

Be stewards in Balsall Heath
The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations

Ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you

The Earth is sweet and green
and verily Allah (swt) has made you stewards of it

You yourself are the bumble-bee the flower, the tree and the bee

Dear Mother Earth you are nothing less than myself

Calthorpe Park

Balsall Heath Meadow

Balsall Heath Pocket Park

Edna's Garden

Balsall Heath City Farm

Pickwick Park

Spark Green Park

Edward Road Arboretum

Balsall Heath

Park Avenue

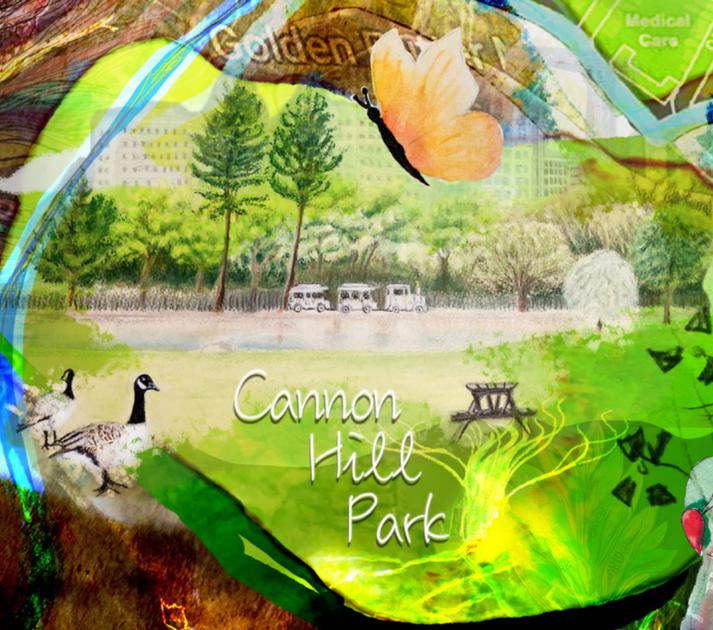
Trafalgar Road Pocket Park

Seven Streets Pocket Park

Carlton Cinema Garden

Cannon Hill Park

Balsall Heath Park



Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath

Balsall Heath, one of the most densely populated parts of Birmingham, tends to be celebrated for its people, not its wildlife. Its sounds are the beats of the carnival, the hum of buses, the continuous blast of car horns on pavements during Eid.

Being in a busy and buzzy inner-city neighbourhood, it can be hard to feel connected to nature. Wildlife can seem something that belongs to the countryside, not part of our daily life as we rush from building to car.

Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath has created this map to help open our eyes to nature that is within us and around us, in Balsall Heath, right where we are.

Why nature matters

Being aware of nature has never been more important. Our planet is heating up. Wildlife is in decline. Already, people in some parts of the world are fleeing their homes because of the effects of climate change. More and more, we are experiencing extreme weather.

In 2005, Balsall Heath was struck by a tornado that lifted the roofs off houses and razed others to the ground. The neighbourhood suffered a worse impact from the whirlwind than nearby Moseley because it had fewer trees. Trees are important in the inner city because they help keep it cool. The heat in Balsall Heath energised the tornado leading to greater destruction than the leafier suburbs.

Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath believes that when we feel part of nature, we are more likely to care for it. If we know that we are nature; that we are made of stardust; that we only breathe because the trees and plants are breathing...then we will cherish the earth. We will care for it, as we care for our own bodies.

How art can help us

This map was made to help us see nature in a new way; to spot it in places we might not have considered before; to know at a gut-level that we are part of the sun and the soil and the sky.

Art can help us to do that. The arts in all their forms have the power to change hearts and open minds. Shaheen Ahmed, one of the

artists who worked on the map, re-works traditional maps to inspire empathy and challenge political borders. "With Balsall Heath Nature Map we were re-working a traditional road map to inspire a love of nature and challenge a perception of the inner city," she says.

Fellow artist Rachel Pilkington says art helps us to change as we imagine. "Art can help us to re-imagine how the space might look if we put nature at the centre of design," says Rachel. "Art can help us become the change we want to see."

Balsall Heath community

After the tornado, the community in Balsall Heath came together. Balsall Heath Forum, with the assistance of St Paul's Trust, planted 150 trees to keep the area cool. Look all around this neighbourhood, and you will see signs of people taking care of the earth.

Take a look at Hampden Retreat, just off Mary Street. Resident Zaira Fathman sweeps the road every morning and has done for the past 17 years. She also looks after Edna's Garden on the edge of the street. That garden wasn't always there. It was once a rat-infested dumping ground. With the help of Balsall Heath Forum, Edna Shaw and other residents cleared the spare bit of land and transformed it into a garden featuring wooden animals on the fence designed by the children who live there.

Or take a seat in Balsall Heath Pocket Park. This was another left-over piece of land on

the corner of Moseley Road and Haden Way. Balsall Heath Forum won funding for a design by Balsall Heath residents Joe Holyoak and John Newson to pay Jericho Landscape to make it into a small park with benches and a grassy mound offering respite from the traffic.

Whilst you're there, look at the trees on the Moseley Road. In 2019, Transport for West Midlands wanted to widen the road, which would have meant chopping down the lime trees and sycamores that were more than 100 years old. The people of Balsall Heath protested - and now the trees have been saved.

Balsall Heath Nature Map

The beauty of nature is above us, around us, beneath us and within us. Here, in Balsall Heath, we have all we need to be the change we want to be. We have got each other, and we have got the good earth. Look at Balsall Heath one way and we see roads, buildings, and rubbish where it shouldn't be. Look at it another way and we notice the bats and the moon, the silver birch and oak, the blackbird, robin, chaffinch, and clear running water of the Rea.



How to care for nature in Balsall Heath

- Look for the moon. Every time you leave the house at night, see if the moon is visible. Pause to appreciate the tides, seasons and signs of faith it gives us.
- Pick up litter. If you want to do it with friends, join a litter-picking group. Cannon Hill Litter Pickers, Birchwood Litter Pickers and Moseley Litter Pickers welcome volunteers. The Bahu Trust does community clean-ups too.
- Grow some plants. If your outside space is a yard, grow some plants in pots. Prune trees, rather than cut them down. Cultivate a garden, rather than slab it, to help prevent flooding. Why not go to the Myrtle Cottage Bee Garden, near the Ort Café, Moseley Road for inspiration?
- Encourage swifts into your garden. They live in cities, but they are under threat. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds can show you how to give them a nest box, wildflowers and a pond.
- Eat less meat, more vegetables and avoid throwing food away. Find out why in the Muslim's Guide to Food and Climate Change.
- Walk or cycle. For shorter journeys, try not to use a car. Saheli Hub in Calthorpe Park teaches women to cycle. Why not explore the

Rea Valley Cycle Route once you're on two wheels? Read the Muslim's Guide to Transport and Climate Change for other ideas.

- Help improve a park by joining a friends' group. Friends of Seven Streets Pocket Park is looking for volunteers.
- Do you live near a park that could be better cared for? Join with neighbours to set up a friends' group for your bit of green space. Birmingham Open Spaces Forum can show you how.
- Use less gas and electricity in your home. Read the Muslim's Guide to Energy and Climate Change to learn how to do this.
- Insulate your home. Retrofit Balsall Heath is helping find affordable ways of doing this together. Join them.
- Find out about practical measure to protect the earth in Balsall Heath by staying in touch with Balsall Heath is our Planet, a community initiative that aims to reduce the environmental impact of our inner city neighbourhood.

To find weblinks to all these organisations, go to: ourgardenbalsallheath.org/what-to-do

Our Garden

Gardens are present in all the major faith traditions. The Jewish Christian and Islamic scriptures refer to the Garden of Eden as the sacred place where it all began, where people, faith and God co-existed in harmony.

In Hinduism, plants and trees are revered, while the Sikh Scriptures describe the Creator as the bumble-bee, flower, fruit and the tree. There's a long history of gardens in Buddhism too.

This map has been created by *Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath*, a project made up of a church and two mosques, coming together in friendship.

As Muslims and Christians, we see the earth as sacred and believe it's our responsibility to care for it. The river, trees and pockets of green in Balsall Heath are sacred spaces. Balsall Heath is our garden - and we tend it together.

(United Church of St Paul's, Bahu Trust, Al-Abbas Islamic Centre)



Spot the green hearts marking places of prayer and meditation on the map. Trace the texts that come from them.

Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath



River Rea

The River Rea is Birmingham's best kept secret. Some think the city doesn't stand on a river - but it does. It trickles on the mighty River Rea that trickles from the Waseley Hills Country Park in Rubery, through Balsall Heath to the Spaghetti Junction where it joins the Tame. It's hidden as it meanders between the back gardens of Constance Road and Eastwood Road in Balsall Heath but can be seen as it flows through Calthorpe Park. The water is surprisingly clear and dances in the sunlight over a bed of pebbles. Blackcap and chaff return from Africa each spring and can be heard here. Herons have been spotted on its path. So has the white egret. There have even been sightings of kingfishers.



Calthorpe Park

The criss-crossing paths of Calthorpe Park are lined with majestic trees that speak of the grandeur of a by-gone Victorian age. The biggest tree in Balsall Heath is here - a giant poplar with a deep, gnarled bark, near to the Wellbeing Hub. The park also has cherry trees that turn a blushing pink in spring. You can find a magnolia, a plum tree and weeping willow gifted by Birmingham Trees for Life too. On the bridge, at the far end of the park, you can enjoy one of the best views of the River Rea as it dances through a tunnel of green. Mixed parties of blue, great and long-tailed tits chatter above.



Cannon Hill Park

Technically, this park isn't in Balsall Heath, but it is close enough to deserve the status of honorary Heathan. There are formal, well-cultivated flower beds in the park, but walk a little deeper in and you can find woodlands and wild meadows. Take a look at the lake and see if you can spot fish, or walk beside the Rea and look out for herons. You won't be able to miss the Canadian wild geese but keep your eyes peeled for parakeets, a form of parrot, that have also been spotted there.



Balsall Heath Meadow

Piercing bright red and orange poppies flaunt themselves beneath a row of silver birches alongside this patch of green between the River Rea and Clevedon Road. It's dubbed Balsall Heath Meadow by locals as, when it isn't mown, you can find a rich variety of different grasses, buttercups and bees. Cross the meadow and go down to the river. Sit on the bench. You are hidden from the road. Listen to the water. You might even be joined by ducks.



Edna's Garden

The pretty garden of art and flowers on Hampden Retreat, off Mary Street, is a memorial to Edna Shaw who used to chair Hampden Retreat Residents Association. It blooms on what was once a spare piece of land that had become a rat-infested dump. In 2009, with the help of Balsall Heath Forum, Edna worked with her friends on the street to transform the space into a beautiful garden. Edna passed away in 2021, but the garden is maintained to this day by fellow resident, Zaira Fathman. Belonging to none, this spot of land belongs to them all.



Edward Road Arboretum

Edward Road is sometimes affectionately known as the arboretum because it boasts such an interesting variety of trees. Walking down from Moseley Road, there's a beautiful view up ahead of the trees and spires of Edgbaston. Outside Balsall Heath Health Centre stands a giant eucalyptus. A shimmering silver birch is on the other side of the road. There's a row of cherry trees outside Balsall Heath Church Centre that was planted by Balsall Heath Forum after the tornado of 2005 caused devastation in the area. Keep walking down towards Calthorpe Park and enjoy a row of horse chestnuts on the right and an ancient yew tree outside the Baptist Church.



Myrtle Cottage Bee Garden

The oldest house in Balsall Heath, Myrtle Cottage, next to the Ort Café, on the Moseley Road has inviting planters packed with nasturtiums, fuchsia, marigold and

dill. Walk down the alley at the side. There you will find the Myrtle Cottage Bee Garden. It's the prettiest cottage garden to be found in a back yard/car park. The gardener, Jeremy Hunt, grows more than 50 varieties of flowers, herbs and vegetables to eat and share. He grows poems there too. Take a look.



Balsall Heath Church Centre Garden

It's easy to miss this nature spot as the beautiful garden in Balsall Heath Church has walls on each side. Step inside, and there's a semi-circle, like half an amphitheatre, with trees and deep beds all around. There are climbing roses in red, orange, peach and pink, irises, geraniums, ferns and wild strawberries. Blue tits can be seen feeding on coconuts hanging from the trees. A fox visited once and stared at the people in their Sunday morning service who stared right back.



Park Avenue

Many of the homes in Balsall Heath have beautiful gardens but, as they are private land, we can't see them unless we're invited. Front gardens are another matter. There are roads like Wenman Street, Balfour Street and St Paul's Avenue whose gardeners cultivate flowers and shrubs which are a delight for anyone to see. One of the best examples is Park Avenue, off George Street, where the wall makes a kind of raised bed that is a shared garden for those that live there. Wildflowers, like bluebells and forget-me-nots, flourish amongst salvia, roses, columbine, peonies, lavender and forsythia.



George Street Park

There's a choice of good places to sit in this relatively quiet spot between George Street and Tindal Street. One is on the bench beside the insects' mosaic, where you can look above the yellow and purple-leaved maples to the cityscape of Brum. It's also nice to lie under the giant sycamore in the shady corner amongst the white, yellow and blue of the daisies, buttercups and campanula and look out to the row of silver birches lining the other side.



Railway Embankment

The Camphill Line has not been any use to passengers since the 1940s, but its embankments form a good home for wildlife. Steep and fenced off, they have largely been untouched by human hands. The brambles on the banks are a great place for insects, slow worm, mice and rats. The trees take care of pigeons, squirrels and bats. Running from Moseley, over Brighton, Runcorn, St Paul's and Ombersley Roads, the railway line is a safe route through which creatures can move from one place to another, helping them to find food and survive - a wildlife corridor. Think how easily creatures from Seven Streets Pocket Park can hang out with their mates from Trafalgar Road Pocket Park thanks to this safe, bushy highway.



The Moon

Whenever you step out after dark, look out for the moon. It might be hiding behind clouds. It might be waxing or waning, high in the sky or low. Sometimes it's been known to blush. It's always beautiful. And it's always there. Even in built-up parts of a city, where nature is at its most sparse, we can look up to the sky, search for the moon and say "Hello". Each time, we can remember the rhythms, tides and seasons that it gives us.



Seven Streets Pocket Park

This pretty triangle nestles between Clifton Road, Runcorn Road and the railway line. It's a lovely place for bees and butterflies as cow parsley, jack-by-the-hedge, goat's beard, bugle and other wildflowers burst abundantly beneath the canopy of lime trees and sycamores. Sitting on a bench, you can sense the wildlife on the embankment behind, whether that's through the rustle in the grass of a mouse or the sighting of a bat at night. Local residents plan to develop this loveliness by planting up raised beds with more flowers to attract the pollinating insects that we all need.

Watch videos of these places made by the community on the Our Garden Balsall Heath YouTube channel.



Pickwick Park

Home of the Balsall Heath Carnival, this park, between Oldfield Road and St Paul's Road, is surprisingly peaceful. It's a good place to listen. Tune into the sound of the birds amongst the background hum of traffic, ice cream vans and children. You can hear the lesser black-backed gull, pigeons, starlings, sparrows and blackbirds.



Spark Green Park

There is something lovely about the location of this park that connects the busiest shopping streets in Balsall Heath - Stoney Lane and Ladypool Road. You can walk through its palatial arches, from one bustling street to another, pausing to connect with nature on the way. There are deep bushes and a variety of fruit-bearing trees on the Nelson Mandela School border. And there's an elegant row of silver birch trees along Stoney Lane. Look for the clover, buttercups and daisies in the grass and spot the young trees, planted by local children and students with the help of Trees for Life in 2020.



Balsall Heath Park

The houses on Birchwood Crescent form a comforting backdrop to this park which also has an entrance on Taunton Road. Opened in 1894, it's one of the older parks in Balsall Heath and enjoys some ancient trees along the edge. These trees survived the 2005 tornado, which wreaked havoc in the rest of the park. Ten beautifully arranged cherry trees have recently been planted by park ranger Jan Tomlinson.



Carlton Cinema Memorial Garden

This patch of green, with a semi-circular path, on Taunton Road was made into a space to mark the place where 19 people, including ten teenagers, lost their lives when they were in the Carlton Cinema which stood on that spot. The youngsters were watching the film Typhoon when it was bombed in the second world war. For decades the site was a dumping ground causing problems for

local residents - until the people of Hagley Villas, led by Jafar Raza, took action. With the help of Groundwork and Birmingham City Council, they turned the dump into a memorial garden for the innocents who were killed. Children from Anderton Park Primary School designed the mural in the path and there are 19 stones to commemorate those who died. It's a place to sit amongst the daisies and the buttercups and remember.



Balsall Heath Pocket Park

It's an unlikely place for a park - a bit of leftover land on the corner of the Moseley Road and Haden Way. But in 2016, the Balsall Heath Forum won funding to transform this spot into a peaceful space with benches. You can sit and look out over a little grassy hill to lime trees and sycamores lining the road beyond. You can hear the screech of the gulls - now so common in Birmingham they are being dubbed Brum gulls by locals. For a few moments, you can almost forget you're sitting alongside the busiest bus route in Europe.



Balsall Heath City Farm

The farm on Malvern Street is best known for its domesticated animals - sheep, goats, pigs, Chinese geese, ducks, chickens and guinea farm. But it also works to restore wildlife. The manager Hywel Williams has created a pond for frogs and newts. There will soon be a pollinator bed to attract bees and other important creatures that pollinate. And there are plans to grow hedgerows along the side of the railway embankment. With berry-bearing trees, like holly, this will mean extra food for the birds, who can nest there.



Trafalgar Road Pocket Park

This is a park for which the term "pocket" was invented - a small corner of green between Trafalgar Road, Brighton Road and the railway line. The sweet smell of elderflower fills the air. Wrens, blackbirds, robins and black caps compete in the dawn chorus. The borders of trees on three sides of the park are so deep, they form a little wood. Stepping inside is like walking into the past, the home of creatures, the place where birds out-sing the cars.

Unfold these pages to find a map, made by artists, showing Balsall Heath as a place or nature and wildlife.

Learn what lives on the railway embankments, find where the cherry trees grow, spot where you can sit beside the gurgling river.

This map was made by *Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath*, a Creative City Project generously funded by Birmingham City Council presented by the Birmingham 2022 Festival.

One church and two mosques came together, as friends, to form the *Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath* project: the United Church of St Paul's, Balsall Heath, Mary Street; the Al-Abbas Islamic Centre, Clifton Road; the Bahu Trust, Ombersley Road.

Special thanks to representatives from each of these organisations who formed the steering group: John Christophers, Sheikh Nuru Mohammed, Shenaz Sajjan, Kamran Shezad, Abdullah Rehman. The project was managed by Abbas Shah.

The map was made by artists Shaheen Ahmed, Rachel Pilkington and Dave Gray. Also included is work by participants at the *Our Garden - Sacred Spaces of Balsall Heath* art workshop. These were Fran Wilde, Saleha Begum, Laila Khan, Zahra Shah, Haleema Bibi, Ruchica Valamudi, Prynata Valamudi, Ariyanna Valamudi, Muniba Iqbal, Aisha Iqbal, Zainab Iqbal, Yunis Jan and Eli Gray.

Balsall Heath Nature Map was devised, written and produced by Jo Ind.

For more information go to: ourgardenbalsallheath.org

Watch videos made by the community: Our Garden Balsall Heath YouTube channel

Do you want more copies of this map? Email: ourgardenbalsallheath@gmail.com



Balsall Heath Nature Map

Presented by

