

## Lliswerry Pond Project The Greater West Programme – Newport

ABC Electrification

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement Award

### Project overview

Lliswerry Pond is situated alongside the South Wales mainline railway in Newport. It formed when an underground stream was struck during quarrying excavations in the last century. The area is urban and the adjacent wards of Alway and Lliswerry are some of the most deprived areas of Wales. As a contractor for Network Rail, ABC Electrification are undertaking major works on the mainline between Bristol and Cardiff. During 2015 we developed a relationship with the Ponds committee to address the historic flooding issues caused by a blocked reën between the pond and the mainline. Since then we have provided ongoing support by strengthening the pond embankments and developing new access platforms. We involved the nearby school, supporting them with environmental educational activities at the pond. Additional sessions and ongoing support is planned to enable

the pond to become a thriving resource in this deprived community.

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

The pond is managed by a voluntary group who experienced challenges in obtaining funding and support to maintain and manage the pond.

Following our initial support with the reën clearance the pond committee identified that they needed support to stabilise some of the embankments- we actioned these works and the building of a new platform which would enable better access for more users of the pond.

As a close neighbour to the electrification works we believe that our support of the local community through the work at the pond will bring long lasting benefit to the area.



*Lliswerry Pond adjacent to the mainline - pond dipping with Alway Primary on the new access platform*

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

Conditions were of a good standard before carrying out the improvements. However the historic blockage of the reën and the associated flooding had led to many of the embankments becoming eroded thus limiting access to certain user groups, especially in winter.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

As a freshwater habitat, Lliswery pond qualifies as a priority habitat under the Newport Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). Furthermore, the pond provides an important habitat to a number of aquatic and semi aquatic species, including LBAP priority species.

Working with the ponds management group, a number of opportunities were identified to improve the ponds accessibility to a wider group of local residents for recreational and educational purposes. This was undertaken in support of the Newport LBAP objective to '*raise awareness of freshwater habitats and the benefits they bring us*'.

By providing the labour and machinery for clearing the blocked reed, access to the pond is now able to be maintained more easily, meaning visitors can make use of the pond regardless of weather conditions.

Most important for the accessibility of the pond, was the stabilisation of the embankments and the creation of platforms. These allow local fishermen and other interested parties safer access to the pond.

Further to the physical improvements, the project has arranged a number of educational visits to the pond with children from the local school. These included pond dipping and a wildlife treasure hunts designed to teach the children about the species and habitat, and encourage their interest in nature. This included special needs children at the school who have reduced opportunities for these activities due to the restricted access at the pond the high level support needed to facilitate this.



*Pond bank stabilisation works*

These visits have been run primarily by project staff volunteers but have also included talks and support from the projects ecological consultants and members of the local swan rescue group.

The support provided to this group has been met with a great deal of positive feedback and plans are in place to provide further development throughout the lifetime of the project in Newport.

How would you best describe the project? An enhancement

### Further information

In the current times of austerity where community assets such as ponds and libraries are being transferred from local authority departments to voluntary groups, it demonstrates innovative partnership working between private and voluntary sector, helping to ensure these community assets continue to be well maintained.

The engagement of the local school helped to promote the pond to local residents, raising the profile of the area and its tireless volunteers. We recruited internal staff through our volunteering initiatives and were able to upskill them to deliver activities and engage with children. This helped us to further our schools engagement strategy and through this approach we have utilised over 80 hours of volunteer time at this site.

The Overall project included: Clearance of the reed from the historical blockages, stabilising the collapsed pond embankments, Support for the building of a new access platform with additional resources to develop these.

A key learning point is that we worked with the committee to support their thoughts on development and improvement. We listened to their ideas and actioned them allowing us to foster a strong relationship and help the pond to develop its own strategy for long term growth and support from the wider local community.

We have enabled the pond to gain a wider reputation and provide a great resource for people in a much deprived urban area.



*Alway Primary pupils analysing the rich variety of pond life from their pond dipping activities*

### What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Our initial involvement came from an historic drainage issue. The motivation to help them from seeing the fantastic determination of the volunteers who had made amazing progress with little support from the wider community. We believe that our help will stimulate further long term improvements to this biodiverse oasis in a deprived urban community.