

Bringing the 4Bs to Addison Close Addison Close, Gillingham, Dorset

Spectrum Housing Association, Arc Consulting

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Pollinator

Project overview

To redesign a housing estate's public realm and urban greenspace, create a significant pollinator resource throughout at the same time as bringing colour, seasonal change and wildlife encounter to local residents.

The community of Addison Close were involved in all the pre-planning and planting day events; the community investment team at Spectrum, the Arc consultants, Eccleston George Public Artists and Ventnor Botanic Gardens collaborated in planning and delivery.

The project also established a contact with Gillingham Town Council and their work with the Dorset Wildlife Trust on riverside land management in the town.

The total project cost was £8000. The total value with in-kind donations of materials and time was over £15,000.

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



Photo: Replacing plain grass with pollinators

The greenspace was dominated by sterile, high maintenance mown greens and empty or patchy flower beds.

Much wildlife activity nearby along the adjacent River Lodden was explored through the project's initial engagement work but little was evident in the estate itself – poor ecological connectivity between the two.

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

The main driver for the project has been '4Bs', an initiative launched by Spectrum:

Birds, Bees, Bats, Bugs – a mission to revive uninspiring and underutilised green infrastructure across its estates and communities, to increase biodiversity, increase opportunities for wildlife encounter and improve individual and community wellbeing through more contact with nature – key objectives of the Natural Environment White Paper.

Work by Arc Consulting on solitary bees, pollination and habitat creation,

brought a focus within 4Bs on merging built and planted urban environments for pollinator conservation.

This has led to a close cooperation between 4Bs and Arc and Ecclestone George's 'Artecology' programme.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Addison Close is a new way of looking at urban public landscaping.

A self-sustaining mix of wildlife foodplants and striking garden flowers to fill all the available niches, reducing maintenance to nothing within 3 years, and populating other areas nearby - even the 'weed flora' in the estate will be beautiful and good for wildlife.

The technique, which can be replicated anywhere, was designed by Ventnor Botanic Gardens based on 20 years of experience in 'synthetic ecosystems'.

The innovation is in the locally bespoke mix of species (without invasive risks) that can fill the selected public spaces with colour and wildlife from a strategic starter planting.

At Addison Close the planting was combined the with 'Artecology' – making



Photo: Bee wall under construction

the built environment biodiverse. A concrete block wall screening bins but ugly and out of place, was redesigned (with the help of local families and children as well as Spectrum staff) by artists Ecclestone George with a sculpted concrete finish to create a nesting site for mason bees, becoming a piece of public architecture with a unique sense of place.

By planting new pollen and nectar sources next to the bee wall we have created conditions for breeding bee species and others associated with them, a local hub of easily visible wildlife activity (all safe to watch at close quarters).

The patchwork of new plant assemblages will also attract wildlife from the adjacent Lodden meadows

and river corridor – butterflies, dragonflies, and a diversity of other species, some BAP and NERC priorities - that will forage for food in the estate and so be something visible to those who live there.

This ecological link made is being followed up with signage and interpretation to encourage residents to explore and enjoy more of the wildlife highlights that will begin to visit their gardens.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The Addison Close project happened in stages.

Winter public engagement, wildlife and arts activities in the playground, talking to residents, discussing plans

for new planting and wildlife work.

Once plans and ideas were agreed with local people, and Spectrum as landowner, the 'synthetic ecology' approach was developed with Ventnor Botanic Gardens and the plants needed sourced from the Garden's stocks.

Site visits then selected key planting areas, each replacing areas of low biological value; each also positioned to seed into and enhance other parts of the surrounding public realm.

Plans for the 'bee wall' were discussed at the same time. Once final designs were agreed between project partners and local residents, implementation days were advertised to residents and young volunteers drummed up.

Two spring planting days and two days working on the bee wall each involving residents, personnel from Spectrum, Arc, Ventnor Botanic and Eccleston George. Jewson donated sand for the bee-wall for free.

Included in engagement and activity days were explorations of the Lodden riverside, beginning the process of connection around biodiversity, building



Photo: Completed bee wall

the idea of the urban and riparian greenspace being one continuous resource for residents to make their own.

The lesson here is that you need to take your time, several small interventions, all connected, is the best way.

It doesn't matter if budgets are uncertain – starting on a journey with a clear purpose, and intervening effectively in small doses when possible, but persisting – this is how to make a difference and give people a real opportunity to get involved and shape that change for themselves.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

A frustration at the ever-increasing dullness of most public realm and yet the huge opportunities for simple interventions that bring places to life.

A belief in the power of wildlife encounter and 'nature nearby' to boost individual and community wellbeing. A desire to act on both at the same time.