

Leading development and investment company John Laing plc has donated £18,000 to conservation charity BTCV to help fund its innovative Green Gym programme.

John Laing, which funds, delivers and manages major infrastructure developments such as hospitals, schools and road projects in the UK and internationally, will enable six existing

community conservation groups to convert into licensed Green Gyms.

With John Laing's financial support, the community groups will become self-sustaining Green Gym groups with trained leaders.

Green Gym is BTCV's award winning programme. Green Gyms operate across the UK and groups meet at least once a week for between one and four hours' practical conservation or gardening work.

BTCV Green Gym is a great way to get fit, meet friends and improve your environment. It is also a great alternative to a conventional gym or sports centre. Activities are led by a qualified leader, and always include: warm up and cool down exercises to prepare the body for activity; training in tools and equipment use; an explanation of how the project will benefit the local environment.

During 2010, six community groups will transform into Green Gyms over the next six to nine months.

One group is looking forward to extending its food growing projects while another, based on a former coalfield site, will continue to work to support wildlife and increase biodiversity.

Yvonne Hunt, BTCV's Health Development Manager, said: "Working out in green spaces is a

great way to relieve stress and can help to combat depression.

“What’s great about Green Gyms is that participants can improve muscle strength, which is particularly important for older people, and can help to maintain independence in later life. “Those taking part say they feeling fitter and have more energy than before.”

David Micciche, CR Director of John Laing plc, said: “We are very pleased to be able to support this worthwhile venture and assist in improving the physical and mental health, and overall

sense of wellbeing of those communities in the proximity of locations where we undertake work.

John Laing has been working in partnership with BTCV for a number of years and has witnessed first-hand the benefits that the charity has made to many peoples’ lives.”

Research shows that 100 per cent of Green Gym participants agreed that taking part benefited their mental health and boosted self-esteem and confidence through learning new skills and completing new tasks.[1]

Green Gyms provide moderate physical activity; people who are regularly active at this level are 50 per cent less likely to suffer from a heart attack or stroke than inactive people.

In addition, almost a third more calories can be burnt in an hour of some Green Gym activities than during a step aerobics class.