

Friars Walk Planters

Friars Walk shopping centre, Newport

Emily Grimes, JLL

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: 5. *Habitat creation: Project of the Year (small scale)*

Project overview

- Improvements to city centre planters, increasing habitat and connectivity for pollinators, including the installation of bee-friendly planting, bug boxes & education signage. Works completed June 2022.

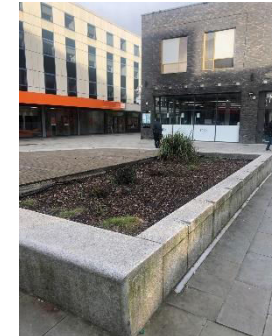
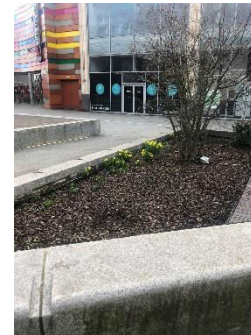
What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Prior to enhancement, other than the green sedum roof, Friars Walk had minimal impact for Nature; planting was sparse and the environment was poor with no habitat features or measures to support wildlife.

In line with Welsh Government's Action Plan for Pollinators, Bee Friendly Accreditation Scheme, Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Newport City Council's Climate Action Plan and Bee Friendly City Status, we identified an opportunity to use existing large planters in John Frost Square and Usk Plaza to increase biodiversity, carefully selecting pollinator friendly plants and installing bug hotels, increasing habitat for pollinators and providing connectivity from the River Usk SSSI to Allt-Yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve.

What were the reasons behind this project ?

We wanted to embrace the BIG Biodiversity Challenge, taking advantage of our unique location between the River Usk SSSI and sites of local importance such as Allt-Yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve to make a real difference for nature, particularly pollinators, in the heart of the City Centre. Creating a welcoming, calming space for shoppers to sit and have a coffee or lunch and engage with nature as they go about their day.



Planters prior to work starting



Planters following completion of project

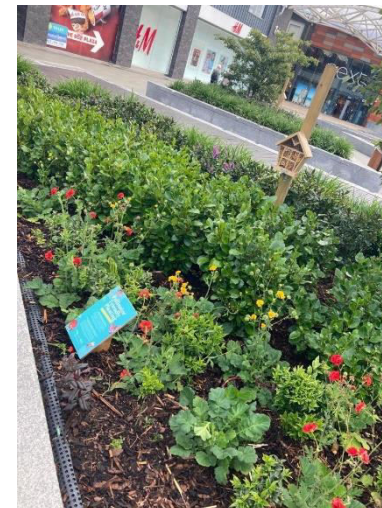
What were the biodiversity measures taken?

In the heart of Newport, Friars Walk is uniquely situated on the cusp of the Gwent Levels, adjacent to the River Usk SSSI, and less than 2 miles from Allt-Yr-Yn Local Nature Reserve and the Mon and Brec Canal. This unique location is one of the drivers to us embracing the BIG Biodiversity challenge. Taking advantage of our location to make a real term difference to tackling the decline in biodiversity and particularly pollinators. Newport is home to 3 of the rarest bees in Europe (Shrill Carder Bee, Small Scabious Mining Bee and Silver Sided Nomad Bee); Shrill Carder Bee are frequently seen on the banks of the River Usk.

Working with the Newport City Council Biodiversity Officers, in line with the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and Climate Action Plan we were able to link pollinators that regularly use the innovative green sedum roof (the only one of its kind locally) to the existing raised beds on Friars Walk. Using carefully selected pollinator friendly plants recommended in the Welsh Government's Planting for Pollinator Guide to increase and improve habitat, providing sources of nectar and pollen throughout the seasons and places to shelter and hibernate. Colourful and informative signage was created to engage with visitors and highlight the importance of enhancing habitat for our declining pollinators. Newport City Council Biodiversity Officers have spent time throughout the seasons surveying for pollinator species and have already reported an increase in bumblebee species such as *Bombus Terrestris* (Buff-Tailed Bumble bee). Records will be submitted to the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) to help create a wider species data set for the local area.



Planting in progress in John Frost Square



Dual-language educational signage installed in planters

Further information

The area has been hugely improved over the last 24 months, with seasonal low maintenance planting and the installation of bug hotels. We have worked well with local stakeholders and the onsite team to ensure the area is kept clean and plants are flourishing; this has been a joint effort and the results have been great for the local community, Friars Walk and the city centre. Most importantly the area now provides a stepping stone of habitat for local wildlife and supports the local bee and insect populations. Looking forwards, we aim to continue our BIG Biodiversity Challenge with the further installation of a much larger bug hotel later this year as well as looking linking our work with local schools as they start their own journeys to becoming Bee Friendly.

Newport is an official Bee Friendly City and with the work which has been carried out on the planters has resulted in a bee friendly accreditation for Friars Walk; in fact, Friars Walk is the first Shopping Centre in Wales to have received official Bee Friendly accreditation through the Welsh Government.

We are also planning interactive sessions with Newport City Council's Biodiversity Team and local schools, sharing our journey to becoming Bee Friendly in the hope that it will inspire their own nature friendly activity at home or in school. These sessions will have a strong emphasis on our local environment, the work which has been carried out and how we can all play a part in making a positive change for nature.

Project Team

- Friars Walk Centre Management
- Newport City Council

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Friars Walk Centre Management were keen to continue positive momentum with their environmental initiatives, with previous projects including the installation of a green roof.



Planters in Usk Plaza



One of the bug boxes installed within the John Frost Square planters