



The Rosehill Rebels
Brighton, East Sussex
Brighton and Hove City Council

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Community Engagement Award*

Rosehill Court is a Seniors Housing Scheme. The scheme has 27 flats and are occupied by residents over the age of 60. Many of the residents are disabled / immobile, have early dementia and sight / hearing issues.

The site was previously a communal garden with a regularly mowed lawn, a small collection of plants and flowers, and planters. The garden was used by residents to congregate and socialise. During the Pandemic the Scheme went into lockdown, and the residents took time out to focus on activities that contributed to improving their mental health. The Scheme was already a major focal point for craft activities and has been had been a regular contributor to the 'Open House' Artists showcase activities in May.

- The reason behind the project was to create a Permaculture / Biodiverse garden to encourage more wildlife.
- The City of Brighton and Hove has ambitious plans around improving and retaining local Biodiversity and we wanted to harness this within an easily replicated project.
- The Project also tied in with the City's carbon reduction plan – and to this end we have significantly reduced our Carbon footprint.
- From a strategic view point, Brighton is the Lead partner of the only designated Urban Biosphere in the UK.
- The Biosphere as a whole has a commitment to: nature conservation, sustainable development and environmental education. (our precious habitats are under threat from pollution, loss of habitat and climate change).



What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The aim of the project was to contribute to the local Biodiversity Action Plans, and to retain and enhance wildlife in the area. The project also contributed to an improvement in the mental health of the residents who were all involved to some degree in creating and maintaining the garden (part of our Corporate Social responsibilities).

The beauty of the project is that it is highly replicable. Anyone with some outside space can achieve similar results.

The first thing we did was to stop mowing the grass – we then enhanced the whole area with wildflowers and meadow mix plants. There are a number of Pollinator plants dotted around and there has been a big increase in bees, butterflies, craneflies, crickets, pollinators and invertebrates.

There were a few dozen trees on the site, and we have planted more to act as Carbon capture. We've added in some vertical planting, planters and herbaceous plants. We have left / encouraged Ivy growth as a food source and created Bird feeders / houses using recycled material.

We have also installed rainwater butts, compost bins, vegetable plots and completely eliminated chemicals from the garden.

We have reused untreated timber to create invertebrate habitats and hedgehog shelters. We have created 3 mini ponds.

The Project is innovative as it has transcended the normal business practice of a Seniors Housing Scheme – it is now a Permaculture haven with significant biodiversity net gains evident in the increase in wildlife (grassland, flowers, pollinators and invertebrates). We have also noted an increase in common and rarer birds such as: Jays, Pheasants, Collared Doves, Chaffinches, Blackbirds, Starlings, Blue Tits, Magpies and Crows.



Further information

The Project grew essentially from issues related to the Pandemic. The Scheme was placed in lockdown – initially no visitors were allowed, and residents didn't venture out of the scheme much in that period. The motivation was to use the time to create a focal point for the residents and improve their mental health. The timeline was somewhat organic but followed the basis:

- Stop mowing - allow grass to grow unabated, addition of wildflowers and pollinator plants, addition of planters and vertical planting, provision of vegetable plot, provision of rainwater butts, and compost areas, provision of bird boxes and feeders, addition of mini ponds.

The idea was to create a permaculture that tied in with the strategic ambitions for biodiversity retention and enhancement. There was a significant increase in biodiversity practically from the outset – with noted increases in bees, butterflies, crane flies and invertebrates.

The garden is tended by almost all the residents and has provided a welcome haven within the scheme. The increase in wildlife has been captured on camera with impressive photography skills by residents.

Because of the success of this scheme – the Council is looking to replicate this across all the other Sheltered Scheme (22 sites).

The residents are very proud of the project and have achieved what they initially set out to do – which was to create a permaculture in line with strategic drivers – this is their legacy.

We also wanted to link in with the Citywide plan of becoming 'carbon neutral' by 2030 – and our carbon footprint has reduced significantly.

As one resident put it 'we were just a Seniors Housing Scheme, but have managed to create a Biodiverse masterpiece out of nothing'

