

**VIRAT A SINGH | Mon, 25 Jan 2016-06:30am , DNA**

Juhu residents, who have been battling to save an open space opposite Kaifi Azmi Park at Juhu Scheme 10th Road, now have a reason to celebrate. The park, which was encroached by slums and had become a haven for anti-social elements, has finally been converted into a forest garden and was dedicated to children on Sunday.

The garden is not only totally a totally community driven initiative, as citizens played an active role in its planning and execution along with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), but it has also been designed without the use of concrete.

The garden, which has been named Children Forest Park, has over 400 trees and the entire walking track and play area have been designed using sand and mud, making it better for walking, running and playing for people from all age groups. The garden was inaugurated by actor Anupam Kher.

"This garden is unique in many ways. It has not been 'over-designed' or 'over-planned' just for the sake of it and is without any concrete. It was decided right during the planning stage that it will be left as natural as possible without disturbing the tree cover," said architect Samarth Das, a resident of Juhu, who played an important role in planning and designing of the garden.

He added that the park has been paved with soft gravel bed, layered with coarse sand. The entire area has been designed as a catchment, making it a recharge pit that will aid in recharging ground water.

Juhu resident Ashoke Pandit, who is founder of Save our Open Space (SOS), said it was a big victory for locals, who had been fighting to save open spaces. "We had to file several FIRs and even face attacks while trying to get the encroachments removed from the garden. Our MLA, Ameet Satam, played an important role and helped us set up this park. The BMC designed the park in consultation with citizens. Soon, as per our Juhu master-plan, we will have a green stretch right along the Irla nalla, where people can not only enjoy greenery but walk and cycle as well," he said.

"Mumbai is the city where open space ratio is extremely low. Hence, saving every open space is essential. We are working on several key projects for betterment of Juhu, which will save open spaces and help preserve greenery," said MLA Satam.

Meanwhile, Nandini Jain, a Juhu resident, said, "What made me really happy is that unlike all other gardens, this one does not have a paved walking area. Instead, there is sand and children will love to run on that."