

Case Study: Nature Connection Digital Badges



Green Communities is an exciting, Plymouth-based partnership project which is shaping neighbourhoods in Devonport, Central Park, Keyham and the West of the City.

We have written a series of case studies to highlight the breadth of work taking place with these nature neighbourhoods. You can read these case studies at greenmindsplymouth.com/greenhubs



ABOVE: The visual identity of the Nature Guardian digital badge

Overview

Plymouth City Council's Green Communities team led a project to develop and test a set of Nature Connectedness digital badges, supported by Natural England grant funding, delivered between October 2023-March 2024.

Why digital badges?

The Real Ideas Badge Nation website summarises the value and benefits of digital badges as:

- A smart, simple, and visual way of recognising non-accredited learning.
- An effective and inexpensive way of demonstrating your impact as an organisation.
- Accessible anywhere to anyone, using only a website link.
- A useful tool for earners to proudly display on their website, email signature, LinkedIn profile, and CV.

What were we trying to do?

- Integrate high quality nature connection activities into our Green Communities' hyper-local, practical nature recovery programme in neighbourhoods.
- Increase nature connection for health and wellbeing and incentivise pro-environmental behaviours.
- Create digital badges which provide skills recognition and support employability.
- Test how innovative approaches to green technology could be delivered at a neighbourhood level.



Why did we do it?

- Creates opportunities to be part of something bigger and something positive for nature and the city of Plymouth.
- Offers a consistent approach which is inclusive and accessible whilst allowing for flexibility and targeting, linked to the development of a wider Digital Badge Framework for Nature in Plymouth.
- Gives recognition for participation and accomplishment by employers through CVs etc.
- Invites and encourages further participation across different habitats and spaces – but starting from where the participant is (e.g. via school visit, via Scout or Guiding group, personal interest, a single event etc.).
- Encourages a deepening participation and agency, on behalf of and in connection to nature.
- Supports and enables cohesion, self-esteem, and skills development, attainment and ambition and, in the longer term, wider pathways to work, improved quality of life and pro-environmental understanding and behaviours.
- Opportunity to link and embed Nature Connection concepts into other nature digital badges as they are written and issued across the city.



green
communities

Who was involved?

- Real Ideas, Badge Nation
- Green Communities PCC team
- National Trust
- University of Derby
- Natural England

Other PCC Teams during development of framework

- BRIC
- Poole Farm
- Plymouth Sound National Marine Park
- Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest
- Plymouth Natural Grid/Nature Based Solutions

Who funded it?

Natural England seed funded £5k and in addition, Plymouth City Council and National Trust provided time in kind towards badge development and creation of the overall Plymouth Digital Badge Framework.



LEFT: Nature Connectedness skill sharing/training session with the Green Communities team.

When did it happen?

The authoring and technical development of four badges took place between October 2023-March 2024. The badges were launched in March 2024. Four badges are live and are being disseminated through our day to day events and activities. These four badges form part of the Plymouth Digital Badge Framework, which is experiencing ongoing development.

What did we do?

- Commissioned Real Ideas Organisation's Badge Nation team to aid in the development of the digital badges.
- Consulted with the University of Derby's Nature Connectedness Research Group on collaboration and application of the digital badges.
- Brought in a professional facilitator to run cross project training sessions on Nature Connectedness for our staff.
- Formed a cross project and cross partner working group. The group agreed on the values and key collective identifiers of all badges across the framework.
- Identified a cross project and cross partner authoring group who integrated these values into the first draft of Nature Connection digital badges.
- Linked work to the development of a wider framework for digital badges for nature across the city.

What were the results?

- Green Communities team (& wider) trained in Nature Connectedness practices.
- Digital Badge Framework developed for Environment Planning and National Trust.
- Steering Group and Author Group created between PCC's Environment Planning team and National Trust to ensure consistency.
- Four live Nature Connection badges:-

Nature Explorer- Level: Participate
Earners of this badge have connected with, and done their bit for, nature in Plymouth. They have had fun exploring nature and trying out new ways of connecting to it.

Nature Learner- Level: Participate
Earners of this badge have connected with, and done their bit for, nature in Plymouth. They have shown enthusiasm to find out more about the natural world, contributing to Plymouth's collective understanding of the natural world and human beings' relationship to it.

Nature Creative- Level: Demonstrate
Earners of this badge have connected with, and done their bit for, nature in Plymouth. They have been inspired by the beauty and wonder of nature and used it to get creative.

Nature Guardian - Level: Demonstrate
Earners of this badge have connected with, and done their bit for, nature in Plymouth. They have shown care for their local environment by taking positive action for local wildlife. In doing so, they have made an important and active contribution to shaping their nature neighbourhood.



"They will be a fantastic tool for so many people interested in a career in the outdoors."

- Cllr Sally Cresswell,
Cabinet Member for
Education, Skills and
Apprenticeships

LEFT: A digital badge as it appears on a mobile phone

How successful was it?

- 4 badges written and live.
- Additional, **leadership level badges are in development** with University of Derby and community connectors.
- **31 badge applications** received
- Reports that **earners are using the badge whilst looking for work.**
- Launched at press event by Environment Portfolio Holder.

Key learnings

- Collaboration is key, a cross-partner approach enriches the content of the badges and broadens the prospective audience and ensures consistency across the department.
- Creation of badges within a framework is key to ensure badges are available across teams and partners and to avoid duplication.
- The importance of earner-focussed development of badges- **why** would someone want one?
- Nature Connection badges focus on **how** people are participating, not just **what** they are doing.
- Development, authoring, and ongoing monitoring of the badges is a large and involved process that which needs allocated resource for coordination and management.

"The badges will be a really great way of connecting people to the outdoors and the nature that we know our residents really value. From families looking for a fun, free activity to young people looking towards an environmentally-focused career, these badges will be perfect for so many people."

- Cllr Tom Briars-Delve

Next steps

- Author group meets regularly to discuss progress of the badges.
- All future Environment Planning digital badges to have consistent wording and evaluation information collected.
- New digital badges are in production, both within the Nature Connection set and more broadly across the Environment Planning department in Plymouth City Council.



ABOVE: Councillor Tom Briars-Delve, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, receives the first Nature Connection digital badge.