Shaftesbury Pollinator project
Carnaby, London W1
Shaftesbury PLC

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Pollinator

Project overview
The objective of the project was to increase biodiversity in central London by increasing the provision of sedum pods, pollinator friendly planted window boxes, hanging baskets and planter boxes throughout the Carnaby village. The project was a key objective of Shaftesbury's Corporate Sustainability Strategy for 2016.

It was coordinated by Shaftesbury staff in the head office management team and implemented by the estate staff. Planters and sedum pods were located on vacant service roofs; hanging baskets and window boxes are located throughout the area. The cost was £513 for the pods. There was no additional charge for the change to the plant species in the planters and hanging baskets as these were already budgeted for as part of ongoing management.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?
Prior to enhancement the diversity of plants was limited. Some hanging baskets were available but plant composition was selected for visual rather than biodiversity benefits and service roofs were sterile concrete with no habitat provision.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?
Biodiversity enhancement in central London has been an ongoing corporate objective for Shaftesbury since 2009. Initially the focus was on opportunities as part of refurbishment projects such as the inclusion of green roofs, walls and small scale features such as bird boxes.

Sedum pods in situ on service roof at 71 Broadwick Street, Carnaby

However, having joined Wild West End in 2015, the decision was made to investigate opportunities to enhance the biodiversity in parts of the portfolio which were not subject to refurbishment.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The project includes two elements: the installation of 25 mixed species sedum pods, each 1 square metre in size on selected service roofs and the inclusion of pollinator friendly species within 46 hanging baskets, 635 window boxes and planter boxes.

The pods comprise up to 12 species of sedum ensuring optimal year round performance; a coarse substrate of recycled organic material acts as a growing medium all contained within a lightweight 100% recycled plastic tray.

A planting regime for the hanging baskets and planters has been implemented that uses nectar rich flowering plants during the summer months such as geranium, fuchsia, lobelia, bacopa and salvia. During the winter perennial evergreens, ivy, lavender and buxus are used as the base with seasonal flowering plants added for colour. In the spring, primulas are added to provide a food source for bees early in the season.

The use of the pods, hanging baskets and window boxes is easy to replicate throughout the portfolio. Indeed, it is intended that one of the corporate sustainability objectives for 2017 is to extend the programme to other parts of the portfolio in Covent Garden, Chinatown and Soho. The combination of the sedum pods, planters, hanging baskets and window boxes create small areas of habitat which it is hoped will interlink with the larger areas of green roofs in adjacent buildings.

Engagement with staff is ongoing with the small internal team of 27 employees being constantly updated on the progress of the initiative. Community engagement has included a stall at the recent Carnaby Street Eat event in July 2016 to promote Wild West End and biodiversity.

Stall at Carnaby Street Eat.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The Carnaby Street Eat event was a one day food festival in the 13 streets of Carnaby with over 30 food trucks and stalls. As pictured, the Wild West End initiative and the Shaftesbury biodiversity initiatives were promoted with the emphasis on informing visitors to the food festival of the importance of enhancing habitats for pollinators. Features on the stand included pots of honey from beehives located on roofs in Shaftesbury's holdings in Covent Garden and free sachets of seeds for pollinator friendly plants.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

For the hanging baskets and window boxes it is important that maintenance should be undertaken throughout the year to ensure that the displays are visually appealing as well as fulfilling the aims of promoting a healthy pollinator population in the area.

Installation of the pods relies on accessibility to service roofs. Due to the pods' manageable size they can be easily carried by hand to the selected locations. They also need minimal maintenance once in place.

Going forward similar roofs will be selected and larger areas installed where space allows. Areas will be selected not only on the basis of accessibility but also to maximise the number of pods that can be used. Limitations which have to be considered in extending the project are not only accessibility but the weight bearing potential of the roofs.

As the project has only commenced this year the biodiversity benefits have not yet been fully assessed, but as part of the Wild West End project annual surveys are proposed which will assess the biodiversity enhancements achieved. A baseline survey was undertaken in early summer. However, as the photograph demonstrates, the new planter boxes on Shaftesbury's green roof are successfully attracting bees.

Wild West End is a collaboration between the West End's largest property owners. We are working together to encourage birds, bees and bats back into this iconic area of London, and create greater connections with nature for residents, visitors and workers to enjoy. Wild West End is a unique partnership between The Crown Estate, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, The Portman Estate, Howard de Walden and Shaftesbury. See www.wildwestend.london

Bees on new rooftop planter boxes, Carnaby (5/8/16)

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The belief that urban environments can support wildlife and even small scale enhancements can provide opportunities for increased biodiversity. Furthermore the awareness of the decline of pollinating species such as bees and the need to provide more food sources has driven the project.