

Reverend Roger Gayler



Name:
Reverend Roger Gayler

Position/occupation:
Vicar of St Marks Parish, Chair of Wellgate Community Farm and Chair of Marks Gate Local Agenda 21 Group.

Residence:
Marks Gate, Barking and Dagenham.

“London in 2050 rests on whether as a society we’ve seized the opportunities for sustainability and reduced our carbon footprint.”

Roger has lived in London all his life. He was born in Walthamstow and has lived in Marks Gate for 32 years. Roger is the vicar of St Mark’s Church in Marks Gate at the northern fringe of the borough of Barking and Dagenham. Since 1984 he has also been the Chair of Wellgate Community Farm, which has just celebrated 25th anniversary, and is also Chair of Marks Gate Local Agenda 21 Group, the only LA21 group in the borough. The group has pioneered the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder process which is now being rolled out across Barking and Dagenham.

Sustainability experience

“For me, sustainability is part of my faith and permeates the way I live my life and the way I work. God gives creation and we are here to care for it, it’s as simple as that. Creation includes planet and people. It’s justice, care and love rolled into one.” Roger says that though he feels that the Church has been committed to the principles of sustainable development for a long-time it isn’t seen as mainstream. “I have always held that sustainability is fundamental to the way we should live, but the increase in awareness recently and the acceptance that sustainability is important means that my views are no longer viewed as simply eccentric!”

“I think that by 2050 London will either be brilliant or it won’t exist in any form we recognise today due to the effects of climate change - it rests on whether as a society we’ve seized the opportunities for sustainability and reduced our carbon footprint.”

As the Chair of the Marks Gate LA21 group, Roger says that initial priorities tended to

relate to issues such as parking and dog fouling. Now their remit is much broader and the Neighbourhood Management pilot has provided momentum and resources. For example the LA21 group has worked closely with the community and borough partners on the development of the local library and adult education centre in Marks Gate.

A range of other initiatives aim at improving the sustainability of the community, all contributing to the enhancement of the natural environment and promoting community cohesion. Community engagement and awareness raising is very important in the success of any project and Roger works particular hard to engage the young population in the community. “Tackling anti-social behaviour is a priority for Marks Gate and for me the challenge is engaging young people before they get drawn into such behaviour. Marks Gate had four borough run youth clubs 30 years ago. Now there is only one in the whole borough, so that the voluntary groups rely on huge individual commitment - many have folded. The need for partnership continues to be crucial in ensuring there are options for our young people.”

One success Roger is proud to be part of is the local composting scheme. Using the model pioneered in Hackney, food waste is collected once a week from homes across Marks Gate. The waste is processed using a Rocket Composter and is subsequently used on local open spaces and allotments. “Take-up has been great and the scheme hugely successful but funding runs out in January 2008 and its future is uncertain. Without long-term support these kind of community initiatives can have no long-term impact.”

The allotments in Marks Gate are something Roger would like to see provide more community benefits. “The LA21 group has undertaken a feasibility study to expand the allotments and provide a new teaching centre and healthy eating initiative. We’re hoping to take this forward and use the centre to raise awareness of sustainable lifestyles.”

¹ The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder process is being piloted by central government. It involves communities working with local agencies to improve services at neighbourhood level.

Roger also recognises the benefits of renewable energy generation, not only for reducing carbon emissions, but also for raising awareness of climate change and sustainability. “The community farm is all about sustainability and in May 2006 we installed a wind turbine on the site in an effort to reduce our carbon footprint and develop a learning resource. Unfortunately we’ve had problems with the site and are yet to reap the benefits but the PV panels we have installed on the playschool extension at the church are working extremely well.”

and then move on step-by-step. Make a start today and it prevents feeling overwhelmed and powerless to change.

The farm has the vision of being a growing place for groups and individuals in leisure, education, training and therapy. Visits to schools reach about 18,000 children a year. The Hands On project links with schools and others working with the disaffected, and a partnership with the Disablement Association of Barking and Dagenham helps volunteering programmes.

Sustainability challenges

“I think the biggest challenge facing a sustainable London is coping with the end of the growth economy. We need to learn to celebrate life in all its fullness. Life isn’t all about acquisition but about harmony, community, and enjoying relationships with other people.”

Roger believes action for sustainability needs to happen at three levels - individual, corporate and company. “The problem is that each is reluctant to engage without the other and we need to work simultaneously if we are going to make change happen.”

“On a positive note I think there has been a recent change in thinking about sustainability in Barking stimulated by the large scale regeneration in the area. People are beginning to recognise the need to think about sustainable development and neighbourhood management if we are going to respond to the community needs in the borough and help to tackle climate change. I think it’s important to raise awareness that individual action can make a difference, if you can’t afford to do everything, do one thing,