

Case Study: Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre Garden Regeneration



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

Context

Green Communities is a Plymouth-based partnership project which is shaping nature neighbourhoods across the city. As part of this work, we are delivering practical, community-led improvements to local green spaces. This case study highlights the regeneration of the Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre Garden, demonstrating how collaborative design and community action can transform underused spaces into thriving, inclusive nature hubs.

Overview

Green Communities worked in partnership with Zebra Collective, Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest, the Open University, and local residents to regenerate the Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre garden.

The project was shaped through a four month co-design process, ensuring the space reflected the needs and ideas of the community. This culminated in a large-scale “24-hour garden makeover” event on 21 March 2026, supported by preparatory works and ongoing phased improvements.



Aims / What were we trying to do?

- Transform an underused garden into a vibrant, accessible, and nature-rich community space
- Create opportunities for community connection, wellbeing, and outdoor activity
- Increase biodiversity through planting, habitat creation, and green infrastructure
- Engage local residents in co-design and hands-on delivery
- Develop a space that can evolve over time through continued community involvement

Why did we do it / What GC aim did it link to?

This project aligns strongly with Nature Recovery, Community Nature and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) aims.

The regeneration focused on increasing biodiversity, introducing new habitats (such as a pond, trees, and hedges), and improving access to nature in an urban setting. The co-design approach ensured the garden reflects local priorities, including features requested directly by residents and young people, such as a sunken fire pit.



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Who was involved?

- Green Communities
- Zebra Collective
- Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest
- The Open University
- Local residents
- Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre gardening group
- Mount Wise Youth Group

Who funded it?

- Plymouth City Council (PCC)
- Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest (including in-kind contributions such as catering)

When/where did it happen?

- Planning period: Approx. December 2025 – March 2026
- Main event: 21 March 2026 (“24-hour garden makeover”)
- Location: Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre, Devonport



What did we do?

Preparation phase

- Ahead of the main event, significant groundwork took place:
- Extension of the right-hand side of the garden and installation of a new fence
- Ordering of materials for the event and future phases
- Excavation of a sunken fire pit (co-designed with the Youth Group)
- Foundations prepared for a shed/greenhouse
- Construction of:
 - 2 front planters
 - 2 accessible raised planters
 - 2 movable planters
 - 6 low-bed planters
- Plant selection with input from residents and the gardening group
- Co-design and initial creation of a mural on the building

Phase 1: 24 hour garden makeover

The makeover event delivered a wide range of improvements:

- Installation of a child-safe pond with aquatic planting
- Hedge, tree, and fruit tree planting
- Plug planting across the site
- Mulching of new planting
- Completion of the sunken fire pit
- Building of a circular bench
- Bird box construction
- Garden sign and pebble painting (including pond features)
- Filling and planting of all planters
- Community engagement activities:
 - Ripple effect table
 - Diversity sign co-design
- Mural continuation



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Phase 2: Ongoing works

- Completion of the mural
- Shed/greenhouse completion
- Bird box painting through Youth Group sessions
- Continued planting and garden development

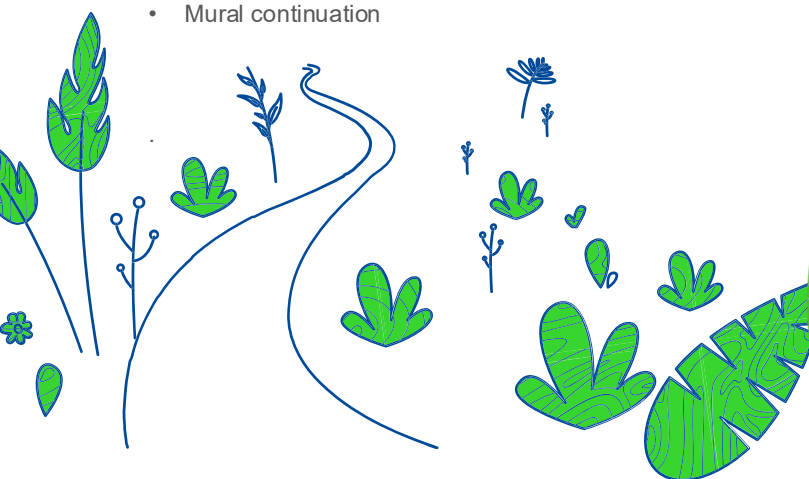
Phase 3: Future plans

- Relocation of the public bin at the front of the site
- Exploration and application to extend the garden on the western side of the centre
- Development of the natural nature play area
- Explore possibilities of improvements to the public space to the north of the centre through the Green Devonport Plan

What were the results?

- A transformed, functional, and welcoming community garden space
- Introduction of diverse planting, trees, and habitats, supporting biodiversity and increasing habitat connectivity through Mount Wise – Devonport
- New infrastructure including seating, planters, pond, and activity spaces
- A strong sense of community ownership and pride in the space
- A foundation for ongoing use, programming, and development

“When I was younger, I used to think, '[gardening]'s boring. How can anyone want to be a gardener? But since joining the gardening group and getting involved in all this with the garden, I think I've been a bit more green-fingered. Learning about different things. And I mean, who would have thought I'd do a permaculture design course?” - Local resident.



How successful was it?

- 15 volunteers and staff delivered activities on the day
- Over 85 community participants engaged during the 24 hour makeover event
- Dozens of hands-on contributions including:
- Tree and hedge planting
- Bird box construction
- Plug planting
- Creative activities such as pebble and sign painting

A particularly engaging moment was the community-led effort to transport water in containers from inside the building to fill the new pond, creating a fun, collaborative atmosphere.

Key learnings?

- **Co-design is essential:** Early and meaningful engagement leads to stronger ownership and better outcomes
- **Preparation is key:** Extensive pre-event work enabled a highly productive 24-hour event
- **Flexible participation works well:** Offering a variety of activities allowed people of all ages and abilities to get involved
- **Community-led elements add value:** Features like the fire pit and mural strengthened relevance and pride
- **Food and social elements matter:** Simple provisions such as pasties and tea helped sustain energy and create a welcoming environment



Next steps

- Complete remaining infrastructure (shed/greenhouse and mural)
- Continue planting and seasonal maintenance
- Strengthen youth engagement through ongoing activities
- Progress plans to extend the garden
- Explore future funding to support long-term development and programming.



Plymouth and South Devon
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