

## Donkey dung lights up Blackpool

The residents of Blackpool have discovered a novel use for one of the more arcane byproducts of its flourishing tourist industry: donkey dung. The dung – which is in plentiful supply in the seaside town – was used earlier this year to fuel streetlights designed by UCL Bartlett School of Architecture lecturer Jan Kattein.

Blackpool Council approached Jan to design a number of projects to encourage urban regeneration in one of the most deprived areas of the town. The donkey dung luminaires sprang out of the design process as a way both to achieve sustainable architecture and to get the local community actively involved in regeneration.

As part of his research Jan is developing urban 'growth initiators' that integrate into existing urban environments to encourage regeneration and direct the growth of the town.

# WHERE THERE'S MUCK, THERE'S LIGHT

The growth initiators provide a sustainable alternative to the rigidity of the traditional urban masterplan, Jan explains: "Where the traditional masterplan requires demolition and reconstruction, the Blackpool catalyst projects are designed to integrate with their local neighbourhood. Rather than dislocating urban communities to superimpose economic development, the growth initiators encourage regeneration from within the community."

The luminaires were designed to require intensive maintenance, Jan says: "They require care, feeding and watering. They are designed to encourage involvement in their maintenance and upkeep. Once installed on site, they call for adoption by local residents. If they don't feed their fermentation vessel with dung or kitchen waste, they won't have light in front of their house at night."

The lamps work by fermenting donkey dung, or kitchen waste, in a tank to form methane gas. The methane is then stored in a series of inflatable bags which supply a gas lamp.

They were made largely from reclaimed materials found either in skips or scrapyards and constructed in the UCL Bartlett School studios by a team of Jan's student volunteers.

While the luminaires were only a temporary installation, they proved very popular with the residents. Caroline Street was chosen because of its close proximity to the donkey stables and because of the intimate relationship that the back-of-pavement terrace has with the street. Most importantly, the street had a sense of community – essential if the luminaires were to be maintained properly.

Methane powered lamps were fairly common in Victorian times and one still exists in London, located off the Strand next to the Savoy Hotel. These were connected – as the Savoy lamp still is – directly to the underground sewerage system where a funnel at the top of the sewer collects the methane and conducts it up into the lamp, where it burns 24 hours a day.



Donkey dung luminaire on-site in Blackpool

