

Wild West End London/England

Arup, The Crown Estate, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, The Portman Estate, Shaftesbury, Howard de Walden

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Client Award

Project overview

Wild West End is a unique partnership between large landholders The Crown Estate, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, The Portman Estate, Howard de Walden and Shaftesbury. Situated between the large areas of parkland within London's West End, the partnership aims to create a connecting network of green stepping stones through a combination of green roofs, green walls, planters, street trees, flower boxes and pop-up spaces retrofitted on existing buildings, and installed within new developments.

Supporting the installation of new space and enhancement of existing spaces is a programme of monitoring, target setting, specification guidance, engagement events and sharing of good practice. With a long term vision, Wild West End partners 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. Progress and case studies are shared on our website www.wildwestend.london

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

The partnership area contained a number of large garden squares with moderate-high biodiversity value, with limited connectivity provided by street trees, window boxes and moveable planting beds. Few green roofs existed overall, for instance, The Crown Estate's portfolio of over 200 buildings had one single green roof of approximately 50m².

Were there any specific reasons that led to this project?

Wild West End was initiated by The Crown Estate, evolving from their work with Arup establishing an Ecology Masterplan for their London Estate. The Masterplan adopts a strategic estate-wide approach responding to BREEAM Ecology requirements and emerging Westminster City Council policy. At different stages of their biodiversity planning, the other landowners realised as neighbouring estates, that collaboration would benefit the whole area.



Wild West End Vision

Now established, continued drivers for the partnership include addressing growing concern for biodiversity loss, the quality of the local environment in Central London, and increasing tenant awareness of the linkages between green space and wellbeing.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The Wild West End approach is replicable in all areas where property owners and developers are able to come together to enhance their portfolios, working towards a common goal. Arup facilitated the Wild West End partners in signing up to a shared vision, objectives and principles, and established a strong brand, Wild West End, to support communications and a range of stakeholder engagement activities.

Arup's digital team created a website to publicly front the campaign, and their ecologists carried out extensive surveys in collaboration with London Wildlife Trust (LWT) to define the baseline biodiversity conditions against which future improvements will be measured. The Greater London Authority and LWT were approached as strategic partners, and engagement was undertaken with key collaborators including Business Improvement Districts, RSPB, TfL, Natural England and academic institutes.

Criteria and guidance for different features was developed to ensure a consistent quality of green space across the partner estates, and encourage a focus towards designing for multi-functionality. Our overriding principles are displayed on our website (<http://www.wildwestend.london/vision/>), and target improvement for BAP species including bats, the black redstart, and the stag beetle.

As all work is either being undertaken to improve existing green spaces for biodiversity, including retrofitting onto existing assets, or the creation of green spaces on new developments, our measures will result in a biodiversity net gain.



Wild West End community engagement events

All partners have volunteered their own time to engage with tenants, workers and the public through hosting or attendance at events. These include Howard de Walden's Marylebone fair, Grosvenor's Summer in the Square, Shaftesbury's Carnaby Street Eat, the Portman Street Party, and The Crown Estate's Summer Streets (traffic-free Sundays) at Regents Street in July. The Crown Estate are specifically engaging tenants directly, monitoring the perception of the new green spaces through occupier satisfaction surveys.

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancement

Further information

Since beginning improvement works, The Crown Estate has increased its green space from a baseline of 50m² in 2012 to over 2,800m². Both The Crown Estate and Grosvenor Britain & Ireland have included the Wild West End biodiversity matrix as a requirement for all their development projects. Similarly, as part of Wild West End, the partners have committed to monitoring biodiversity across their estates to measure progress. Arup and LWT completed cross-portfolio baseline surveys in 2016, recording birds and bats throughout, and the relative abundance of plants within significant green spaces. These results will be tracked through repeated surveys every two years.

All partners have signed up to commitments included within a Memorandum of Understanding, and progress is tracked during quarterly meetings. Lessons learned from implementation is shared between partners as they tackle issues including how to establish good practice in design specification, balance competing space demands, overcome challenges of retro-fit, particularly on heritage assets, and resource for planned maintenance and monitoring.

Whilst biodiversity is a major driver of the partnership, our objectives also target the multiple benefits of green infrastructure. Therefore, each new green space must target at least two beneficial functions of green infrastructure including biodiversity, water retention, mental and/or physical health, noise and smell, and local cooling effects. Design requirements for each function have been established, which partners aim to communicate to their stakeholders early on in the development process. In the long term, we aspire to have created a multifunctional, beneficial ecosystem in the West End.



Roof Terrace, 10 New Burlington Street, The Crown Estate

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

We saw a need to move the industry beyond a box-ticking approach, which can lead to installation of green space with low biodiversity value. Instead, the partnership wanted to create greater awareness of how to develop purposeful connected green spaces which benefit both people and the environment.