

Debbie Cashmore:	00:00	It's like a weird place because we are city people living on the council state in the countryside.
Kevin Whiston:	00:06	Birmingham is just there, Warwickshire there, and South Solihull's there. We're stuck and nobody wants us.
Ronnie Cashmore:	00:13	There's a fantastic strong community over there in Chelmsley Wood and there's some lovely people over here.
Ellen Delaney:	00:19	Chelmsley Wood is the best place ever. It's a fantastic place.
Debbie Cashmore:	00:25	Chelmsley Wood is the butt of a lot of people's jokes and it's very unfair. It's not going to ever be one of the top ten most wanted, desirable places to live in a Sunday supplement, but essentially, I think it's a council estate for Brummies in the countryside.
Brendan Gara:	00:42	You come here and your first thing is you see cars and you see houses and you see flats, but actually once you start looking deeper than that, there's a lot of wildlife. There's a lot of nice green spaces, but it's a funny position because we are hemmed in here, but you've got the NEC, you've got the airport, you've got the M42 coming across the top. We've got the M6 as well. Now we've got HS2. It's slightly claustrophobic as well.
Ronnie Cashmore:	01:05	Nationally, you've got this thing about Chelmsley Wood. People need to come and see the place and find out about the place because sometimes it is sort of talked down a lot. But there's a lot of people around here who have really done well with education and that and it's trying to get an identification.
Debbie Cashmore:	01:24	Essentially, I think Chelmsley Woods are Brummies, but in the mid-seventies we were moved over to Solihull Council who, culturally, are different, so we don't really sit with Birmingham anymore, but we don't really sit with Solihull. It's like Chelmsley Wood has fallen down a crack, really, haven't we, in terms of identity?

Ronnie Cashmore: 01:43

But a few years ago, when they were doing the regeneration over here, which I got involved with, I went on a coach and there was a lot of people that had come down onto this coach trip from Liverpool, Sheffield, Lee's, all over the place, that had really a regeneration in their own areas, and they come down to see Chelmsley Wood. And when they looked at it, and this was only a few years ago, they said it was the greenest estate they'd ever seen. And some say the reason for that is basically it was built on a wood. You look around you now, how beautiful it is here, you can't keep the wood down. It carries on growing up.

Ellen Delaney: 02:21

I think because there's so much green space and you go out and you walk about and we've got so many parks in the area, people are just friendly. They just will say hello. Well, I'll say hello. You know, if you smile, people got to smile back on, haven't they, that's what you've got to do. And I don't know, it's just Chelmsley Wood is ace, I love it.

Debbie Cashmore: 02:42

You have to look at what's here in Chelmsley Wood, and what we've got is we've got some incredible, despite the housing development and the motorways, we've got some incredible green spaces here that actually we could turn into your community asset. Yeah, it's got its problems it's poor prospects, lower life expectancy, but there's a lot of positive stuff that doesn't really come out as well and there's a lot of goodwill and talent and interest in actually making things better. Not from a sort of charity perspective but more from we can do it as a community and we got a lot of green spaces. We think that's a real community asset and we're not making enough use of it.

Ronnie Cashmore: 03:23

We tend to, as a community, make you work for ourselves. You do the little bit that you can, maybe that's all you can do like, you know?

Chelmsley Wood, when I moved down here, I remember, this is me playground because when we moved down to Garrets Green Lane Sheldon after coming from Aston where the only tree you ever see was at Christmas and it wasn't even a real one, it

was more like a lavatory brush. Yeah, so when I came down here, it was completely different. It was all woodland and farmland, and so you could imagine the effects it's had on me. But prior to that, God bless him, me dad had passed away some years ago now when we lived in Aston because he loved the country side and he used to cycle all the way from Aston over to Chelmsley Wood, so I knew the area even before we moved over here and he waited 18 years in the back house until he got exactly the house he wanted, which was over this way.

And when we first moved in, it was all mud actually. It had been given a bad name to be honest and certain newspapers didn't help with that, and it was only because it was mostly people from the inner-city areas that moved into here. Historically, if you go back to the areas, Small Heath, Aston, in the inner-city areas. Those people quite a few years ago now, they struggled. They were in backhouses and places like that. Many of them had been through the war. And they really, really struggled. But what happens is you get a community because people tend to stick together, help each other. And I think it comes from that, you know? So, if you went down Aston or Small Heath, you had community people, and that gets passed on. I think it's important that people know their roots.

You know, I've done about the younger generation, because things have to be passed on orally. Working class history doesn't get written down, so it gets passed on orally, yeah? It's the people who really know what's true, and what isn't. On the community artists, which I have been for some years, I do a lot of stuff in the community with the arts and got me own art practice and write stories and all sorts of stuff like that, yeah. I'm Ronnie Cashmore. I'm Ronnie Cashmore. What I do is I do a lot of storytelling in the classrooms and that, yeah. And we do a lot of story about Chelmsley Wood, which was the original name of Chelmsley Wood, it's Anglo-Saxon. And we do a lot of mythology and that about the place, about the one-eyed Saxon who was the first farmer to farm this place called Chelmsley.

Every year we have a festival over here known as Chelmund's Day where we celebrate the one eyed Saxon Warrior, Chelmund. I'll tell you very, very quickly, I can't do the long version because you haven't got six hours. Basically, it was an Anglo-Saxon Warrior and it is a mythology. It's taking some of the truth and then adding to it, yeah? And he was an Anglo-Saxon warrior who lost his eye in battle after that come over from the area that we know was Germany today. He lost his eye in battle and decided to farm the land over here and that's what he did. The Saxons believed in, what they believed, in elves and they existed. And he had one or two battles with them before they allowed him to chop those trees down. They agreed, basically, that if he supplied them with a certain amount of mead each year, they were quite happy for him to chop their trees down. And there's a hell of a lot of stories in the community that's come from that, and going back to this identity thing, it's good because when kids go off the wood, when they get older, some of them go at university. When they say about Chelmsley Wood that can say they know the mythology behind Chelmsley Wood.

Debbie Cashmore: 07:37

It was kind of a special place because Chelmsley Wood was built to deal with the housing crisis in inner Birmingham you had all these Brummies in the countryside with some garden and a lot of people from Birmingham would come to this area on the weekend to get out into the countryside. And then they've been told that they can move into a new home here, so it was all very new. I was raised on Chelmsley Wood, but I left when I was 18. I've lived all over the world and trained as a fish farmer, lived in all these remote places with space and small communities and the way communities work together. And I came back here after 25 years. Oh, my name's Debbie and I live in Chelmsley Wood.

I didn't want to come back. You're successful in Chelmsley if you get off it. We say here that we live on the Wood and everyone gets off it. I came back because all my family has stayed here. I mean I had flown the nest when I was 18 and I was never coming back.

Although, I didn't realize when I went away that I was actually brought up on a council estate. It didn't dawn on me. It wasn't till I left that I realized there was this issue with council estates. So yes, my family brought me back, met friends and what do we know of this environmental stuff now. I did have plans to leave as soon as I could, but this is just too much fun now.

Kevin Whiston: 08:59 This used to be the Arden Forest. It used to be a massive forest and they just took it out, didn't they? To build houses. I've lived here 50 odd years. I think I was about three years old when we moved up. It was all right, it was a brand new estate when I moved on here. I think it was new. There was still a lot of woodland left. Half of the estate is decreased living here. It used to be the largest council estate in Europe when it was first built. When I was growing up, even from when you're little, you were just let out. There was-

Debbie Cashmore: 09:37 Back at lunch time for a jam sandwich and then back again?

Kevin Whiston: 09:40 No, I mean even like ten, 12, I was off. I'd get up, go out, and come back when it was getting dark. There's woods and fields. There's farm all around us. I mean my dad built my first aviary in the garden when I was about ten. I had birds most of my life until I got married and that sort of, went out the window. No time. As the kids got older and otherwise, I needed as much to look after them and stuff. I could get out a bit more and it sort of started building up. Then going out watching birds and recording sites.

I started volunteering at nature reserve over in Kersal and then I met Debbie and it just started snowballing from there. Oh, my name's Kevin Whiston and we are, at the moment, in Meriden Park in Chelmsley Wood. I'm part of a group called Tribal. Well, a nature-based group trying to bring nature to the masses. Trying to educate at least some of the people on Chelmsley about nature and how to respect it.

- Debbie Cashmore: 10:45 We've been working in setting up Tribal, and you call yourselves, what? A local conservation, land, and social forestry group.
- Kevin Whiston: 10:52 Well, my take on Tribal, it's trying to get the local kids, even their parents, involved in nature. As for getting kids interested, you've got to start them young. We've done a moth-trapping sessions where people come down and watch us trap the moths. We've done a walk over at Babbs Mill for the parakeets. Sorry, I thought I heard a parakeet then. My ears are going all the time, and me eyes.
- Ellen Delaney: 11:23 We wrap our kids up in cotton ball, don't we? I remember as a child getting up, having my breakfast, going outside and playing and you knew when to go in for your lunch and then you knew when to go in for your tea. I grew up on the Isle of Man. I'm a Manx. I could walk down to the beach. I could go down up to the paddocks and I had a totally different childhood. My husband is from Birmingham. I met my husband and we travelled the world and then came back here.
- My name's Ellen Delaney. I'm from Meriden Adventure Playground and we're based in Solihull, which is a little town in Chelmsley Wood. We're an open access adventure playground. This is quite a unique playground as it's an open access. We have swings, we have slides, we have sand pits, we have zip wires with climbing frames and the children can have hammers and nails. They can build dens, they can paint, they can take risks that they don't normally take in every day, which we encourage because you learn life, don't you, when you're allowed to take risks.
- When you walk to walk gates and the main thing you see is two sand areas. There's a huge big, long zip wire on your right. You walk through and you come to some climbing walls. We've got a slide, we've got a huge big metal pyramid on the left. We've also got a fire area and you come, then you walk straight all the way down the main fairway and we've got the big swings. Then you come round the other side and we've got platforms

where the children can build dens. We haven't got any indoor space, so in the winter we literally all camp around the fire to keep warm. We do hot chocolate, we cook on the fire for the kids.

It's a fantastic open facility and it's needed. It's needed for children to be out in plain because I really do believe that children are confined at school all day long. Then they go to their bedrooms and play on the PlayStation or their gadgets and they don't spend enough time outside. It's needed for children's mental health and also for adults as well, isn't it? It's good to be outside. It's an amazing space and we love what we do. We love being in the heart of the community. We're here for 11 years and we plan to be here for a lot, lot longer. We're quite an unusual bunch. Play work is, what we tend to do is we don't jump in and tell children what they can't do. We encourage them to what they can do. You know, for them to take risks and them to play and really to stand back and observe them playing.

Because I think in a whole life there's too many adults telling them what they should do. As a play worker, we stand back and we observe and if the children ask for help, then we'll help them. And I'd say the playground is a community hub. Lots of people and adults come to this play setting and it's where children can be themselves, can be who they need to be and not be what they are told to be.

When I first came to Birmingham, I didn't know a soul. I only knew my husband. My children were born in Holland and we came back here and I didn't know anybody and I met people through the school and that's how I became involved in the community. I joined community groups. I know a lot of lot of people and I wouldn't know the people had it been somewhere else. Chelmsley Wood is a unique place. I've got my job on my doorstep and I can honestly say it's the best job in the world. I wouldn't change it for the world, and I work with the best people. I've got the best team. It's wonderful.

Debbie Cashmore:	14:48	We've got this thing, we're calling it the green estate. It's a bit tongue in cheek, but we're challenging our communities to become the greenest estate in England and how are we going to do that? Well, we're growing an army of friends and our mission is to plant 10,000 bulbs and 1,000 trees put in a hundred artwork, wildlife installations, ten green spaces and one food business. We've struck the first one off, the 10,000 bulbs. We're just gonna keep on going, and just do more stuff.
Brendan Gara:	15:22	It's not about doing good, it's about doing good stuff. It's kind of an original strapline, isn't it? I married into Chelmsley Wood, so I've known it for the past, probably 25 years, but only as a visitor really. We've lived all over the world and we've lived generally in quite rural, remote places where you just take the landscape for granted.
Debbie Cashmore:	15:46	B37 started off as a shop unique for one week as an art venue for people to talk about art and show their art. That was two years ago and we haven't been allowed-
Brendan Gara:	15:59	No, then it was-
Debbie Cashmore:	16:00	To stop. B37 is anybody who wants to get involved, they can.
Brendan Gara:	16:06	And it's supporting projects in art, food and the environment.
Debbie Cashmore:	16:09	We like to bring artists outside the Chelmsley Wood in, because we think that we're interesting, but it's really important also that we support people interest in art who live here and getting them out. You have conversations with people in Chelmsley Wood and they tell us that they can't go to art galleries in Birmingham because it's too posh for them and we're saying "what? Yes you can, you know." And-
Brendan Gara:	16:35	It's empowering people to go out and do stuff.
Debbie Cashmore:	16:37	Because we take over shot units over at the shopping center, and we try and fit it out like it's a professional



looking gallery. Like the first one we painted it completely white and we put some art up on the wall. People were actually frightened to come in and they said, "is this a museum?" and because we wanted to say to people, your worth this, and you need to come into this space and you can create in this space.

It's giving people a platform because art, it transcends class doesn't it? I mean, it sounds cheesy, but we get people coming up and giving us hugs and saying, we love you and you've changed my life. We go, okay, well we haven't, but in a way, yeah. Because we're kind of saying you can do this. Someone told me once that the difference between a good place and a great place to leave is wherever you help to build it, and the more that I'm doing this, the more I'm realizing that it's actually, the change has to come from within the community.