

North West Lands NW01 Wembley

John Sisk and Son Ltd

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Medium Scale Permanent Award

Project overview

Northwest Lands is a £95m D&B residential development in Wembley, on the site of the old Palace of Arts exhibition centre built in 1923 for the British Exhibition. The development is part of an overall 25 year plan by the client Quintain to redevelop the lands around Wembley Stadium, which are mostly old industrial buildings and car parks.

The current development consists of 7 residential blocks, which began in May 2014 and due for overall completion in October 2016.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The previous site of the old Palace of Arts has had various guises over the years, mainly as coach parking, a driving school and most recently badminton courts for the 2012 Olympics. Prior to commencement of the project the site had no vegetation, and consisted of a tarmac and stone surfaced area with little or no biodiversity evident.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

This project is working towards Code for Sustainable Homes (CfSH) Level 4 and as part of the development was assisted by an ecologist to enhance the ecological value of the site.

In response to the Brent Local Biodiversity Action Plan trees have been planted along transport corridors and routes.

In addition, the 2000m² of green roofs installed on the project are part of planning requirements for the development.

In all this project has exceeded the ecological enhancement requirements needed for the ecology CfSH credits, and has gone above and beyond in improving biodiversity in the local area.



Previous site condition with the tarmac being stripped prior to groundwork's. No vegetation has existed on this site for a number of years.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

A number of measures were taken on this development to enhance biodiversity. Planting beds were designed into the landscaping along the public realms of Empire Way and Engineers Way. The podium courtyard was designed to replicate a parkland garden with a mix of planting including, Ferns, Bulbous, Aquatic, Perennial, semi mature trees, shrubs and climbers of both native and non-native species. This provides an array of habitats for all seasons and enhances the diversity of the area.

Native English Oak trees have been planted along the public realms of Empire Way and Engineers Way. This species of tree has been selected as it supports the highest diversity of insect herbivores of any native British plant, and are a much needed habitat for birds such as the Jay, which are increasingly being forced into urban areas in search of habitat and food.

The Brent Biodiversity Action Plan encourages planting along transport corridors and streets to provide a link with nature and help reduce carbon and urban dust. The trees and plants along the public realms provide this and connect the development to surrounding green areas at Raglan Court and the Brent Civic Centre wedding gardens and encourage wildlife into the central podium courtyard.

The Podium courtyard is designed as a private parkland garden for the residents of Northwest Lands. A holistic approach was taken by Sisk at design stage to include an array of planted species with which the residents could interact. Birch Trees, with its paper bark, provide ideal nest building material for birds and also increase the organic matter in the surrounding soil. Cherry blossom trees, water lily's, lavender plants, common box hedging and ivy climber trees all provide an ideal source of pollen for the vulnerable bee population.



The overall planting arrangement allows a natural corridor for fauna to navigate in around the development and provides a link to the gardens at Brent Civic Centre and Raglan Court

Designed plan view of the North West Lands development

In addition 2000m² of green roofs have been installed across the seven blocks to provide habitat for species to propagate naturally with minimal maintenance requirements.

The combination of all these initiatives has greatly enhanced and improved the biodiversity of the Wembley area and the development as a whole, and has had a positive contribution to the surrounding green areas.

How would you best describe the project?

This project has been a major enhancement to the local area in relation to the previous uses of the land developed.

With little or no biodiversity present on the site prior to development, the designed and constructed ecological enhancements for this project have greatly improved the biodiversity potential for the Wembley area and has contributed to the overall development in terms of ecological value.

Further information

The landscaping and planting was completed in sections in line with the handover of each residential block, and so was gradually introduced to the local surroundings. The trees were all handpicked from nurseries in England and Germany a number of months ahead of planting and as such were planted as semi-mature trees so that they could bed into their surroundings quicker.

As the scheme has been designed as a private garden for the residents, it requires minimal maintenance, with this consisting of grass cutting, and trimming hedges. The plants are largely self maintained as there is a large proportion of wildflowers, and the trees have been selected with small leafage to assist in reducing the risk of blocking drains. The aquatic plants in the pond will guard against any stagnation, and the grown roofs are self maintained and require occasional monitoring future visits.

This project has shown how early design involvement from Sisk helped to ensure biodiversity is enhanced in the area and thus enhancing the development and surrounding area in the process.



The podium garden showing completed sections and areas still under construction.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Having been involved on several projects in the regeneration of Wembley, it is important to me that a holistic approach is taken to ensure the design and planning of new developments contribute to the local surroundings, and encourage diversity amongst wildlife that will last for years to come.