



## Ridgegrove Park Launceston, Cornwall

Client: Cornwall Council

Delivered By: Cormac Solutions Ltd

### BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Biodiversity Legacy Award*

#### Project overview

Ridgegrove Park has been created to bring local connectivity in a newly created public open space enriched for biodiversity which encourages residents to enjoy nature around them. Previously obstructed by the River Kensey, a new shared use path and bridge has connected homes to the town and local shopping area.

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

Ridgegrove Park (1.3Ha) was previously in private ownership and primarily used as grazing grassland. It also comprised of marshy grassland, dense scrub, hedgerows and trees which all have high biodiversity value.

Ecological surveys and assessments identified the habitats were suitable for a number of protected species including bats and nesting birds.

The Making Space for Nature (MS4N) landscape design by Cornwall Environmental Consultants carefully considered protecting the pre-existing habitats whilst introducing new ones to improve the overall biodiversity of the site.

#### What were the reasons behind this project ?

The scheme intends to help alleviate Launceston's major air quality problem.

The planning approval required the path/bridge to fulfil 10% Biodiversity Net Gain By delivering this through MS4N, this contributes to the project's overall target to deliver 28Ha of biodiversity improvement across seven Cornish towns.

Access for pedestrians and cyclists to central Launceston was limited and unsafe with the only connection being a road with narrow path over the river. The new shared use path and public open space will encourage people travel the short distance on foot or by bike while integrating nature into everyday lives.



*Post-completion (May 2022 during no-mow May) with views towards Launceston Castle (Photo By Cormac)*



*Post-completion (May 2022) (Photo By Cornwall Council)*



### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Purchasing privately owned land to transform it into a public open space for the community providing new access to the River Kensey is undoubtedly an innovative solution. The Transport team had the foresight to involve the MS4N team early in the process to ensure that the construction works continuously considered biodiversity improvements as part of the engineering solutions being sought. This should happen on all building projects.

Working with the community, University of Exeter undertook a workshop on 28 February 2020 to gather local views on considerations for the landscaping of the new space. A 'You Said, We Did' report was prepared after the event and influenced changes to the landscape plan

The following interventions have been made achieving 1.3Ha of biodiversity improvement:

- terrestrial habitat creation; tree planting, pollinator beds including shrubs and perennials and meadows
- aquatic habitat areas; swales and a 196m<sup>2</sup> pond
- artificial habitats; bird and bat boxes
- composting areas, bee banks and hibernacula

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*Large plant bed with ornamental mix, pollinator and flowering shrubs (May 2022) (Photo By Cornwall Council)*



*New swale (May 2022 during no-mow May) (Photo By Cornwall Council)*



CEC undertook a Biodiversity Net Gain analysis for the scheme which identified that 10.09% was gained in habitats and 17.02% was achieved in hedgerows.

In total

- 540m<sup>2</sup> of wildflower meadow,
- 325m<sup>2</sup> of pollinator friendly shrubs,
- 124m<sup>2</sup> of bulbs
- 985m<sup>2</sup> of wetland perennials were planted or overseeded.
- 53 trees were planted

MS4N funds a one-year establishment period with enhanced management to give the habitats the best start. Following this a 15-year Environmental Growth Management Plan (EGMP) is produced which will see the site managed in the most biodiversity friendly way.

Ridgegrove Park will form part of the Urban Ranger volunteer gardening programme running to December 2022 which will see voluntary community involvement to manage the site to maintain biodiversity and culture value in the long term.

The Urban Ranger programme is an eminently replicable community-based way to manage public land.

300 words



### Further information

Ridgegrove Park has left a legacy of easier access across the River Kensey through a wonderland of biodiversity. It is a major asset to Launceston which will only get better over the years.

The biodiversity improvements were funded by the European Regional Development Fund with match funding from Cornwall Council and University of Exeter. The path and bridge works funding came through the Local Transport Plan and the Economic Growth Fund.

The MS4N aspects were project managed by Cormac following the RIBA stages 1-9 which we would endorse as an excellent methodology.

Where feasible, construction has been carried out using nature-friendly methods;

- We avoided herbicides by employing mechanical methods to carry out all turf strips.
- Stripped turf was reused to form landscape features around the site and for the construction of the hibernaculum .
- The swales and pond were mechanically excavated with the excavated material set aside on site to form bee banks for burrowing mining bees.

The culvert works over a stream connecting to the River Kensey – a salmonid river - required Land Drainage Consent to start after 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021. Ongoing liaison with Cornwall Council and the Environment Agency allowed prior access when conditions allowed no risk impact to biodiversity. To install the culvert, a temporary flume pipe was installed which ran during the culvert construction. The culvert matched the river width and is set at the riverbed level.

The integrated project is an exemplar case study and worthy of sharing with the wider CIRIA membership.



*Pond creation using excavators (Photo By Cormac)*



*Pond post-completion (May 2022) with planting beginning to establish with adjacent hibernaculum (Photo By Cornwall Council)*



## Project Team

Client :	Cornwall Council
Funder:	European Regional Development Fund University of Exeter Local Transport Plan Economic Growth Fund
Designer:	Cormac Solutions Ltd Cornwall Environmental Consultants
Principal Contractor:	Cormac Contracting Ltd
NGOs & volunteer groups:	Launceston in Bloom

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

More access across the River Kensey was an aspiration of locals. This could have been delivered by simply building the path and bridge. Working with MS4N meant that the biodiversity aspects of the project were an integral part of the planning process. It also allowed the green corridor from the Ridgegrove estate, another MS4N site, to be completed.

Ridgegrove Park was previously in private ownership with no access to the river for the public. It is rare, if ever, that a local authority purchases a piece of land purely to turn it into public open space-making this project unique.