

Freshwater Fields

Freshwater, Isle of Wight

Arc Consulting, Spectrum Premier Homes, Spectrum Housing Association and Drew Smith

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Large scale permanent

Project overview

The Freshwater Field project shows the sky's the limit when seeking to bring biodiversity into new development.

This was Spectrum Premier Homes' first build on the Island - 50 new houses in a 1.55 hectare site on the outskirts of West Wight's largest village Freshwater.

25 of the new houses are affordable housing (double the requirement) and the remainder open market/shared ownership.

Ecologists from Arc Consulting, the build team at SPH and Drew Smith, volunteers and new residents have collaborated to fantastic effect throughout the life of the development, ensuring the conservation of locally important natural and cultural heritage, supporting a nationally rare and iconic bird species, the swift, and creating as a result a flagship development that is already being used to incentivize other national house-builders.

The actual cost of the project was around £7500 but the team at Arc and Spectrum staff volunteered



Photo: Green Army (NEETs) volunteers

time and effort beyond this.

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

The site, after the closure of West Wight Middle School, had become increasingly derelict.

Greenspace, small wooded areas and garden plots associated with the working school and its grounds were in decline and the biological value of these spaces was suffering from neglect and lack of management.

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

This Spectrum development was the first to be directed and shaped from the start by the company's 4Bs initiative – 'Birds, Bees, Bats, Bugs'.

Ecological compliance, mitigation and condition fulfilment were taken further than required to exemplify the use of the built and landscaped environment of the development to maximise biodiversity and wildlife encounter in shared spaces designed to support the wellbeing of new residents.

The retention and positive management of abandoned green infrastructure (Camp

Lodge Copse) together with an estate-wide landscaping strategy with high invertebrate appeal and new built habitat for birds combined to make a 4Bs showcase!

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Freshwater Fields created and restored urban habitats, making high biodiversity and wildlife encounter fundamental principles from the beginning.

A small copse, part old cherry orchard (BAP habitat) bought by Spectrum as part of the site acquisition, but closed and unused for years, was rehabilitated as the perfect public greenspace; somewhere which can be enjoyed by new residents and the existing community alike, where people can share activities to care for the copse and surrounding greenspace.

Simple yet effective management prescriptions were written, designed new path layout, organised contractors and programmed volunteer days, all around copse restoration and other estate wildlife interventions:

- A '4B's planting palette designed by Arc Consulting for all communal spaces of the



Photo: Discovering a slow worm

- development – replacing generic plant choices with nectar and pollen sources, foliage, seed and fruit, for wildlife and for colour.
- Red clover in grass seed mixes to bring pollinator power to open greens.
- A planted pear tree gateway into Camp Lodge Copse.
- Reptile/amphibian/beetle shelters made from the coppice timber and woodchip left over from copse management.
- Hand-made 'Artecology' outdoor bird boxes together with 50 inbuilt swift nestboxes (high priority BAP and NERC species) incorporated into new homes.

Innovation at Freshwater Fields has been in the integration of 4Bs principles into every part of development, from site care during construction to habitat creation and restoration and community engagement after completion.

It has been wonderful to see the quality of the shared environment that has resulted and the speed with which the new estate has filled.

Drew Smith have been key, demonstrating environmental care and safeguarding well beyond the Considerate Constructors benchmark.

This ethos spread to collecting waste wood from site and passing it on to other community and school projects on the Island.

Grounds maintenance contractors collaborated, helping with community planting events and the selection of pollinator-friendly species.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The installation of 4Bs worked as follows:

- Maximum retention of greenspace and tree cover during planning; prescriptions for green infrastructure management.
- Swift boxes in buildings, working with RSPB on optimum nestbox design and siting.



Photo: 50 swift boxes installed

- Whole team collaboration on approaches to soft landscaping and green infrastructure.
 - Management Plan for Camp Lodge Copse restoration written.
 - ‘Hedgerow Harvest’ plants from Tree Council for Camp Lodge Copse replanting.
 - Winter work to coppice and thin copse, work with Groundsell to provide training to Green Army Spectrum volunteers/NEETs.
 - New hedges planted around copse perimeter.
 - Community consultation and engagement, including Freshwater Parish Council, with programme of activities
 - and work parties - wildlife safaris, food for free, wildflower planting, litter picking.
- Biodiversity benefits are already apparent – greater botanical diversity following coppicing, 10 species of butterfly in first spring/summer, badger activity, slow worms and several new beetle records from habitat piles.
- The concentration of biodiversity intervention in the copse is carefully connected out into the wider development by the special plant choices in the landscape planting, vital to achieve the long term objective of functional ecological network and widespread wildlife encounter.

Freshwater Fields has been a project 2 years in the making and there is much still to come.

The key lesson learned has been the tremendous impact that a well-informed and fully involved construction manager can have in delivering a high quality working environment for project staff and a high quality living environment for new residents, by using the 4Bs approach and the safeguards and controls it demands

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

To see 4Bs brought to life in every part of the Spectrum development, improving and informing and inspiring project partners, development contract staff, and of course new residents.

To see the 4Bs installation becoming influential on other island developments because of the above, as is happening.