

Wellesley Woodlands Aldershot, Hampshire

Grainger plc, The Land Trust

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Large Scale Permanent

Project overview

The Wellesley Woodlands is 110 hectares of biodiverse natural open green space in Aldershot, Hampshire. It is part of the new Wellesley development, a major housing project of 3,850 new homes on former military garrison land.

The new development is being delivered by Grainger plc, the UK's largest listed residential landlord, creating a new community in Aldershot with green urban living at its core.

Grainger has invested £1.5m in creating the Wellesley Woodlands, which was previously unmanaged and unutilised land. The area has been transformed into a community asset, with a network of paths and trails and improved wildlife habitats, bringing people closer to nature. Grainger has partnered with the Land Trust who is managing the woodlands long-term.

Together, they have created a new opportunity for Aldershot offering residents and visitors the chance to enjoy a haven of biodiverse green space.

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

Previously, the woodlands were part of the former garrison training estate. The site was derelict and not actively managed, apart from being used by the soldiers. The woodlands were underused, windblown and substantially overgrown. Ground flora was shaded, streams canalised as well as old infrastructure and issues of contamination further compromising the biodiversity of the area.

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

Wellesley Woodlands has been created as a green space (known as SANGS – Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) to mitigate the impact of the development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA).



Mixed woodland with developing ground floor

This was part of a Section 106 planning obligation to ensure the European nature conservation interests of the SPA were unaffected by the new residents of Wellesley. It has also created opportunities for increasing biodiversity across the new development.

Initially the woodlands project was due to be phased over a 10-year period. However Grainger saw the added value of bringing it forward to enable the green space to be at the heart of their development and be a place where the existing and new Aldershot communities could come together and enjoy.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Grainger's long-term commitment to the project follows its vision of "creating a flourishing community long after the final phases of homes are built" and has enabled investment of time and money into biodiversity enhancement projects that are meaningful to the community.

Partnering with the Land Trust has ensured that the Woodlands will be well maintained in perpetuity for the benefit of local communities and biodiversity. The Land Trust provides the strategic support for the project and has appointed local team, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP), to deliver the day to day management of the Woodlands. BVCP's local knowledge, biodiversity expertise and existing presence within the area ensures that the project is real, credible and actively delivering on all fronts.

In order for the Woodlands to be accessed and enjoyed by the whole community, a large scale transformation was necessary to create high quality, accessible and safe recreational areas.

Activity included:

- Preparation of a detailed management plan for the woodlands that combines community involvement and biodiversity enhancements;
- Meadow creation from former hard-standings;
- Creation of woodland glades to encourage more light at ground level;
- Clearance of laurel, rhododendron and invasive species(e.g. Japanese Knotweed);
- Volunteers helping to create habitats for stag beetles;
- Active management of standing deadwood for invertebrates;



Stumpery to provide Stag Beetle habitat

- Installation of bat boxes;
- Removal of concrete from a modified stream and degradation of banks to a more natural state. (e.g. management of adjacent woodlands to provide a mix of sunny & shady banks);
- Establishing a regular programme of community volunteer days;
- Establishing links with schools to enable the woodlands to be used as part of the new curriculum and as a teaching resource;
- Working with local bee groups to create a Wellesley Apiary;

- Establishment of a programme of Biodiversity Events, including a Wellesley Woodlands festival and school Scavenger Hunt. Programmed events for the future include a small mammal summer workshop, Kids crafts and guided walks. All are organised to highlight and promote biodiversity in the area and are open to all existing and new communities in Aldershot.

So far, these projects and habitat improvements have already resulted in an overall net gain to the Wellesley Woodlands.

How would you best describe the project?

The project was initially created to mitigate the effects the Wellesley development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. However Grainger has seen the value of the project beyond this initial role, and built in community and biodiversity elements that go well beyond the initial requirements - these should be considered enhancements.

Further information

The creation of the Wellesley Woodlands falls into three areas of work: remedial works, establishment works and on-going management.

Initially, remedial works were undertaken to remove old army infrastructure (air raid shelters, rubbish dumps, assault course, razor wire etc.) from the woodlands. Once cleared, the Land Trust carried out works to enable access of the woodlands by the local community - this included creating walking routes and paths through areas prone to erosion, installing signs, way markers and benches, making safe dangerous trees along identified routes, and constructing car parks to encourage access for all.

Alongside this, BVCP has started working with the local community, involving them with specific projects and establishing conservation management across the woodlands. This work is on-going with regular monitoring of species and use of the woodlands by the local community.



Woodland sculptures designed by local community

A full set of baseline ecological surveys was carried out as part of the planning application and this has given us a starting point against which we can assess biodiversity trends. We are still in the early stages of this monitoring, but with the management of the woodlands specifically targeted to increase biodiversity, and with all necessary resources available, significant increases are expected.

Therefore, the Wellesley Woodlands will bring significant long-term benefits to biodiversity by improving and increasing habitats. It will also benefit the community by supporting cohesion, enabling people to lead healthier lifestyles, improving public health and wellbeing, creating educational opportunities and enhancing the local economy.



The key to the successful delivery of Wellesley Woodlands was the genuine partnerships and relationships created by key stakeholders and the community. Grainger, The Land Trust, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership Team, the Ministry of Defence, and Rushmoor Borough Council have come together to support, guide and create these woodlands.

[What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?](#)

Grainger's core business is residential homes. However it recognises the value of community and biodiversity in making an area a great place to be, and in turn, adds value to its development. Wellesley Woodlands makes good social, environmental and ultimately economic sense, and is part of a holistic vision to provide tenants with a property that is a home, rather than just a house.

