

The Abbey Mews Apple Project Newport, Isle of Wight

Arc Consulting

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Small scale permanent

Project overview

The project celebrates urban biodiversity by preserving local distinctiveness in a new development: an orchard lost to the housing estate was cloned through grafting and then replaced along a new riverside green.

Ecologists from Arc Consulting, staff and students from the IW College's horticulture department, Island fruit tree specialists, local residents and the team from David Wilson Homes collaborated over a 3 year period to salvage cuttings for grafting, grow-on and look after the saplings, design and prepare the space for their return, finally replanting an orchard of 7 trees at Abbey Mews.

The blossom and fruit will encourage wildlife on the doorstep of new and existing residents and provide healthy food for free from forgotten varieties with great heritage.

The actual cost of the project was less than £1000. Its value, in the time and support given for free by partners over 3 years was well over £10,000.



Photo: Isle of Wight Apple Project

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

The site of the redevelopment was a derelict house and garden, suffering fly tipping and vandalism.

The orchard was almost all dead beneath invading sycamore but enough remained to sample for cloning. The concrete stream channel (now remodelled riverside green and cloned orchard) was overrun with coarse vegetation.

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

Planning conditions required a landscape plan for the final public realm at Abbey Mews but Arc, David Wilson, IW College and local people committed voluntarily to save and replant the orchard and undertook to integrate this into the formal conditioning of the scheme, working with the local authority to thereby provide additional enhancement for biodiversity and ensure the conservation of locally significant natural and cultural heritage – the orchard and its apple varieties (including Howgate Wonder).

The preservation and replacement of the orchard became an important symbolic act for all partners, carrying through something naturally important from before to after development.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

This is a cloning project and thereby eminently replicable. But it is innovative too in that it sought to take a declining feature of local cultural and biological significance, protect it off-site during development works, and bring it back afterwards to regenerate and restore that habitat and landscape connection with local people and local wildlife.

The original orchard was almost dead and so its habitat value has been rejuvenated in the same process.

Traditional orchards are important BAP habitat priorities in their own right, and at Abbey Mews the orchard is an additional enhancement to the riverside restoration that has created the new public realm where the fruit trees and their visiting wildlife can be enjoyed.

The project was initiated between project ecologists and local residents and



Photo: Ian Boyd, Arc Consulting and Adie Morgan, David Wilson Homes

adopted by the developer, David Wilson Homes.

Site staff and management, the consulting team and the community collaborated to make the project work over 3 years.

The IW College team were partners throughout and were able to grow on a further 13 cloned trees from the Abbey Mews stock which have been

incorporated in other local tree planting projects involving students and community groups.

Thus the biodiversity gains of the project have been spread still further.

The placement of the cloned orchard trees at Abbey Mews has been such as to not only restore the original feature but also provide ecological connectivity

between retained tree cover east and west along the riverside engineering works and associated public realm.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The installation process included:

- Selection of wood on original orchard trees healthy enough to work as cuttings;
- Harvesting cuttings prior to final site clearance; grafting onto half-standard stocks with IW College and fruit specialists Deacons;
- Growing on and care of specimens at IW College for a further 18 months;
- Engagement with developer David Wilson over design, layout and landscaping of riverside public realm as it is constructed;
- Setting aside correct areas for orchard replanting; planting out cloned orchard trees;
- Organising after-care with local residents.

Arc, working with a local community representative will continue to monitor the orchard and take material at the right time for a second generation of clones.



Photo:

These will provide replacement stock for Abbey Mews and new plants for other sites including developments to come on the west side of Newport.

The long-term benefits will be in the maturation of the orchard creating resources for biodiversity, increasing opportunities for wildlife encounter for residents and visitors, contributing to 'Incredible Edible' on the Island and demonstrating the combination of both in a public place.

The key objective achieved: to salvage a semi-natural habitat/landscape feature at risk from development, preserve and then return to its original location (and new locations) for public benefit.

Having done this there is now great potential for a similar approach to conserving features of local distinctiveness and biological interest through effective partnership with developers. The lesson learned: small interventions at the start of a project can leave great benefits at the close!

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

To save something important and not only replace it but rejuvenate it in as accessible way as possible.

And to show that this can be done quite simply if we can just collaborate around achievable public goals. These things shouldn't be extraordinary; they should be expected.