

HEROES WOOD
DEBDALE PARK, GORTON, GREATER MANCHESTER
CITY OF TREES / GALLIFORD TRY AND PROJECT PARTNERS

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Community Engagement

Project overview

Heroes Wood is a commemorative woodland in the grounds of Debdale Park in Gorton, Manchester, a project led by charity City of Trees with the support of groups and partners including Galliford Try (corporate partner). A number of partners collaborated raising funding, materials and volunteers to create the woodland.

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

Prior to enhancement the site was dominated by amenity grassland with very limited in biodiversity value. The project team engaged with the Friends of Group and park manager to develop a design, and ensure that this reflected everyone's views and preferences. Careful consideration was given to the selection of species. There was a preference for native species, making the connection to a British war memorial and providing an important future habitat for native birds, insects and mammals. City of Trees was required to submit a planning application to Manchester City Council, because of the engineering works associated with the construction of the walkway and memorial space.

Path / seating area installation



Trees awaiting planting





What were the reasons behind this project ?

The woodland was created as part of the WW1 Centenary Events, taking place between 2014 – 2018, to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War, this is the first commemorative woodland in the North West. City of Trees will work with a range of corporate partners, Manchester City Council, local community groups and school children to ensure that Heroes Wood is managed to maximise benefit to both people and wildlife. Project partners prioritised engagement with residents and the wider community to promote respectful appreciation of the sacrifice made by local people in the First World War and the wildlife that the new woodland will support. The need to increase woodland is key to the Greater Manchester element of the Northern Forest Initiative, which is cited in the DEFRA 25 year Environmental Plan.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

73 semi mature trees were planted, including large Oak trees alongside lime, hornbeam, scots pine and beech, which are all native trees, as this was about creating a 'tree tribute' to UK soldiers. In total half a hectare area of new habitat was created. The Oak trees will in particular provide a long term living memorial, some Oak trees can live for more than a 1000 years. Not only will the Oaks be around for a long time but they are also extremely important from a wildlife perspective,! Mature Oak trees can support up to 423 different species of insects, birds and mammals. Even after they die, Oak trees are said to have an 'afterlife' of another 300 years providing deadwood habitats for woodpeckers, beetles, birds and much more. A poppy 'trench' was created along the border of the woodland attracting birds, bees, and other insects. They are especially good at attracting bees, which are excellent pollinators.

One of the main objectives of the project was to engage with the community to educate and promote biodiversity awareness and enhancement, using the medium of commemoration to initiate interaction. There has been a host of public participation planting events, with support from over 50 local volunteers and 60 students of Wright Robinson College (11-16 school). Students learned about the historical significance of the poppy, as well as the biodiversity value of wildflowers and are using this information to produce interpretive material for the site and as a learning resource for other schools.



Poppy trench and community tree planting session



Community tree planting session

Further information

Key installation steps:

- Native trees were sourced
- Planning permission obtained
- Construction of the pathway and memorial space – excavation, sub base, geotextile, top base, edging
- Sourced memorial stone seating and engraved inscriptions
- Installation of memorial stone seating
- Planting trees– excavators, tree pits, planting by volunteers, staking/tree guards
- Excavation of poppy trench - removal of top layer of soil & grass, installation of grit sand as infertile growing medium to stop grass regrowth, sewing poppy seed in trench with seed
- Regular monitoring of trees, watering trees as required

The site is still in its early days, and the trees need to establish and grow to provide habitats for birds/insects/mammals. Last year the poppy meadow did very well, and pollinators including bees and hoverflies were recorded.

The legacy from the project is broad reaching, and includes:

- Habitat creation / attracting a greater diversity of insect, bird and mammals
- Engagement of the community, an increase in local volunteering
- An increase in biodiversity awareness
- Creating a place of contemplation & tranquillity–for both people and wildlife
- Demonstrating how redundant amenity grassed areas can be transformed into places of interest and wildlife benefit – which will hopefully encourage the delivery of similar projects elsewhere

The project was ambitious, especially the choice of semi mature trees. On reflection, even more contractual help with mechanical plant would have reduced need for manual labour, however, involvement of volunteers created a real sense of ownership.

“This project would not have been feasible or deliverable without the support of partners, in particular Galliford Try. Projects like this need private sector support in this age of austerity and ever increasing competition for finite resources. Without partners this project would never have happened.” Pete Stringer, City of Trees.



Armistice Day 2017, official opening ceremony



Galliford Try volunteer team, proud after a day of planting trees