

The Birds, Bees, Bats, Bugs project (the 4B's)

Freshwater Fields, Isle of Wight Lordshill, Southampton & Addison Close, Gillingham

Spectrum Premier Homes, Spectrum Housing Association, Arc Consulting

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Community engagement

Project overview

Birds, Bees, Bats, Bugs project or 'the 4Bs' as it's known for short was started by Spectrum in 2014 and has carried out a huge number of big biodiversity challenges this year.

A 'Nature Nearby' initiative, it has involved literally hundreds of Spectrum residents on communities on the Island and South Coast, as well as staff from Spectrum Housing Group, Spectrum Premier Homes and Spectrum Property Care, developers Drew Smith and grounds maintenance contractors.

Arc Consulting were commissioned to devise and carry out with Spectrum's Community Investment, Resident/Housing & Development teams a series of biodiversity improvements and community activities at Freshwater, Lordshill and Gillingham - the mission being to design-in wildlife in our new developments, and revive uninspiring and underutilised green infrastructure across



Photo: Freshwater Fields resident planting team

existing estates and communities, to increase biodiversity, increase opportunities for wildlife encounter and improve community wellbeing through more contact with nature. Cost around £20,000 over the year.

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

At Addison Close, greenspace was dominated by sterile, amenity greens and empty or patchy flower beds. At Lordshill, greenspace improvements were initiated in 2014 and improving biodiversity; this year's work took that a stage further.

At Freshwater, greenspace and wooded areas leftover on these former school grounds were in decline.

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

Spectrum's 4Bs initiative grew out of the success of its earlier Natural Wight project which encouraged residents and Islanders to explore nature on their doorstep and in response to resident surveys identifying interest in supporting urban wildlife.

4Bs was begun therefore to bring nature to that doorstep itself through engagement and on-the-ground improvements.

At Freshwater, our first new development on the Island, ecological compliance, mitigation and condition fulfilment were the prompt but the 4Bs and Beyond Bricks & Mortar ethos went even further with opportunities for biodiversity and wildlife encounter in the shared spaces designed also to support and engage the new/existing communities.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

At Freshwater Fields, the installation of 50 swift boxes and restoration of a small woodland, and 4Bs 'pollinator' planting in shared spaces have not only created new habitat and rejuvenated the existing spaces, but also involved local community and build team all along.

Spectrum's conservation volunteers Green Army (young NEETs) worked with Arc to restore the copse, learning to coppice, plant trees and creating reptile/invertebrate habitat from the coppiced wood/mulch.

Welcome packs for new residents featured information explaining about the copse as a wild space while a swift newsletter invited all to keep an eye on the skies and join the national swift survey!



Photo: Making bug habitat - Addison Close Bee-wall Day

Camp Lodge Copse was opened and celebrated by 40 residents planting woodland plants, with a wildlife safari including bughoovering and wild food foraging.

In Lordshill, this year's work, with residents advising at every stage, involved the transformation of a neglected space with pollinating plants and bug house.

Additional sculpted Artecology bird boxes by Eccleston George were installed in two trees chosen by local residents.

Young residents joined Spectrum and Arc for this year's Wildplay day, planting a 'butterfly bar' of dog violets, larval food-plant of nearby silver-washed Fritillary butterfly, followed by a photographic expedition/bioblitz around

the estate's transformed greenspaces and focussing on birds and invertebrates.

At Gillingham, the focus was bees. Linking with Ventnor Botanic Gardens and Eccleston George, Arc and Spectrum worked with residents, replanting redundant, sterile green triangles with self-sustaining, pollinating gardens and transforming a breezeblock wall into a sculpted habitat for mining bees using materials donated by Jewson but also incorporating natural habitat collected from the local river by the children volunteering with us.

As well as participating in the improvements, the children explored their surroundings with river-dipping, bug-hoovering, bird-feeder making and natural art. All of this is definitely replicable and we are already replicating it everywhere we go!

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

Freshwater Fields :

- 4Bs management plan and planting palette for communal spaces from Arc.
- 50 swift boxes installed with support from RSPB/Swift Conservation.



Photo: Magnifying our wildlife finds at Camp Lodge Copse

- Community consultation and engagement, including Freshwater Parish Council, with programme of activities and work parties such as Green Army volunteer day and a work programme in the copse with grounds contractors. Celebration and wildlife safari to bring all together.
 - culminating with wildlife expedition.
- Gillingham:
- Winter consultations with residents using nature-related art and making bird feeders.
 - Production of the 4Bs for Addison Close Plan by Arc with planting plan finalised and plants sourced, liaison with local authorities etc.
 - Series of planting & sculpting days with Ventnor Botanic & Eccleston George creates 4Bs gardens and Bee-Wall. Arc report 10 species of butterfly in first spring/summer, badger activity, slow worms and several new beetle records from habitat piles.
- Lordshill :
- Visits to discuss ideas for green space improvements with residents.
 - Green space planted and 2 arctology birdboxes plus second of 2 bug houses installed.
 - Wildplay day supplements 2014's woodland understory restoration work with 'butterfly bar' planting

At Lordshill, residents reported nesting birds including nuthatches and BAP-list sparrows, plus woodland flowers supporting hover and butterflies.

Long-term benefits include improved community satisfaction and engagement. We think this model works. Exploring what nature's nearby first and what needs support – what connectivity can you build or encourage.

Build a plan and a team by linking with local specialists like our mix of ecologists, artists, wildlife specialists, inventors, and by talking to local communities and utilising all your staff's range of skills, then encourage imagination, enthusiasm, engagement and exploration among everyone who participates!

Don't forget about recording your project's progress and asking people to engage in citizen science and monitor improvements to biodiversity.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Pulling the first flowering plant out of your van in a concrete car park and seeing a relieved hoverfly land straightaway.



Photo: Ian Boyd - Arc firing up the bug hoover at Camp Lodge Copse

Watching children's absolute awe as they explore a restored woodland and discover a slow worm for the first time ever.

Seeing young adults fill with energy and confidence as they discover skills they didn't know they had and fresh air they'd forgotten existed.

Being part of a movement that supports biodiversity with as much energy and innovation as we can muster and seeing new and stronger communities forming as a result.