



Making Space for Nature (MSFN)

Bodmin, Falmouth, Launceston, Liskeard, Newquay, Penryn, St Austell CORNWALL

Client: Cornwall Council

Delivered By: Cormac Solutions Ltd

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Habitat Creation: Project of the Year Award (5ha & above)*

Project overview

Driven by the desire to cultivate habitats close to where people live, the ecological and social value of 28 hectares of public urban spaces in seven Cornish towns has been enriched. We have created more flood resilient landscapes whilst improving access and understanding through signage, seating, paths and 'natural play'.

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

All 24 public open spaces were dominated by mown grass with low biodiversity value.

This was confirmed when the sites were surveyed by University of Exeter.

To corroborate the baseline ecological assessment, a local Record Centre (ERCCIS) desk study was undertaken which showed all habitats and species present within 1km of each site. Where important species had been recorded, this information contributed to the inclusion of specific measures

Post construction, all sites were surveyed using modified versions of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the Environmental Benefits from Nature (EBN) tools for a qualitative assessment of ecosystem services provided.



St Columb Minor, Newquay: Sensory planting (Photo By Cornwall Council)



Castle Park, Liskeard: Wildflower Meadow Photo By Cornwall Council

What were the reasons behind this project ?

Cornwall is in a climate and ecological emergency. Cornwall Council's 2015 Environmental Growth Strategy sets out a vision to be 'a cleaner, greener Cornwall with more space for nature and bringing nature closer to people'.

Cornwall Council's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy 2021 identifies 'Cornwall's towns, villages and built environment present plenty of opportunities to better integrate nature into our everyday lives – transforming them from green deserts into wildlife-rich spaces. Urban green infrastructure brings communities close to nature and can be a haven for wildlife.' If adopted, this will ensure replication of the successful MS4N model in more urban areas.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We demonstrated replicability by following the successful blueprint from phase one, Green Infrastructure for Growth. MS4N has made the following interventions:

- terrestrial habitat creation; planting of orchard trees, flowering trees, pollinator perennials & shrubs, native hedge, Cornish hedge, meadows, nectar rich bulbs and fruit bushes
- artificial habitats; bird boxes, bat boxes, hedgehog boxes, bee hotels, and hibernacula
- aquatic habitat areas; ponds, swales and wetlands
- reduced grassland mowing
- composting areas

Bringing nature closer to people's doorsteps determined which interventions would suit each location.

All sites were assessed for net gain figures and carbon storage by the University of Exeter.

We introduced

- 19,358m² (1.93Ha) wildflower meadows
- 3757m² (0.37Ha) pollinator friendly shrubs
- 4645m² (0.46Ha) bulbs
- 399 trees

The average biodiversity net gain per site is 9.5% (4.6-20.1, n=9)



Ridgegrove Park, Launceston: Hibernacula located adjacent to the new pond (Photo By Cornwall Council)



The Beacon, Falmouth: Bee art activity as part of community event (Photo By Cornwall Council)

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What were the biodiversity measures taken? (continued)

Each site has a 15-year Environmental Growth Management Plan (EGMP) which specifies biodiversity-friendly management including managing meadows, leaving long grass areas where possible, sensitive horticultural management for invertebrate overwintering and keeping green material on site in habitat piles.

There has been thorough engagement with residents, local councillors and local town councils throughout. We have actively worked to foster community involvement introducing an Urban Ranger programme to encourage local people to volunteer in maintaining the habitats. These monthly sessions at selected parks will run until December 2022, aiming to create local stewardship to maintain biodiversity and cultural value in the long term; So far, 500 voluntary hours have contributed to maintaining the new habitats and savings on maintenance.

To educate the Cormac maintenance teams, a CPD event 'Managing land for Biodiversity' was held at the Lost Gardens of Heligan to share stories and inspire the attendees. 50 people attended who felt they gained valuable insights.



Further information

MS4N received £2.4 million from the European Union Regional Development Fund with match funding from Cornwall Council and the University of Exeter. Dedicated funds were set aside for capital works and establishment of the new habitats.

Cormac was appointed to project manage following the RIBA stages 1-9 which has been replicated for all 24 sites.

During construction, nature-friendly methods have been employed wherever possible. In line with Cornwall Council's strategy to reduce Glyphosate herbicide use, wildflower and planting bed areas have been manually stripped with small excavators. Excavated materials were reused on site to create soft landscape features. All civils works and hard landscaping was carried out using the smallest mobile plant with tracked vehicles used to reduce, as far as reasonably practicable, damage to existing surfaces.

To ensure MS4N is delivering on its project aspirations of environmental, social and economic sustainability, it is being assessed using the UK industry recognised Building with Nature Standards with the Project Strategy has been assessed as 'Excellent' and 'a national exemplar'.

The team has endeavoured to share best practice with as wide an audience as possible;

- Guidance on Meadow Creation, setting up a Community Orchard and Wildlife perennial plants have been issued
- Celebratory events are arranged to share stories and encourage wildlife gardening
- Government departments and professional bodies have been briefed
- Quarterly electronic newsletter updates are sent to interested parties
- Videos have been created to encapsulate the essence of the project [Making Space for Nature | Let's Talk Cornwall](#)



St Austell A391: Following a turf strip by mechanical means avoiding glyphosate, wildflower turf is laid to the highway verges (Photo By Cormac)



St Austell A391: 'Patchwork Quilt' mix of wildflower turf in flower (Photo By Cornwall Council)



Project Team

Client: Cornwall Council
Funder: European Regional Development Fund
University of Exeter
Designer: Cormac Solutions Ltd
Cornwall Environmental Consultants
Principal Contractor: Cormac Contracting Ltd
NGOs & Volunteer Groups: Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Eden Project, Lost Gardens of Heligan, Newquay in Bloom, Launceston in Bloom

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

We sought to share knowledge way beyond the project scope.

We have worked with three NHS hospitals who have transformed their grounds with wildflowers.

Through our inspired dissemination throughout Cornwall Council and Cormac, changes have been made to natural assets management. New wildlife-friendly methods and machinery were trialled and are now being used across all 1,533,049m² of roadside verges which have reduced cutting regimes. As well as helping biodiversity it has impacted maintenance costs positively with the lesser frequency of cuts.

Our vision is to see this approach replicated across Cornwall and the rest of the country.