Grade 2 listed status. According to the Roof Gardens Information Sheet:

The gardens were the idea of Barkers vice-chairman Trevor Bowen who employed the Welsh landscape architect Ralph Hancock to realise his vision. Ralph Hancock had previously worked on the 'Gardens of the Nation' at the Rockefeller Centre in New York where Trevor Bowen had been researching American department store layouts. The gardens took two years to build at a cost of £25,000 and were opened in May 1938 by the Earl of Athlone.

Ralph Hancock (the landscape architect) was a well respected and fashionable landscape designer of the 1930s with a special interest in rock and water gardens. He won gold medals for his gardens at several Chelsea Flower Shows and designed gardens for the Royal Family.

In 1976 Tree Preservation Orders were placed on all the trees to avoid any damaging pruning or removal during rebuilding works over the next few years.



Fig. 11 The 'Spanish Garden', Kensington Roof Gardens

The 'Spanish Garden' is one of several themed gardens which include the Tudor Garden, the Chinese Garden and the Woodland Garden. The 'Spanish Garden' is based on the 'Moorish' gardens of the Alhambra. The present head gardener, David Lewis, pointed out to us that Hancock had probably never been to Spain and that in fact the Spanish Garden probably represented a more typical 'Californian' garden. However it is interesting that central elements of an Islamic garden are strongly represented. There is a pavilion, a four quartered section with a central fountain, running water, a wall surrounding the garden, and geometrical symmetry throughout. It should also be noted that plants found in the

Qur'an and Hadith still feature prominently in this garden. For example there were palms, olive trees, Mimosa, thyme, and figs.



Fig. 12 David Lewis – Head Gardener in the Spanish Garden.

Whilst discussing the issue of sustainability with regard to growing Middle Eastern plants in Britain, David agreed that one of the reasons this was now possible was due to recent changes in climate. However he also pointed out that advances in plant knowledge have allowed the growing of plants where it was previously thought not to be possible. For example the original Spanish Garden in Kensington had a row of trees that were thought to represent olive trees. Olive trees had not been planted because it was thought too cold to grow them in the UK. The present garden now boasts a row of healthy olive trees (Fig.12). David noted

one can see olive trees covered in snow in Northern Spain. In fact drainage and not temperature is the main factor when growing olive trees in the UK. So now the row of olive trees grows successfully in the Spanish garden.

The design and use of this garden is mainly very ‘secular’, but there is considerable scope for re-marketing, and promoting the Islamic features.



Fig. 13 Row of olive trees in the Spanish Garden.

- *Mughal Garden, Lister Park, Bradford.* (Built: 2001, and designed by Bradford City Council Architects)



Fig. 14 Mughal Garden, Lister Park, Bradford

Lister Park is a large formal Mughal style garden near Cartwright Hall in Bradford. We were able to make a brief visit to the garden during the course of a visit to the city, but this would be a good site for more ethnographic follow-up fieldwork. This is because Lister Park is in the Manningham area of the city, and has a very high South Asian Muslim population living within easy walking distance (63% of local residents are either Pakistani or Bangladeshi). A more precise understanding of how and in what ways they use the Mughal Garden area (relative to the rest of Lister Park) would be illuminating. Our main informant about the garden was the Principal Parks & Woodland Manager for Bradford City Council who wrote to us at length about the garden.

The gardens were built as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant covering the restoration and improvement of Lister Park. Our Mughal Gardens, designed by the council's Landscape Architects, were opened on the 9th April 2001 by the Mayor, and have attracted significant interest on both a local and national level.

Whilst trying to create a Mughal Garden in Lister Park, it became clear that there were two options available. The first option was to select bits from different gardens or replicate an existing garden all be it on a different scale to fit in to the proposed site in the park, adjacent to Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, a grade II listed building.

The second and the chosen approach was to look beyond the visual details and consider the common principles and ideas that influenced the design of the gardens. Following analysis, these were then applied to the garden in Lister Park to create a unique Mughal Garden, within the context of the site conditions – the local community, project finances, local climate and available materials.

These factors were not seen as potential restrictions and barriers, but as positive and necessary context, which builds meaning, depth, integrity and value into the Lister Park Mughal Garden. Indeed this is how all of the Mughal gardens evolved their unique and world-renowned individual characters – by trying to create a certain kind of garden out of the particular local conditions inherent with each site – materials, craftsmen, climate, finances, palace architecture etc.

This adopted approach influenced all decisions taken by the design team from the master plan right down to the choice of every individual plant species. The common principles that have been applied to the Lister Park Mughal Garden are:

- *Horizontal planes that intersect along geometric axes, divided the garden into deliberate divisions and sub-divisions. The planes often take the form of terraces ascending in a symbolic hierarchy approaching a palace, mausoleum or summer house and are linked by steps.*
- *Generally a symmetrical landscape with linear paths, grass areas and avenues of trees aligned either side of the central axis of water channels, cascades and pools. Water channels often divide into four along geometric axes. Shrub and tree groups don't always conform to symmetry, but do form balanced elements in the strictly controlled axial views.*
- *In many ways Mughal Gardens can be seen as paradise gardens. There is total immersion of the senses in colour, from scents and birdsong; as well as the music and glittering cool splash of fountains. The gardens encapsulate the stimulation and restfulness of an exuberant diversity of experiences mixing harmoniously together.*

The park receives around 1 million visits a year and ...visitors are generally representative of the local area and Bradford district dependent on date/time and attraction in the park.



Fig. 15 'Bradford's Moghul Gardens' . Peter Sanders/Art of Integration.

(No copyright; for illustrative purposes only).

The park has attracted the attention of the international award-winning British Muslim photographer, Peter Sanders, who wrote about his experience of photographing the park:

It was not the quiet place of meditation that I had imagined, but buzzing with life and children of many ethnic groups playing together (Sanders, 2008: 36).

- *Arif Muhammad Memorial Garden, Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking.* (Built: 2001, designed by Sally Hornsby, “a local garden design expert” (Salamat, 2008: 68)



Fig. 16 Arif Muhammad Memorial Garden, Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking

This is a small garden built in association with ‘BBC Southern Counties Radio’ after plans for a BBC ‘Ground Force’ project were abandoned. The surrounding community were also involved in supporting the project, and this included donations from the Royal Horticultural Society and local businesses, alongside labour provided by students from a local Further Education College (Guildford College, Merrist Wood Campus).

The garden is situated at the rear of the mosque. Whilst not conforming to the *chahar-bagh* (four-fold garden) layout usually associated with traditional Islamic gardens, certain features are present. Sitting within the perimeter of the mosque the garden is bounded by a low hedge. Two oblique paths meet at a paved patio with benches forming a pavilion-like sitting area. A water element is provided by a central fountain and two other water features on either side of the garden. The layout of the garden is symmetrical with each side being a mirror image of the other. Each side contains a flower bed and two palm trees.

It would appear that the rationale of this garden is aesthetic rather than environmental in nature. However a synthesis of cultural traditions is achieved with the planting of palm trees, evoking the Middle East, with very 'English' lawns and rose-beds.

The Shah Jahan Mosque is the oldest purpose built mosque in Britain (Ansari, Gilliat-Ray 2010, Brown, 2004) with a history of intercultural collaboration. Further evidence of intercultural cooperation in Woking can be found about half a mile from the Shah Jahan Mosque. Within a clearing in the woods stands a brick structure built in a distinctive Islamic style. It consists of a gateway topped by a dome which is obviously influenced by the nearby mosque with a wall enclosing an area about thirty meters square. This is the remains of the Muslim burial ground built in 1916 to accommodate the graves of Muslim soldiers who had been killed in the First World War. The remains of the soldiers buried here were relocated to the military cemetery at Brookwood in 1956 due to vandalism (Salamat, 2008). Early photographs of the site show that amongst the graves there were plantings of small shrubs and trees. The structure enjoys a grade II listed status with English Heritage and at present the Horsell Common Preservation Society are currently working to restore the grounds (ibid). The building of the structure, subsequent vandalism and present efforts to renovate the site serve as an allegory for the complex and often contradictory experiences of cross-cultural cooperation and friction which characterises the history and experiences of Muslims in Britain.



Fig. 17 The Muslim Burial Ground at Woking in 2010.

- *Carpet Garden, Highgrove House, Gloucestershire* (Built: 2001, designed by Michael Miller)



Fig. 18 'The Carpet Garden' Highgrove House, Gloucestershire

For the 2001 Chelsea flower show HRH Prince Charles won a silver medal for an Islamic garden that had been inspired by two of his Anatolian tribal carpets in Highgrove House. Many Islamic carpet designs depict a bird's eye view of formal paradise gardens (Clark, 2004).

After the show the garden was moved to Highgrove House and rebuilt in an area with a high wall around it. This move was made in conjunction with the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts programme (VITA) at The Princes's Foundation which teaches the principles and practice of the Islamic arts and crafts. The garden is about 15m long and 10m wide with a typical *chahar-bagh* layout with a fountain in the centre. The centre feature of the garden consists of an eight sided raised platform with geometrical mosaic of tiles (*zellij*) upon which sits a marble fountain. The intricate colours shapes and patterns of the original woven carpets are re-created in the plantings around the garden. Emma Clark (2004) has made a case study of this garden in her book *The Art of the Islamic Garden*.

- *The Alhambra Garden, Roundhay Park, Leeds.* (Built: 2003, designed by Keith Jackson)



Fig. 19 The Alhambra Garden, Roundhay Park, Leeds

Roundhay Park is situated in a relatively affluent area of Leeds, about four miles from the City Centre. It attracts over eight million visitors annually. The area between the Park and the City is characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity, and is home to a substantial population of Muslims. This gives Roundhay Park potential for attracting large numbers of visitors from the locality.

In an email exchange with John Roebuck, the Officer for the Roundhay Park Estate for Leeds City council, he outlined the history of the project:

“The gardens at Roundhay were drawn up in April 1998 by one of the Leeds City architects, Keith Jackson, and one of his assistants at the time, Jane Cash, who still works for Leeds City council.

The gardens are a copy of the Winter Palace Gardens in the grounds of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. [The Winter Palace Gardens] were originally built by the invading Moors in the 13th century, with water jets added in the 19th

century. Initially such gardens were of medical importance, as well as decorative, using many herbs and medicinal plants, as well as other edible species and plants important to them, such as almond trees. As new plants were discovered they may well have been introduced to the garden. Water is the main feature and represented power and strength, those who could control water could control all. Also its use is repeated over and over in the Alhambra.

The garden we created is split into two parts: an historical representation of planting, and an interpreted planting making use of plants more suited to our climate. Our gardens were built as part of a scheme to produce an area of gardens called 'Gardens of the World'. Only two gardens were produced 'The Alhambra' and 'The Monet Garden'.

The gardens were built using apprentice gardeners and this was very successful as can be seen by the result. I believe they were finished in 2002/3. One main gardener was employed to look after these gardens, but unfortunately he is no longer with us.

I have been in charge of the area since 2004/5 and have tried to keep planting along similar lines to Keith Jackson's interpretation although as time goes on the development along the plant side and the ground conditions leads to alternative plant choices being adopted. The area is mainly, colour wise, to represent cool colours, so very few loud or hot colours are used".

John pointed out that whilst many of the visitors to Roundhay Park seemed to be Muslims, they seemed less likely to visit The Alhambra Gardens within. He recounted:

The Muslim visitors do not particularly seem to visit The Alhambra Garden preferring the attractions such as "tropical world" which has activities aimed particularly at families. Visitors don't seem to make the connection between The Alhambra Garden and its Islamic heritage. Perhaps we could include more information about the Islamic connections in our promotional material".

It is significant that he has outlined here two important factors influencing local Muslim engagement with 'The Alhambra Garden'. The first reflects the popularity of the site, *relative to* other competing family attractions. In other words, the success of Islamic gardens as sites for inter-religious encounter, the social inclusion of Muslim communities, or raising awareness about sustainability and biodiversity, will reflect the availability (or lack) of other local leisure attractions. It would appear that in the Leeds context,

Roundhay Park is not able to ‘compete’ with other facilities that are perceived as more ‘family friendly’.

Secondly, allusion is made to the relative lack of awareness among local Muslims about their Islamic heritage (at least as it was, in Spain). This is a direct reflection of the migration history, social background, and educational levels of substantial numbers of British Muslims. However, as more young British Muslims are born and educated here, alongside efforts that some are undertaking to develop a ‘Euro-Islam’ (based in part on Islamic history in Europe), so there is a greater prospect for increased awareness and interest in Islamic heritage in the future. This could of course be stimulated by more effective marketing literature on the part of gardens/parks seeking to widen access to a greater diversity of visitors.

- *St. Mary the Virgin Primary School, Bute Town, Cardiff.* (Built: 2003, designed by a team from BBC Wales.)



Fig. 20 Islamic Garden in St Mary's the Virgin School, Butetown, Cardiff
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/tours/events/slideshow6/garden1.shtml>

St. Mary the Virgin Primary School is a faith-based school run by the Church of Wales where 70% of the children are Muslim. The Muslim children are generally of Somali or Yemeni descent. The remaining 30% come mainly from a white “Christian” background. While the religious ethos of the school is Christian, great importance is placed on the spiritual aspect of religion and respect for other faiths. On Wednesday the Christian

students go to St Mary's Church for mass whilst the Muslim pupils are led by Muslim members of staff in prayer and Islamic studies.

The grounds of the school are overlooked by St Mary the Virgin Church (Church of Wales), St Andrews (Greek Orthodox) and the Somali Mosque (Nur al-Islam) indicating the multicultural character of the area. The school is situated in an area characterised by high levels of economic deprivation. An indication of the socio-economic need of learners is the school's eligibility for incentives such as *Community First* and the inclusion of a playgroup as part of the *Flying Start Initiative*. The school is further challenged by a high pupil turnover (25% in most years). This turnover is often to do with issues of housing where families are moved around the city as new accommodation becomes available.

In 2003 an Islamic Garden was built in the school yard by staff pupils and volunteers from BBC Wales and other local organisations and businesses. An interview for our project was held on Wednesday 10th March 2010 with the present head teacher, Ruth Jackson and Mrs Griffith, member of staff working when the garden was built, where history of the garden and its possible regeneration using an ecological framework were discussed.

The Islamic garden was built in 2003 and was the inspiration of the former head teacher Julie Bowman. The original garden was inspired by Prince Charles's Islamic garden at the Chelsea Flower Show. The aim of the project was to promote racial harmony and to teach both Muslim and non-Muslim pupils about Islam. This was a 'Business in the Community' initiative. The project cost £3,000 with funds coming from Spec Savers, Cardiff Round Table No.26, BBC Wales and Cardiff County Council.

The garden received excellent press coverage. There had been a long-standing relationship with the BBC and the school through a programme where the BBC had people volunteering to help with reading in the school. The project was also Joint winner of the *Muslim News* 'Sankore Award' for 'Excellence in Education' in 2004. The garden was opened by Saeed Shad (Cardiff businessman and former president of Cardiff Chamber of Commerce). Clare Summers a newsreader and journalist with the BBC was also there (Fig. 20). The garden included a mosaic designed by the pupils and local artist, herbs from the Middle East and five trees representing the five pillars of Islam.



Fig. 21 Claire Summers with pupils at the opening of the garden.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/tours/events/slideshow6/garden9.shtml>

The garden had to be dismantled when an extension was built onto the school and the various elements have been re-positioned. Part of the school grounds consists of a community garden area used by the school and other community organisations (it is not open to the public). Mrs Jackson is keen to move the Islamic Garden to this area.

The school has a Gardening Club and an Eco group. Ideas that came up when talking about resurrecting the garden included:

- Using sustainable methods of construction. Making use of recycled materials as part of the environmental message as well as a way of keeping costs down.
- Having more involvement from the local community and parents.
- Including calligraphy with Qur'anic versus pertaining to ecological concepts (perhaps including sayings from other faiths and beliefs systems)

There is something significant in this project that brings together many elements of 'good practice', and suggests possibilities for the future. It is indicative of what can be achieved by local communities, when schools, businesses, and faith groups combine their energies and resources.

3.1.2. Existing garden projects primarily developed by Muslims

- *Ismaili Centre, Roof Garden, London* (Built: 1986: Design: Casson Conder Partnership and Sasaki Associates and Lanning Roper, architects)



Fig. 22 Garden on the roof of the Ismaili Centre, London

The garden on the roof of the Ismaili Centre in Kensington formed part of the design of the centre when it was built in the mid 1980s. Consisting of a courtyard with a central fountain forming a classical eight sided star flowing into four channels, the design produces the classical *chahar-bagh* layout. The marble courtyard is then surrounded by well- established multi-levelled beds. According to Nizam Abdulla, a former Vice-President of the Ismaili Council:

The roof garden on the third floor is often the space that completely takes people by surprise, the idea of a garden, designed on the model of classic Islamic gardens, in the heart of central London, in a space from which you can look up to the domes of the Victoria and Albert museum, and at the same time be totally unaffected by the sounds of the traffic below. Is something that they just don't expect. It is often a space where people stop to reflect and to listen to the sound of the water from the five inter-connected fountains.

'<http://www.theismaili.org/cms/989/Looking-back-on-25-years-of-the-Ismaili-Centre-London>

As the first 'high profile' Ismaili Centre in the UK (www.theismaili.org) the London centre has served as the model for other centres around the world, often incorporating Islamic gardens. In addition, Aga Khan Development Foundation is involved in several projects to restore existing gardens. Examples of such projects include: The *chahâr-bâgh*, surrounding Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, and the Bagh-e-Babur, the tomb of the 16th Century Emperor Babur, Afghanistan. The Aga Khan Development Network is also involved in a range of projects around the world with elements of conservation and sustainable development.

- *Community Garden, Tower Hamlets, London* (Built: 1999, and designed by Bangladeshi Muslim women of the Borough)



Fig. 23 Community Garden, Berner Estate, Tower Hamlets.

The Wapping Women's Centre in the East End of London has set up a 'community garden' within a quadrangle formed by blocks of flats on the Berner estate. The project currently has a membership of around thirty women, nearly all of Bangladeshi origin. The Community Garden Project has given women from this community the opportunity to grow organic vegetables and herbs for cooking and medicinal use.

According to Sufia Alam, Manager of the Women's Centre, it had been observed that large numbers of women were using planters on their balconies to grow 'beneficial' plants more associated with Asian cultures. An opportunity was seen to encourage gardening as a means of fulfilling the desire to grow these plants, while addressing the need to

encourage women from the Bangladeshi community “out of their flats and into the wider community” (3rd March 2010).

A sensitive approach has been needed in the development of the project as access to these communities is often problematic with cultural practices sometimes seen as a barrier to successful integration. The garden has thus ostensibly been ‘off-limits’ to men. Sufia points out that this has been necessary to provide an environment in which the women feel safe and relaxed. More recently a compromise has developed allowing men to help with the heavier tasks at limited, pre-arranged times. As members have become more engaged so their sense of empowerment as grown.

We have been encouraging visitors to the garden and this has instilled a sense of pride by the members. As the women have gained in confidence outside visitors have increasing been allowed into gardens (3rd March 2010).

Sufia regards the project as an ongoing success as it has allowed local women to socialise more outside their homes. Members have also been to visit other gardens, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. From the outset the garden has had a strong ecological underlying principle promoting recycling and composting and organic horticulture.



Fig. 24 Composting advice at the Community Garden

“Islam teaches us to take care of the environment”, notes Sufia. She wanted to do something about the apparent apathy amongst local Muslims when it came to taking care of green spaces. She was determined to encourage people to take responsibility for and invest agency in their own environment, rather than seeing such matters as the concern of others. The garden is also a valuable reminder of the benefits of recycling since it now occupies land that was previously a vermin-infested rubbish dump.

The ‘Women's Environmental Network’ has also been involved in the project, and “three eco champions” have been trained by an IFEES member to go out into the community and inform people about, and promote Islamic environmentalism. Such projects have been effective. At a recent meeting with Tower Hamlets Council it was said that there had been a 40% reduction in waste as a consequence of the actions of Muslim women in the locality.

- *Gardens of Peace Cemetery, Ilford, Essex.* (Built: 2002, designed by Austin-Smith: Lord - architects. Winner of the 2003 Stoneguard Phoenix Award for overall total concept design. Winner of BALI (British Association of Landscape Industries) National Landscape Award 2003 for land renewal.



Fig. 25 Entrance to the Gardens of Peace, Ilford
http://www.gardens-of-peace.org.uk/photo_gallery.html

The 'Gardens of Peace' is the largest purpose-built Muslim cemetery in Europe, with space for up to 10,000 graves. It is open to Muslims from all schools of thought, and is held in trust by a registered charity. Further details can be found at: <http://www.gardens-of-peace.org.uk/>.



Fig.26 Path dividing burial area from gardens, Gardens of Peace, Ilford
http://www.gardens-of-peace.org.uk/photo_gallery.html

We visited the Gardens of Peace on 8th April 2010 and met with Maqbul Hussain Mubeen, a trustee of the Gardens of Peace, and the person responsible for the conception and layout of the gardens associated with the Cemetery. We also met Mohamed Omar, the temporary manager of the Gardens.

The areas where there are graves adhere to the conventional form of Muslim burial with a simple marker stone and neatly raised earth mound (Fig. 25). In contrast the sparse nature of other Muslim cemeteries can be seen in the example in Bahrain (Fig. 26). Despite signs forbidding the placing of flowers on graves, in some cases this has been ignored. However, generally, the attitude is one of inclusiveness with the organisers trying to accommodate as many different traditions and religious schools of thought as possible. Gardens are set around the periphery of the burial ground. These gardens, whilst Islamic in concept, more closely resemble the gardens of peace found in many British crematoria.



Fig. 27 A cemetery in Bahrain

Maqbul told us that has been studying Islamic gardens, Islamic ecology and Muslim burial practices for many years. He emphasised that he wanted to produce a garden that “would not look out of place” within the British context, while also deriving inspiration from Islam. The extensive lawn area near the entrance of the cemetery is a feature Maqbul is keen to retain as, to him, “lawns are a very British feature”. The garden does not follow the traditional layout of an Islamic garden. However features of ‘paradise gardens’ can be found. For example, to represent the “four rivers” of heaven a stream running through the garden has been dammed forming four pools. One unusual feature used here, and not found in traditional Islamic gardens, are crescent-shaped beds and hedges. According to Emma Clark, the use of the ‘symbol’ of Islam in a context such as this is unusual.

Maqbul has made a considerable effort to represent as many plants found in the Qur’an and Hadith as possible. All the plants have to survive outdoors and so species have been chosen that grow well in the British climate. For example, palm trees from Tasmania have been planted to represent the traditional Middle Eastern date palms. Planting has also been engineered to reflect stories found in the Qur’an and Hadith. For example, a palm tree has been planted near the river but in an isolated position within the lawn. According to Maqbul, this evokes the story from the Qur’an (Sura Miriam 15:20) of how

Mary gave birth to Jesus under the shade of a palm tree, deriving sustenance from the dates and water at its base. He then went on to explain how this story is an important representation of “the true reality of purdah; it is not simply about covering up, but also about dignity, privacy and modesty”.

The garden is generally made of beds which are scattered throughout and often have some form of theme. Often people have donated the money to have these beds produced and so the theme reflects those who will be remembered. For example, "the weeping garden" is a crescent-shaped area with an oak bench dedicated to a girl who had died young. In this area, several trees of a ‘weeping’ variety have been planted. A further unusual feature that Maqbul is keen to put in place is a “Hell Garden” comprising thorny plants and resin spurge (*Euphorbia Resinifera*), the tree of Zaqqum mentioned in the Qur’an as the ‘Food of Sinners’ (Sura 44:43-44).

Although the garden that has been set out in the cemetery does not represent any previous Muslim burial tradition, it does appear to have produced a very workable synthesis where Muslim burial practices are combined with a traditional British looking garden, which includes plantings that have a strong significance within Islamic tradition. An anecdotal story told by Maqbul attests to the success of this venture. When an elderly gentleman from the local area died, whilst on holiday in Pakistan, it was his wish to be buried back in the Gardens of Peace in Ilford.

Maqbul noted that not all of his colleagues shared his enthusiasm for the garden and the rationale behind it. He points out that many Muslims have no particular reverence for places of burial, and find it difficult to understand the need for a garden in such a utilitarian space.

Maqbul feels that his garden has a strong role in teaching Muslims about the environment, conservation and sustainability. IFEES was consulted as part of the process of incorporating messages on conservation into the design of the site. Having said that, Maqbul feels that there is very little interest by most Muslims in these issues. He puts this down primarily to the way that Islam is taught. He suggests that there is too much emphasis on carrying out the ritualised aspects of Islam. Additionally, he observes that those teaching Islam to young people do not prioritise environmentalism. “There is too much emphasis on learning Qur’an by heart rather than looking into its meanings and therefore our responsibilities”.

Compared to all the other ‘Islamic gardens’ and gardening projects surveyed so far, the ‘Gardens of Peace is perhaps the only one that has pro-actively sought to incorporate

plants from the Qur'an and Hadith. As such, it provides a 'model' as to how these plants can be grown outside the Middle East, and without the use of greenhouses. But the 'Gardens of Peace' is also an interesting cultural synthesis, combining what one would expect in a British burial place, with Islamic gardening practices. In this way, it is sympathetically introducing British Muslims to a novel concept.

- *Community Garden, Crosshill Tennis Club, Blackburn* (built: 2009, designed by local Muslim volunteers)



Fig. 28 'The Gang' - volunteers at the Crosshill Tennis Club garden, Blackburn

A piece of wasteland that backed onto the Crosshill Tennis Club was purchased by a group of interested Muslims with the intention of re-claiming the land and producing a 'garden' that would encourage local Muslims to get involved in their environment and with the community as a whole. The land was then given to the tennis club. The initial meeting of the gardening group was attended by representatives of IFEES who explained the principle of Islamic environmentalism.

Waqar Hussain is the organizer of the tennis club garden project and is presently the acting chair of the Crosshill Tennis Club. According to Waqar, the demographics of the area have shown a shift from an 80 percent white population to 70 percent Asian population. Local Asians such as Waqar are keen to halt any “white flight”. The Asian population is around 90 percent Muslim, originating from Jhelum and Mirpur in Pakistan and Gujarat in India. Waqar has some illuminating comments to make about Muslim views of land, environment and ecological responsibility.

The vast majority of these people came from rural areas where they struggled to survive as subsistence farmers. When arriving in the UK many turned their backs on anything to do with agriculture or horticulture. Land was considered the cause of their deprivation and misery and they wanted nothing else to do with it.

There has not been much of an uptake to the idea of Qur'anic based environmentalism - people tend to abdicate 'difficult' questions by doing what they know best. So they feel that if they pray and work towards the hereafter that they have been good Muslims. There is also a sense that the environment is an issue for the government and therefore not their responsibility or in the realm of faith.

Waqar questions to what extent the local Asian community feels any connection with Islamic gardens. He suspects that they are generally seen as elitist. No such gardens existed for the poor rural communities these people came from. He describes the situation in Lahore.

In Lahore the British built these grand bungalows with large well-kept gardens. After they left the bungalows were divided up with several families living in each. The gardens have been neglected and remain unkempt. And this is all within a stone's throw of the famous Shalimar gardens!

Compounding this situation, Waqar noted the apathy among local religious scholars and leaders: “religious leadership is not interested in addressing issues such as the ecology and community partnership”. He sees this as a direct reflection of the worldviews of religious leadership ‘imported’ to Britain.

Muslims at the moment are feeling victimised - backed into a corner. They have sought the religious leadership that typically told them there was no need to mix with those around them (they were spiritually superior...and should not change or try to adapt to a society that was seen as essentially sinful). This has in turn led to a form of Islam that is characterized by exclusiveness, insular attitudes and paranoia.

Despite the fact that many Asians turned their backs on agriculture and horticulture there were those that retained an interest in working the land. For example, Waqar's father has held an allotment for twenty years. During a period when allotments were not very fashionable, older generation Asian men began to take up the allotments. More recently allotments have again become 'trendy' and so now some of the 'prime plots' are predominantly worked by Asian men.

3.1.3 Proposed garden projects for development (primarily by Muslims)

- *Gulshan-e-Wycombe, High Wycombe.*

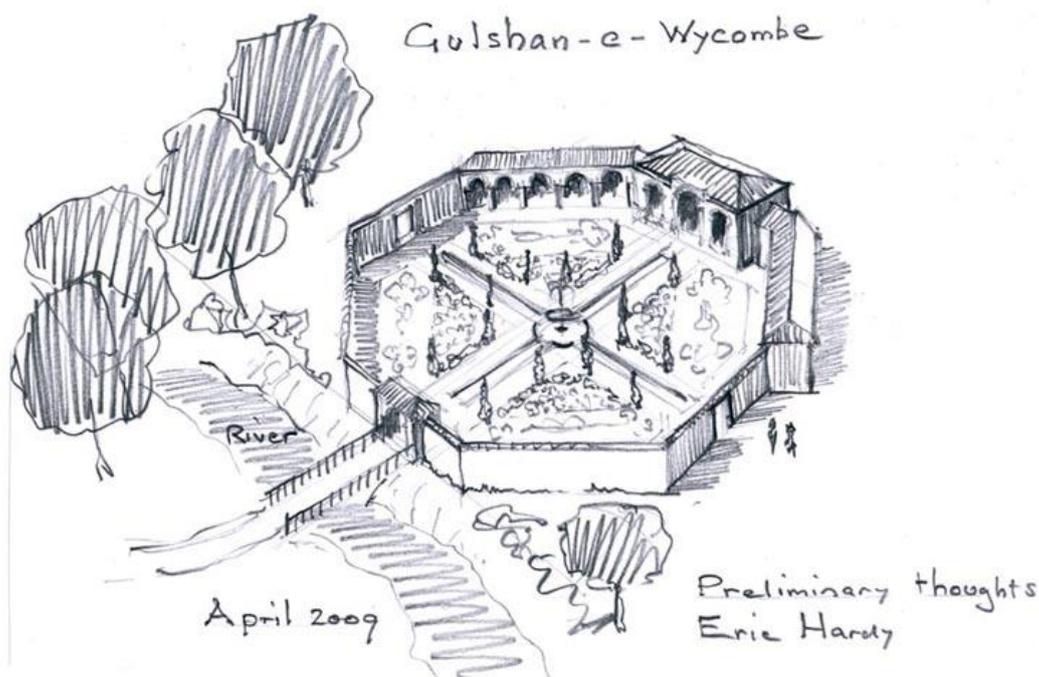


Fig. 29 Gulshan-e-Wycombe, preliminary design (April 2009)

<http://www.gulshanewycombe.org.uk/>

In 2009, councillors in High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire announced plans to support the development of a new 'Islamic Garden' in the town. They made the forthright (but erroneous) claim that it would be the "first one in all of Great Britain" (Hayes, 2009). The plans are without doubt ambitious; initial estimates for building the garden put the cost at around £2 million, which will be raised through public donations. The rationale for the

proposed garden is development of better 'community cohesion', tourism potential, and a site which could have inter-religious educational benefits for young people. Leading British Muslim garden designer, Emma Clark, gave a lecture to councillors and Muslim community leaders in the town when the proposal was first unveiled in March 2009 (Hayes, 2009).

A local newspaper report about the meeting to discuss the plans resulted in very extensive negative comments (see appendices), as did a later report about the project in June 2009 (Evans, 2009), though on a slightly smaller scale. There might have been a more enthusiastic response to the proposal with better management of the public relations process, but nonetheless, it is worth considering what anonymous members of the public had to say by way of criticism of the project. Their views are likely to reflect some of the concerns and difficulties that might surround the development of other Islamic gardens in Britain...especially where these are promoted as distinctively 'Islamic'.

In general, the overwhelming view among those who posted comments on the local newspaper website (www.thisisocalondon.co.uk) was that religion itself was exclusive and excluding, let alone Islam in particular. Many commentators were hostile to any expression (let alone funding for) religion in the public sphere. The rationale for the especially 'Islamic' character of the garden is not fully explained, making the project vulnerable to these criticisms. These 'anti-religion' voices sometimes qualified their views by suggesting that 'community' gardens, or gardens for people of all faiths, would be more likely to foster 'community cohesion', rather than 'Islamic' gardens alone.

However, there were some who went beyond 'anti-religious' perspectives to reveal concerns about the 'Islamic' nature of the proposed gardens. These were not criticisms about Islamic gardening design principles (about which they are most probably unaware), but were more easily characterised as instances of 'Islamophobia' and racism. Indeed, the whole scheme seems to have exacerbated the expression of negative ideas about Muslims.

Another difficulty of the proposed project is the large sum of money that has become associated with it. Regardless of how and to what extent it receives funding in the future, some feel that the amount of funding required to establish the garden is disproportionate to the objectives, especially in a context where there are perceived to be more urgent financial priorities in the town. One commentator wondered how it was that a project involving plants could involve such a large sum.

Finally, it would appear that the 'ordinary' Muslims of High Wycombe are not fully engaged in, or supportive of the project. There is no mention of their involvement, or

any process of consultation with them. This amplifies the sense that some commentators had, that the proposal is being driven by those associated with the council, without any real mandate. Some critics of the project explicitly express concern that

...the self-appointed undemocratic 'Members of the Steering Committee' including 'ex-councillors' have already got a shortlist of sites that THEY have chosen; THEY have already decided...on whose behalf and on what authority?

All this underlies the fact that those promoting the idea of Islamic gardens in public spaces need to take great care in terms of project management and consultation. The likelihood of the Gulshan-e-Wycombe project going ahead seems remote in the face of the funding required, and the local hostility that has already been generated.

- *British Muslim Heritage Centre, Manchester*

In 2006 the grade II listed gothic style former GMB Union building in Whalley Range was acquired to house the British Muslim Heritage Centre (BMHC). According to their website the mission statement of BMHC is:

To celebrate Islam's rich and varied heritage, inspiring all communities to embrace diversity and to be instrumental in the shaping of a cohesive British society.

It would appear that an Islamic garden features in the centre's development plans.

There are around eight acres of land, and part of this will be used to establish the UK's first public Islamic gardens - which will attract people of all backgrounds from all over Britain.

We have not been able to establish further details about this project, but once again, this statement reveals the lack of awareness and publicity for the Islamic gardens that already exist in the UK.

- *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Oxford*

The final phase of the development of the building for the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies includes a plan for an Islamic garden in the central courtyard. From the plans on the centre's website it would appear that the layout will be in the traditional *Chahar-Bagh* style. The Prince of Wales has expressed an interest in helping the design of the garden. The environmental credentials of the new project, the choice of plants, and the accessibility of the garden is unclear as yet.



Fig. 30 Artist's impression of the new Islamic garden at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (<http://www.oxcis.ac.uk/newbuilding4.html>)

- *Cambridge Mosque and Islamic Centre*

The Muslim community in Cambridge is in the process of acquiring and developing new, larger premises for its religious activities in the city. A FAQ page includes information about the new design....

And an important feature will be the Mosque Garden, which seeks inspiration from classical traditions of Muslim garden design in Spain and India, to provide a haven of peace for all comers. The project aims to include an element of affordable housing for families, which will provide 'natural surveillance' for the garden area.
<http://www.cambridgemosqueismoving.org.uk/faq.html>

No further information is given about the architecture or environmental sustainability of either the mosque or the garden. However, the involvement of Sheikh Abdul Hakim Murad, a well-known British Muslim scholar, suggests that environmental considerations will be taken into account. He is well-known for his sermons on environmental issues, and his promotion of projects that seek to increase awareness of 'green' issues among Muslims.

3.1.4 Temporary Islamic gardens/exhibitions

- *Reep (Religious Education and Environment Programme/Islam-Expo, London 2008.*

REEP is a non-denominational charity that provides pupils and teachers with free online resources on topics concerned with spirituality and the environment. With the strapline: “Promoting links between religions and the environment”, a section of their website on “Gardens of the Islamic World” provides resources covering the following topics:

Islamic Gardens – Aspects of Their Design

The first part of this resource looks at the common design elements of Islamic Gardens, their history and symbolism, and how they can be reproduced in a garden design in Britain.

Aspects of Islamic Garden Design:

- *Key Things About Islamic Gardens*
- *The ‘Chahar Bagh’ Garden Plan*
- *Garden Features In Islamic Gardens*
- *Designing An Islamic Garden In Britain*
- *Related Resources*
- *Creating Miniature Islamic Gardens*

If, like many schools, you don't have a large area in which to create a garden, this follow-up article explores the creation of miniature gardens incorporating the design principles discussed in the first part of the resource.

Miniature Islamic Gardens:

- *Outdoor trough gardens and raised flower beds.*
- *Garden features for a miniature garden.*
- *Miniature plants for miniature gardens.*
- *Miniature gardens indoors.*
- *Steps which need taking at design stage.*

The 2008 Islam-Expo (a cultural conference dedicate to Islamic issues), commissioned REEP to build a temporary Islamic Garden designed by Emma Clark in the centre of the exhibition at Olympia in London.



Fig. 31 2008 Islam-Expo Islamic garden by Emma Clark

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is listed as one of REEP's patrons. Nasr, a well known Muslim philosopher, has written and spoken widely about Islam, the environment and science.

- *Qur'anic Gardens Exhibition, Kew, London, (Built: 2010)*



Fig. 32 Exterior of the Qur'anic Garden Exhibition, Kew, April 2010

In April 2010, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, joined His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales to plant a Sidra tree sapling at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, formally open an exhibition on Qatar's Qur'anic Garden, and marking the International Year of Biodiversity 2010.

The exhibition comprises plants and herbarium specimens of some plants proposed for the Qur'anic Garden in Doha.

The Holy Qur'an is full of references to the beauty of the Earth's plants and trees. A Qur'anic Garden comprises all the plant species mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and those in the Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, Peace be upon Him), and the Sunnah (Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace be upon Him); these plant species belong to three main ecological groups:

- *Desert plants, such as Bitter gourd, Tamarisk, Christ's thorn, Tooth-brush tree, Acacia spp., Aloe, Senna, Henna, Camel's hay.*

- *Mediterranean plants, such as Olives, Common grape vine, Fig tree, Wheat, Barley, Black cumin, Mustard, Saffron, Safflower, Onion, Garlic, Watermelon, Pomegranate.*
- *Tropical plants, such as Agalocum, Ginger, Wild ginger, Camphor tree.*

In addition, the exhibition details the botanic terms mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah, explaining them in modern scientific terms.



Fig. 33 Interior of Qur'anic Garden Exhibition, Kew, April 2010

According to the publicity literature..

gardens play a significant role in the visual arts of the Muslim world. A Qur'anic Garden demonstrates the basic principles of Islam and provides an oasis for peaceful reflection where water, shade and greenery play an essential role. The Qur'anic Garden in Doha and this exhibition at Kew, aim to increase global awareness of the plants mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and to promote understanding between cultures through a common interest – our environment and its preservation.



Fig. 34 Qur'anic Garden Exhibition, Kew, central water feature

3.1.5 International case-studies

- *IFEES programme for Islamic conservation in Misali Island, Zanzibar*

The fragile marine environment of the tiny uninhabited coral-fringed Indian ocean island of Misali, near Zanzibar, was under threat from the unregulated and destructive methods of local fishermen. This included the dynamiting of the coral reef, the breeding grounds habitat and hatcheries of many local fish. This represented an obvious threat to the sustainability of the fishery with the added problem of cutting of the important tourism based income stream. Tanzania wanted to utilise the religiosity of the 99 percent Muslim local population via a community-based grassroots project, and to that end, CARE International asked IFEES to produce education materials that could be used by local religious leaders to promote conservation through Islamic ethics. This material used

Qur'anic references to educate the local population about the environmental message and responsibility inherent in their faith (Wolinsky, 2009).

According to Fazlun Khalid, director of IFEES, this approach proved far more effective than local government regulations.

The dynamiting stopped 24 hours after I had conducted the Pemba workshop based on a training resource we had produced! The NGOs were amazed: "we've been coming here for years and you have come here and run a workshop and you've changed attitudes in twenty four hours". Attitude change is so important.

One fisherman is reported to have said: *"it is easy to ignore the government – but no-one can break God's law"* (Dickinson, 2005). There has been a rise in fish catches since the program was implemented, and those who felt that Islamic teachings directly related to their use of the marine environment rose from 34 to 66 percent (Wolinsky, 2009).



Fig. 35 Islamic conservation in Misali Island, Zanzibar

3.2 Online survey results

3.2.1 Muslim perspectives

Appendix 2 lists the range of British Muslim environmental groups whose members or contacts were given the opportunity to complete our online survey. The results from this survey thus reflect the views of British Muslims most committed to environmental issues. However, it is important to note that not all the respondents may have been actual *members* of the Islamic organisations/environmental groups that circulated the survey on our behalf; many are likely to be simply ‘contacts’ on an email distribution list. Furthermore, not all the respondents to what we labelled the ‘Muslim’ survey were in fact Muslims. The majority were Muslim (79 percent), the remainder a mix of other faiths or of ‘no faith’. Nevertheless, the survey results provide some useful insights into how respondents, of predominantly British Muslim origin, and most interested in environmental issues, felt about the ‘need, value, and viability of Islamic gardens in the UK’. The general picture that emerges from the *closed-response* answers are that:

- They are living in relatively close spatial proximity to existing botanic gardens – not surprising given the largely urban location of British Muslims and botanic gardens
- Our respondents do visit botanic gardens. Just over a third said this was “often”. Thus, the most pro-active British Muslim environmentalists and horticulturalists *are* visiting botanic gardens, as are their children as part of educational visits (37 percent).
- The most significant barriers in terms of visiting botanic gardens, in their view, are in order of frequency:
 - Lack of publicity and an associated unfamiliarity with what a botanic garden might have to offer
 - Geographic distance
 - Lack of prayer facilities
 - Expense, both in terms of travelling but also admission charges

One respondent additionally noted that:

I’m not sure that many Muslim people would view a botanic garden as a place of interest – they have forgotten their heritage in terms of Islamic gardens and the younger generation have nobody to teach them about this

side of Islam. British botanic gardens may also be regarded as the type of place frequented by middle class native British people and not the kind of place at which they might feel at home.

- Just under half of our respondents had visited an ‘Islamic garden’, but for the vast majority, this had been overseas, not in the UK.
- However, if an Islamic garden were to be incorporated into a botanic garden in the UK, nearly 82 percent felt it would make them ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’ to visit. Many felt that such sites could have a role to play in biodiversity conservation, particularly in educating visitors about the link between Islam and the environment.
- Among our respondents, the ‘green space’ that they visit most frequently is a public park (36.6 percent visiting at least once a week). Other kinds of ‘green space’, such as ‘nature reserves’ or ‘gardens open to the public’ are more likely to be visited on an annual basis. This is an important finding in relation to any *potential* visit to an Islamic Garden. If their visiting behaviour in relation to other kinds of ‘green space’ is used as an indicator, then hypothetical future visits to Islamic gardens, although more *likely*, are probably also going to be *infrequent*.
- Our respondents are not all gardeners. Only 45 percent were engaged in regular gardening activity, and only 15 percent had an allotment.
- Less than one third of our respondents were members of Islamic environmental groups, though there were also some respondents who were members of other environmental organisations. The general picture suggests that our respondents are not expressing their activism through membership-based organisations.
- However, recycling is practiced by 95 percent of respondents, largely driven by a sense of environmental responsibility and an associated sense of religious responsibility.
- In relation to *other* British Muslims, our respondents felt that where they are aware of environmental issues, this is largely driven by the efforts of secular/mainstream initiatives (64 percent), rather than Islamic principles and obligations (12 percent). Islamic religious leaders could have an important role in reversing this balance, and 94 percent of respondents would like to see Friday sermons addressing this issue.

Muslim respondents generously commented upon a range of issues covered by the survey, as did those respondents primarily associated with horticultural organisations. These *open-ended* views and comments are discussed together, at the conclusion of the following section which summarises the views of members of horticultural groups.

3.2.2 Horticulturalist perspectives

Unsurprisingly, the survey respondents from horticultural networks were more pro-actively engaged with, and knowledgeable about botanic gardens, and less likely to have a religious perspective on the issues. For ease of analysis and explanation, this group of respondents are collectively referred to as ‘the horticulturalists’, though with full awareness that within this category are members of a wide range of different kinds of plant, park, and conservation organisation (perhaps overlapping, and some of whom are *also* Muslim). The general picture that emerges from the *closed-responses* from the horticulturalists is:

- A much greater degree of clarity about the location of their nearest botanic garden. So, where 14 percent of Muslim respondents were ‘unsure’ as to whether there was a botanic garden within a 40-mile radius of their home, only 2 percent of horticulturalists were ‘unsure’ about this. Likewise, where 73 percent of horticulturalists ‘often’ went to visit a botanic garden, only 43 percent of Muslim respondents did so.
- When it comes to barriers to access, horticulturalists also identified ‘lack of publicity’ and expense (travel and cost of entry) as significant. Perhaps the only distinguishing feature between the two groups of respondents was in relation to the availability of a prayer room – clearly important to potential Muslim visitors, but less so for others.
- Surprisingly, more horticulturalists (56 percent) had visited ‘Islamic gardens’ that had the Muslim respondents (41 percent). Where this visit had predominantly taken place *overseas* for Muslims, there was a noticeable contrast among the horticulturalists - from those who had visited an Islamic garden, in 50 percent of cases this was in the UK. It is difficult to speculate on the reason for this difference, but one possibility is that members of UK-based horticultural organisations have visited especially notable Islamic gardens (such as the Carpet Garden at Highgrove) as part of organised excursions. If British Muslims are not expressing their interest in environmental issues through membership of plant or conservation organisations – which may be key for enabling access to ‘prestigious’ Islamic gardens – they are indirectly excluded from the opportunity to enjoy British ‘Islamic gardens’.
- If an Islamic garden were to be built within a botanic garden, 54 percent of horticulturalists would be ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’ to visit (in contrast to 82 percent of Muslim respondents). But this is in a context of higher rates of visiting to botanic gardens *anyway*.

- Like their Muslim counterparts, the horticulturalists felt that Islamic gardens could play an important potential role in educating the wider public about the conservation and environmental principles contained in Islamic sources.
- There are observable differences in the frequency and type of green spaces that Muslims and horticulturalists visit regularly. The general picture is that the latter visit green spaces more frequently overall, and whilst the general distribution in terms of types of spaces is broadly similar, 30 percent of horticulturalists claimed to visit a 'garden open to the public' at least once a week (compared to only 9 percent of Muslims). Likewise, where 38 percent of horticulturalists visited other kinds of green spaces at least once a week, only 14 percent of Muslims were doing the same. In many ways, these trends provide quantitative evidence for some of the qualitative interview findings.
- Likewise, there is a notable difference when it comes to gardening activities. Nearly 80 percent of horticulturalists are engaged in regular gardening, compared to only 45 percent of Muslim respondents, and it is evident that many of the horticulturalists are able to do their gardening outside the confines of an allotment.
- Based on the general findings so far, it is not surprising to find that, compared to the Muslim respondents, a greater proportion of horticulturalists have joined organisations to support their interests in relation to general conservation/environmental action as well as more specific bodies (such as The National Trust).
- Rates of reported recycling are identical between Muslims and horticulturalists, and both groups are motivated by a general concern for the environment. But the horticulturalists are far less inclined to justify their behaviour on the grounds that it is also 'a religious responsibility', compared to Muslims.
- In terms of promoting environmental awareness, where 94 percent of Muslim respondents were likely to look to religious leadership for direction and support, only 69 percent of horticulturalists felt that religious leaders should be more pro-actively involved in educating their congregations about the issues.

Alongside the quantitative data gathered through the online survey, we received extensive comments to support responses to questions 8 and 9, as well as range of feedback about the survey and the project overall.

Question 8 asked for views about the effect that an Islamic garden might have on 'community relations' – either positive, negative, mixed or 'none'. Where 64 percent of horticulturalists felt the effect would be positive, some 83 percent of Muslims shared that view. The reservations - most probably reflected in the different proportion of 'mixed'

views (30 percent horticulturalists; 13 percent Muslims) are given further expression in the qualifying explanations. Indeed, the open-responses directly reflect the statistical findings.

The Muslim respondents who felt that an Islamic garden could have a positive effect on community relations (the majority) expressed this view on a number of grounds. These included the possibility that such sites could help to promote a more positive impression of Islam, and/or help to bring people together. Interestingly, the opportunities for presenting a ‘more positive impression of Islam’ through Islamic gardens were driven by both positive factors (e.g. giving people the chance to appreciate Islamic culture, or sharing “the beauty of Islam”), as well as by ‘negative’ factors reflecting the contemporary socio-political climate (e.g. helping to move away from the association of Islam with “terrorism”). Other positive outcomes for community relations included the idea that such gardens could help Muslims to feel included in society, and might help them to become more aware of the environmental messages of the Qur’an. Muslim respondents made some supporting comments that were neither positive nor negative, and they included the idea that it may be unhelpful to attach the label ‘Islamic’ to gardening projects. Rather, Muslims should be seeking to involve themselves in ‘mainstream’ gardening projects. This is one particularly strident view on the subject:

community relations would be better served by Muslims operating an “ordinary” botanical garden. This would be viewed as Muslims giving something back to the community for the common good, rather than Muslims trying to ram Islam down everyone’s throats.

The labelling of ‘Islamic gardens’ was also a concern for the horticulturalists, whose caution for the whole idea was also reflected in the degree to which they expressed ‘mixed’ views. Though some could empathise with the idea that Islamic gardens could help to shape positive opinions about Islam beyond the usual media stereotypes, they were also concerned that such spaces should be inclusive, and that reception would depend on good public relations and location. This is a typical concern

on the Isle of Wight the Islamic community is very small and largely anonymous. A high profile garden may in some quarters cause consternation.

However, in the right place, and with the right ‘label’, the positive impact of an ‘Islamic garden’ was viewed very positively by one Bradford resident, associated with the Friends of Lister Park:

From what I have observed...the establishment of the Islamic garden in Lister Park has increased the use of the park by local Asian women, who feel safe in using the park as an amenity in which to take exercise. There SEEMS to be a levelling effect that acts as a counterbalance to the occasional incidents of vandalism. The Islamic Garden within Lister Park is significant symbolically....

Open response comments in relation to Question 9 elicited similar views, despite the fact the question was less about 'community relations' and more about interfaith exchange and the contribution that Islamic gardens might play in this regard. There was a predominant view among the Muslim respondents that Islamic gardens could be valuable not only as a matter of principle, but also practically. Thus, in terms of ideals, they could provide an opportunity to show that Muslims and non-Muslims (of any faith) have more in common when it comes to environmental issues, than differences. Highlighting shared values and concerns, regardless of their ultimate philosophical or religious underpinning, could make Islamic gardens ideal sites for promoting better understanding and awareness of Islam, thereby counteracting negative stereotypes. From a practical point of view, Islamic gardens were seen as providing real physical spaces for educational/RE visits, inter-faith outings, and places for dialogue and contemplation. One respondent was optimistic about the potential of Islamic gardens when these were placed adjacent to mosques.

Once upon a time, mosques in the East had beautiful gardens associated with them and taught people about the Islamic vision of Heaven as described in the Qur'an; provided functioning spaces from which food as well as aesthetic pleasure was derived and provided space for peaceful contemplation. With the migration to places [from] the East, mosques had to be created wherever they could be afforded – often just a room or in an existing building whether it had outdoor space or not. The heritage of gardens – the knowledge of what they signified and the skills that Muslims had in managing gardens was lost. Nowadays mosques' outdoor spaces is [sic] just a car park space or barren patches of amenity grassland. An Islamic garden would create so much interest in the local community – generate curiosity, discussion and perhaps engagement from the wider faith community”.

Among the horticulturalists, there were concerns about inclusivity, 'labelling', and public relations; any suggestion that Islamic gardens were primarily 'for Muslims' or for the promotion of Islam would alienate a significant proportion of the gardening community. However, where such gardens provided venues for community events (and one mentioned a wedding) this could provide a positive place of common ground.

At the close of the survey, respondents were able to provide open feedback on any theme or issue related to the project. Some used this as an opportunity to provide comments about the survey and the project itself, but the majority made more reflective observations about Islamic gardens and Muslim environmentalism more generally. A particularly welcome outcome of the process of analysing this data was the degree to which themes from interviews and case-studies were repeated and reinforced, thus lending validity to the findings derived from the combined mixed-method approach. For example, several respondents commented about the problem of ‘apathy’ among British Muslims in relation to environmental awareness and responsibility, but also the very significant potential for changing this via faith-based approaches, perhaps initiated by pro-active leadership among Islamic scholars. The value of working a) locally, b) in relation to practical projects, c) via schools, and d) in connection with key stakeholders, came through in the comments of some, with one particularly good example which combined all four aspects of good practice:

We are developing an allotment adjacent to the school. We are hopeful of this being the focus for cross-curricular teaching in respect of Food Technology (healthy eating), Citizenship, Care of the Environment, and incorporating this into our Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Eventually, we hope to distribute vegetables amongst the needy of the community and use this as a way of developing stronger ties between the school and the community.

There was support for the idea of developing Islamic gardens as a means for promoting better positive understanding, but this was qualified by some through concerns about inclusivity and accessibility. Some voiced the idea that where traditional Islamic gardens had tended to be for the ‘elite’ and largely ‘aesthetic’ spaces (albeit shaped by Islamic principles), contemporary Islamic gardens (certainly in a British context) needed to be much more orientated towards conservation, education, and promotion of inter-faith relations.

Not all respondents were open to the idea of a faith-based garden. The idea that gardens might be used to promote a distinctive worldview or a particular group of people was criticised by some. They were not actively opposed to Islamic gardens in particular...rather any kind of garden that was orientated towards a particular community of thought and practice. These rather more cautious and critical perspectives were also dominant in the views expressed by the directors of botanic gardens to whom we spoke.

3.3 *Telephone interviews with botanic garden directors*

We conducted telephone interviews with the directors of three botanic gardens, located in Birmingham and Sheffield. More extensive research in the future might survey the opinions of a greater number, not least because different botanic gardens have more scope for new developments and projects depending on their size and location, and thus a wider range of views would be forthcoming with a greater sample size. However, from the three interviewees we spoke to, we were able to gain some useful perspectives and views about our project.

Each had some knowledge of the concepts underpinning the idea of 'Islamic Gardens', some more than others. We asked them for an evaluation of the 'need, value and viability' of establishing Islamic Gardens in the UK (with a view to promoting biodiversity conservation), and they outlined a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the idea.

In terms of positive strengths and opportunities, they could see the possibilities for increasing (Muslim) visitor numbers (thereby increasing the profitability of their gardens), and one valued the prospect of bringing about a better social balance in the visitor population. He noted that visitors were predominantly white, middle-class, and of an older generation, and he welcomed the idea of more social diversity in order to reflect the diversity of society at large. One garden had started to host "Asian" weddings, with commercial interests uppermost. Theoretically, the inclusion of an 'Islamic Garden' could increase the popularity of the botanic garden for functions of this kind, particularly among Muslims. However, the wedding events "had not been without controversy", and some of the staff and management of the garden had feared being "swamped by Asians".

All three interviewees could see difficulties and threats associated with the idea of developing Islamic Gardens, certainly within the parameters of their own sites. They spoke of the fact that their botanic gardens carried 'listed' status and that any significant changes would be complex. They also noted the practical constraints of space and funding when it came to new developments. From a horticultural perspective, one of the directors was emphatic that traditional Islamic gardens were "by definition unsustainable...they are designed to produce an unnatural situation...biodiversity doesn't spring to mind when I think of an Islamic garden". Another noted that even if an Islamic garden were to be established, attracting Muslim visitors could be difficult because "there is not a strong Muslim tradition of visiting gardens...it's not really counted as a leisure activity".

Aside from these scientific and practical constraints, a consensual theme running through their comments was the idea that botanic gardens should not be seeking to appeal to any one particular social group, whether blind people (a sensory garden) or Muslims (an Islamic Garden). One interviewee said: “we try to tailor most of our events to appeal to anyone”, whilst another felt that in relation to an ‘Islamic Garden’, “I feel religion is a bit of a no-no in the garden”. One noted that “neutral” spaces carry the possibility of multiple meanings for a wide range of visitors: “a quiet area of reflection for one person, an intimate space for a courting couple, or a place of remembrance for someone else”.

However, space is rarely ‘neutral’, because much depends on what counts as ‘neutral’, and who decides what the criteria for this ‘neutrality’ are. What might appear ‘neutral’ to someone who is middle class, educated, male, and white, could look very different when seen from the perspective of someone of a different ethnic background, gender, or social class. Furthermore, the idea that events in botanic gardens are “designed to appeal to anyone” fails to take into account the structural (economic, practical, and social) barriers that make botanic gardens more accessible to some groups, rather than others. In general, whilst our interviewees seemed to welcome the idea of inclusion and diversity in principle, few seemed inclined to explore ways in which to make this a reality, and there was particular resistance to the idea of singling out a particular social/religious group for special efforts. Towards the end of one interview, we were advised that a more positive way forward may be the idea of “community-based projects with an emphasis on a hands-on approach”.

The inevitable conclusion that emerges from these interviews is that pro-active efforts to encourage the incorporation of Islamic Gardens in botanic gardens are likely to face a range of practical, financial, and principled objections. However, at least one of the botanic garden directors we spoke to was enthusiastic about the idea of bringing the temporary ‘Qur’anic Garden’ exhibition at Kew, to his garden. He thought it would be “an excellent idea...this is the sort of project that would encourage local Muslims to the gardens”. Perhaps.

SECTION FOUR – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When we were invited to evaluate the ‘need, value, and viability’ of Islamic gardens in the UK - with a view to how and in what ways they might promote biodiversity conservation, ecological awareness, and/or inter-religious understanding - we focussed our research efforts in two principle directions. We located and evaluated *existing* and *proposed* Islamic gardens in the UK, in order to ascertain the degree to which they were *already* meeting (or could potentially develop) some of the objectives of BGCI. Alongside this, we sought to establish how and to what extent British Muslims were *already* engaged in projects that involved biodiversity conservation, horticulture, and environmental awareness, and the scope for extending their work in the direction of gardening (and potentially the development of ‘Islamic’ gardens, either within or outside of botanic garden sites). Through our research, we were essentially seeking to establish the feasibility of bringing Islamic gardening traditions, and faith-based environmentalism, *together*. We sought to evaluate both attitudes and opinions which might make this possible (or not) *theoretically*, as well as actual existing projects which could tell us the *actual* likelihood of success.

We defined ‘Islamic gardens’ broadly, in order to encompass both formal, traditional, self-contained Islamic gardens (such as the Carpet Garden at Highgrove House), as well as urban parklands that had developed gardens/spaces to reflect traditional Islamic garden design (such as the Mughal Garden in Bradford). Likewise, our efforts to map the broad contours of Islamic environmentalism in Britain incorporated a wide range of institutions, including mosques, local community projects, as well as formal and informal organisations and networks.

It became clear from our research that traditional Islamic gardens in the UK are part of a shared British-Muslim history, shaped by colonialism. But along with Islamic art, architecture, and science, Islamic gardens (which to some extent embody all these things) carry the potential for educating *all* British people about the long-standing and beneficial relationship that Britain has had with the Islamic world. Islamic gardens could thus have a significant role to play in promoting Muslim heritage, which could be valuable for inter-religious understanding and social cohesion. Where these sites have an existing visitor base, there is potential for developing their information resources, going beyond the aesthetic and historic attributes of the gardens, and emphasising the particular *religious* significance of their features and perhaps also Islamic environmental ethics. Passive educational methods (posters, pamphlets, film) could be effective in enabling visitors to appreciate the link between Islam and conservation, and the strong historic ties between Britain and the Muslim world.

However, our research makes it clear that many existing traditional Islamic gardens in the UK, while being aesthetically beautiful spaces do not, at present, seem to further the cause of environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, or ecological sustainability, and some of them are almost entirely inaccessible to the general public. In some cases, the gardens perpetuate an association with wealth and exclusivity, and thus have little real or potential resonance for many British Muslims. An exception to this might be the ‘Gardens of Peace’ in Ilford, which is both accessible *and* takes account of environmental conservation.

In relation to British Muslim environmentalism, we have noted the difficulties of sustained engagement in organisations and networks, but also the success of practical, grassroots, community–orientated, empowering, inexpensive, ‘bottom-up’ gardening and conservation projects that reflect the composition and dynamics of local communities. What has been especially notable about the success of some of these projects is the extent to which they have sought to ‘sacralise’ environmentalism by making reference to the Qur’an and Hadith. These projects signal the enormous potential for faith-based initiatives that go beyond merely informing or educating, but lead to real change in behaviour.

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping one’s worldview and its teachings on nature produce an environmental ethic that could be harnessed to influence behavioural change. The greening of the world’s religions is undoubtedly on the rise (Mohamed, 2007).

Some of the successful projects that we have surveyed have drawn upon a powerful combination of resources, both social/human, and religious, and have been shaped by a regard for the internal dynamics of British Muslim communities and appropriate consultation with key stakeholders in a locality. Our research makes clear that community projects and initiatives hold the key to engaging Muslims with the environment and their particular religious relationship to it. Existing local institutions, such as mosques, schools, women’s networks, and inter-faith organisations, provide the essential social capital to make conservation projects successful. When this is allied to the expertise and religious credibility of Islamically-inspired environmental education organisations (such as IFEES), there is considerable scope for positive change.

The summer 2010 issue of the National Trust magazine carries an interview with the Iranian-born British Muslim, Shappi Khorsandi. She describes her early impressions of the National Trust thus: “I’d always seen the Trust as a posh organisation for rambblers” (Summer 2010, p94). Botanic gardens also seem to be regarded as rather socially conservative formal places, with particular appeal for educated, middle-class people who can afford to pay the entry price. This makes them inhospitable places for many British

Muslims, especially those who do not relate to gardening and visiting gardens as a leisure activity. However, to the extent that we ascertained the views of botanic garden directors, they show an awareness of the economic and social value of being more outward-facing, and this signals potential for more positive change in the future. The UK government is also a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity which includes the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC). Target 14 of the GSPC requires that **everyone** understands the importance of plant diversity and the need for its conservation. This of course includes British Muslims. The idea of *temporary* Islamic gardens or exhibitions might provide a means of bringing about an incremental change while at the same time demonstrating that botanic gardens welcome British Muslims.

BGCI could have an important role to play in encouraging botanic gardens to critically examine their current visitor profile and look at ways of becoming more inclusive of faith communities. For example, some of the gardening projects surveyed in this report are seeking to grow plants mentioned in the Qur'an, or plants associated with traditional culinary or medical use in climatic and soil conditions which make this a complex process. The expertise held by botanic garden staff could be of valuable assistance in supporting and enabling these projects, and BGCI could help botanic gardens to develop a more outward-facing, collaborative orientation to faith-based community gardening initiatives.

This evidence points to the obvious conclusion that if new Islamic gardens are to be built in the immediate future in the UK with principles of biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability in mind (and with a view to *practical engagement* and *behaviour change*), they are most likely to be successful when developed outside botanic gardens, and within Muslim communities, and through the efforts of local grassroots organisations and networks that are able to articulate the principles of conservation embedded in Islamic discourses.

Meanwhile, Islamic gardens of a more formal and traditional kind could have a significant educative role both within, but especially *outside* British Muslim communities, in relation to British-Muslim heritage. There seems to be a significant degree of ignorance about the links between Islam and garden design, ecology, and sustainability. If existing (and proposed) gardens are able to convey these messages more effectively and deliberately through their publicity materials, this could help to inform the wider public about the commonalities that unite, rather than divide, faith communities.

It is paradoxical that the *extensive* references to conservation and environmental stewardship in the Qur'an and Hadith are, at the present time, *not* reflected in the actual behaviour of many Muslims in Britain. This is a reflection of the cumulative impact of migration history and socio-economic levels, education, and historical circumstances.

However, what is also evident is that the environmental messages of Islam are slowly being taken up by a new generation of British-born activists who have the credibility and knowledge to demonstrate in practical ways that being a 'good Muslim' necessarily involves environmental responsibility and biodiversity conservation. Developing traditional 'Islamic' gardens is thus just one way by which Muslims might be engaged in horticulture and projects related to plants and gardens.

Traditional Islamic gardens have not, typically, promoted ideas of biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability. Our research seems to suggest that there is considerable scope and indeed necessity for Islamic gardening design to take account of, and incorporate, the contemporary realities of climate change and other ecological challenges, if they are to truly reflect the messages of environmental 'stewardship' inherent in Islamic sources.

APPENDICES

- 1. Focus group discussion issues*
- 2. Timeline of Islamic gardens, parks and Muslim gardening projects*
- 3. Public comments on the proposal for an Islamic garden in High Wycombe, 2009*
- 4. Online survey recipients and respondents*
- 5. Online survey questions*
- 6. Online survey data*
- 7. Online survey 'open response comments.*
- 8. Financial Report*
- 9. Focus Group - PowerPoint presentation*

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