



greenminds

greenminds case study

Urban Wilding: Community
Co-stewardship



Green Minds Model summary

The Green Minds Model aims to summarise the structure of the GM approach, to aid its transfer and replication to other urban areas and authorities.

Green Minds piloted new ways of implementing nature-based solutions within an urban environment. The project's central aim was to collaborate with stakeholders to recognise how humans, as part of nature, interact with nature in a complex system and to identify ways in which *systemic* change is brought about.

The model is presented as an integrated approach, where various nested elements are shown working together as a system. It reflects the particular challenges and scales of focus in urban areas - from individuals, to communities and neighbourhoods and at a citywide level. It focuses on particular leverage points for change (best practices) with regard to nature in cities, and is guided at its core by a set of underlying principles to inform practice.

At the centre of the model sits the system goal - *Urban Wilding. A set of guiding Principles have been created to inform the practice of Urban Wilding. These principles have emerged from our experiences designing and implementing Urban Wilding in Plymouth.

The eight Principles that have emerged from our programme of testing and development represent key leverage points to effect system change and to successfully integrate nature within urban place shaping. This includes exploring deeply held beliefs and values around our relationship to nature and to others, the creation of new organisational and digital infrastructures which empower citizens, and the development of new policy, planning and financial frameworks to support this.

Complex systems can behave differently at differing scales and so these are reflected too in the model to recognise the importance of understanding *who* needs to be engaged and *how*. This takes into account the need for multiple perspectives and the importance of equity (who participates), through an

inclusive process of engagement from individuals to groups and organisations, and at neighbourhood and citywide scales.

Finally, the model acknowledges the importance of an ongoing and iterative co-design process. This process recognises that resilience requires the ability to adapt as solutions emerge within a complex and constantly changing environment. It is delivered through a cyclical, action learning approach in which lessons learned influence the next cycle of implementation to ensure a progressive approach.

The model is brought to life through our suite of Insight Papers, Guides and Case Studies which aim to illustrate how the model was implemented and what we learnt.

Green Minds Urban Wilding Principles

The quality and quantity of nature has declined significantly in recent decades. Across the UK and Europe, nature recovery and restoration, rather than just preserving or conserving what remains, has become a high priority, as we have become more aware of society's dependence on nature[1].

We know that spaces that are more biodiverse can deliver multiple health and wellbeing benefits as well as other nature-based solutions such as improvements in water drainage, increased carbon sequestration, removal of air pollutants and increased pollination for food security[2]. 'Rewilding' has gained prominence as one approach to achieving such improvements in biodiversity, with a growing research body assessing its impact.

Urban (re)wilding, however, is still a new concept. We define Urban Wilding as 'any initiative, both human-aided and natural colonization, that aims to encourage biodiversity, ecosystem function and native species in urban settings'[3].

Urban Wilding is fundamentally different from wilding/rewilding/renaturing elsewhere. Cities and towns are dominated by human infrastructure and activity. Consequently, many natural ecosystem processes are significantly modified or constrained in urban areas. We rely upon ecosystem services for our health and wellbeing. Urban ecologies, which deliver these ecosystem services, are complex and poorly understood. However, we know that more biodiverse systems deliver more or better ecosystem services. We also know that we can mimic, or engineer, some specific ecosystem services such as storm water management. Whilst we don't know enough to design urban ecosystems to deliver all the services we need, we do know that more nature is good for people and urban living and that arranging it in certain ways can deliver certain specific benefits. We can't achieve this by doing nothing - positive interventions are required, which in turn demand enabling policy, community action and practical delivery mechanisms.

The Green Minds understanding of Urban Wilding recognises the need to shift from nature conservation to nature recovery - to focus on restoring much of what is rare or has gone and a recognition that we need to bring high quality Nature into places where people live.[4]

The Urban Wilding Principles below are designed as a set of prompts to help guide initiatives for nature to thrive in cities: to survive and reproduce, to expand, and to function as a system and so deliver more and better services to support urban environmental health, our economy, and human wellbeing.

*We have chosen to use the term 'wilding' instead of 'rewilding', as it better reflects the reality of nature in urban areas - to rewild implies a return to nature before urbanisation, which is not possible.

[1] Nature Recovery for Our Survival, Prosperity and Wellbeing: A Joint Statement by the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies of the UK. jncc.gov.uk/our-role/the-uk/nature-recovery-joint-statement

[2] Dasgupta, P. (2021). The Economics of Biodiversity: the Dasgupta Review. London (HM Treasury); Maller, C. (2018) Healthy Urban Environments. Routledge

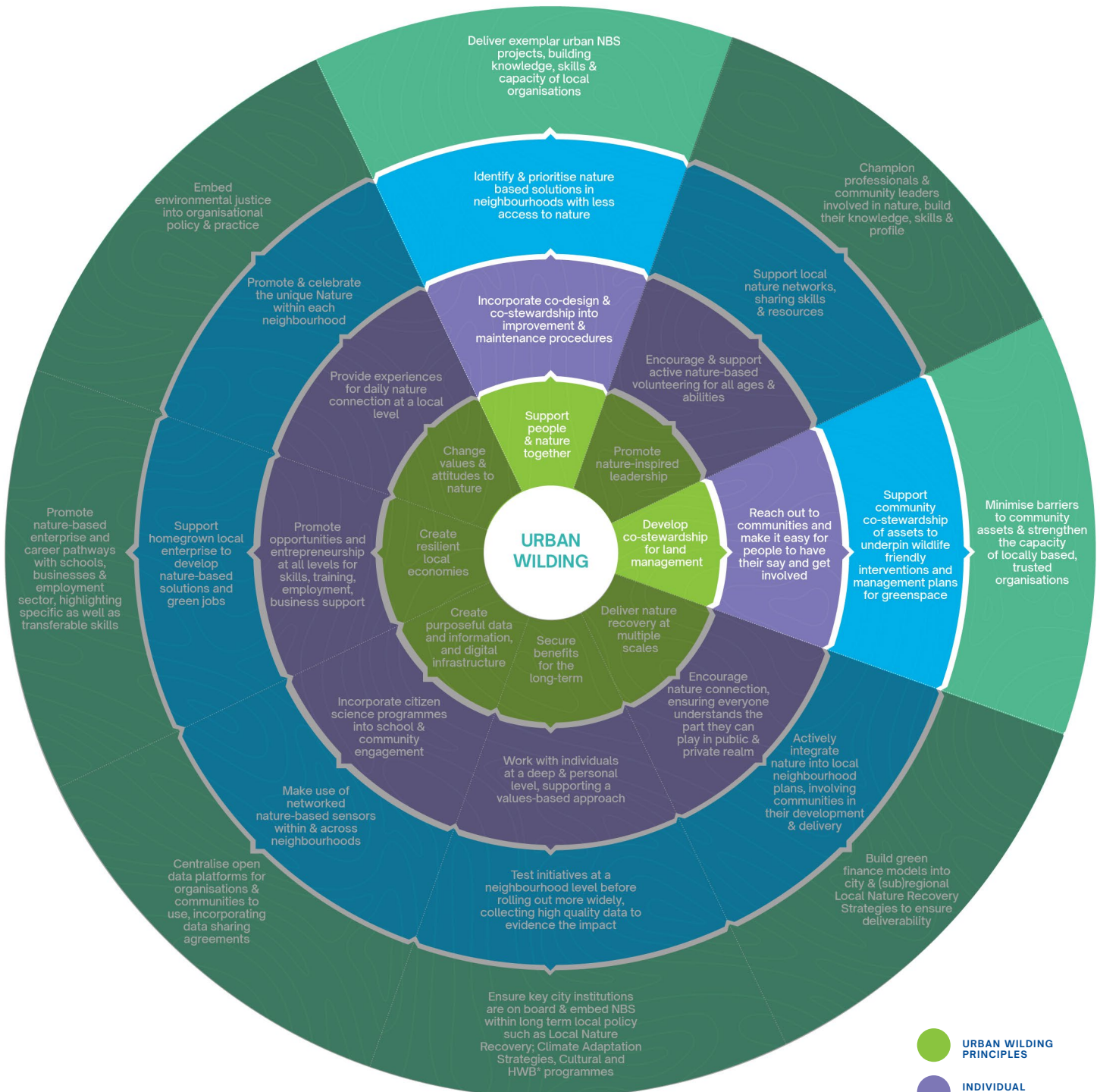
[3] Maller, C., Mumaw, L., & Cooke, B. (2019). Health and social benefits of living with 'wild' nature. Ch 9 in Rewilding. Pettorelli, N., Durant, S., and du Toit, J. (eds). Cambridge University Press

[4] Juniper, T. (2022) Tony Juniper: Green Paper - an opportunity for an integrated approach to Nature recovery - Natural England

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The model illustrates the three system levels at which the Urban Wilding principles are applied to drive action: the individual, with neighbourhoods, and within organisations.

Permeability, both within and between segments, reflects the need for adaptability through local learning gained through an action learning approach, in which lessons learned influence the next cycle of implementation.



Urban Wilding Principles



Support people and nature together

Promote a just transition to wilder cities through equitable access to nature, socially just policy and involvement in the co-creation and co-stewardship of nature-based solutions that are adapted to climate change, biodiverse and support nature connection.



Promote nature-inspired leadership

At all levels of management (individual, community/neighbourhood, city administration, business, etc) enable nature positive actions to enhance urban liveability through education, training, and policy.



Develop co-stewardship for land management

Democratise land management and ownership through the development of co-stewardship solutions with user communities, introducing inclusive and empowering processes for engagement, creating community assets, and utilising diverse governance structures.



Deliver nature recovery at multiple scales

Make the most of the local built environment and its scale, acknowledging that no space is too small to be valuable whilst at the same time recognizing that larger green spaces and high degrees of connectivity are key for nature recovery.



Secure benefits for the long-term

Develop integrated policy instruments that embed urban wilding in development practice, led by communities and advised and supported by public administrations to create resilient cities and a population connected to nature.



Create purposeful data and information supported by digital infrastructure

Develop new digital infrastructures to generate community-owned and insightful knowledge of urban nature to support nature connection, and nature-positive policy and practice.



Create resilient local economies

Promote and empower nature-related careers, cooperatives and social enterprise across all sectors, to create new jobs and new value in green and blue infrastructure.



Change values and attitudes to nature

Promote nature connection amongst citizens, to enhance individual and community wellbeing and to foster nature-positive choices.



Co-stewardship of green spaces

Green Minds set out to find new ways of managing parks, to bring them closer to the communities that use them.

We chose to adopt the term ‘**co-stewardship**’ for our approach. We feel that this phrase better represents the **collective** role we have to **responsibly** care for and value nature.

Green Minds piloted co-stewardship around three key themes:

- **Social enterprise** – green assets used as the basis of a non-profit enterprise bringing benefit to the community
- **Community management and asset transfers** – green spaces managed by the community, permitted through a contractual arrangement (optionally, with a transfer of assets from public to community control)
- **Community empowerment** – deepening nature connection and enabling community leadership on urban wilding and the improvement of urban green spaces through a Growing with Nature Network.

In this case study we feature Blockhouse Park and Keyham Green Spaces as practical examples that embodied all three themes.

RIGHT: a flyer for a foraging event at the park for local people

“Lockdown showed us how necessary our connection to the natural world is, and we are determined to open up the gift of this to all the residents of the local community by enticing them to come and have a look, dig a bit of earth and allow the space to do its magic!”

CO-ORDINATOR AT THE VILLAGE HUB



1 Blockhouse Park community management

An existing community association, Stoke Traders and Residents (STARS), had worked at the onset of the pandemic to coordinate mutual aid.

As this developed, and an empty premises became available in the local high street this initiative became The Village Hub Community, a Co-operative Community Benefit Society, which is a non-profit enterprise. This CCBS, has an explicit interest in supporting the local community to take pride in its spaces, including the local underused park, **The Blockhouse Park**.

Establishing a mechanism

The Village Hub approached the Green Minds team at the Council for permission to rewild part of the park. The Council proposed an 'Indefinite Lease' as a form of contract that would give the group control over a defined area and allow specified activities.

After some negotiation these activities were defined as "rewilding planting, groundworks, and events" and a subsequent delivery plan was supported by Green Minds resources and staff.

Village Hub holds the lease with the Council but the aim is that the Blockhouse park group should become self-sustaining and take on the lease themselves when ready to do so.



An 'Indefinite Lease' created a long term contract with the Council to allow rewilding planting, groundworks, and events.



LEFT: local residents survey 'wilder' areas of Blockhouse Park

TOP RIGHT: The local group and Plymouth City Council teams work together to plant trees at Blockhouse Park



Benefits and learning



This transfer of the management of this asset has given residents of the area a new sense of collaborative responsibility to care for the park. This, in turn, has created new feelings of civic pride for many as they work together to rewild and improve the park.

The Village Hub recognise that they can't do everything themselves and prefer to collaborate with other organisations rather than see planned improvements as exclusively theirs.

The lease has been useful for the Village Hub to secure funds and to create partnerships, enabling them to demonstrate consent for their activities and providing a credible case to funders.

The Hub's co-founder participated in both the Green Minds Nature-Inspired Leadership programme and Permaculture training and has built nature connection as a key element into the way they deliver activities.

Village Hub volunteers have planted over 3000 bulbs and 5 new large specimen trees in their rewilding area. They are also working with Pollenize (a Green Minds funded nature-based enterprise) to sow wildflower seed around the park.

The partnership with Green Minds also allowed the group to work with the Local Authority to transform an area where the toilet blocks were due to be demolished into a sustainably planted area at the entrance of the park that the group now stewards as part of their contract.

“We take on a lot...but we can't do everything, so good collaboration is needed” **KAREN PILKINGTON**



Before

Residents' enthusiasm is augmented with council expertise as they work together to improve blockhouse park.



After

2 Keyham Green Spaces

Keyham is a community in the west of the city, characterised by dense victorian housing with little private outside space, and little greenery on most streets.

Following a serious incident in the area, the community asked for improvements to the neighbourhood's green spaces to make these areas safer, more welcoming and accessible, and better for wildlife.

The spaces were: Knowle Avenue, North Down Crescent Park, Alexandra Park and Marley Park

Green Minds provided resources and facilitated an open co-design process, engaging people in a variety of ways to understand community needs and desires and support nature connection.



LEFT: Tree planting in Keyham



Co-design process

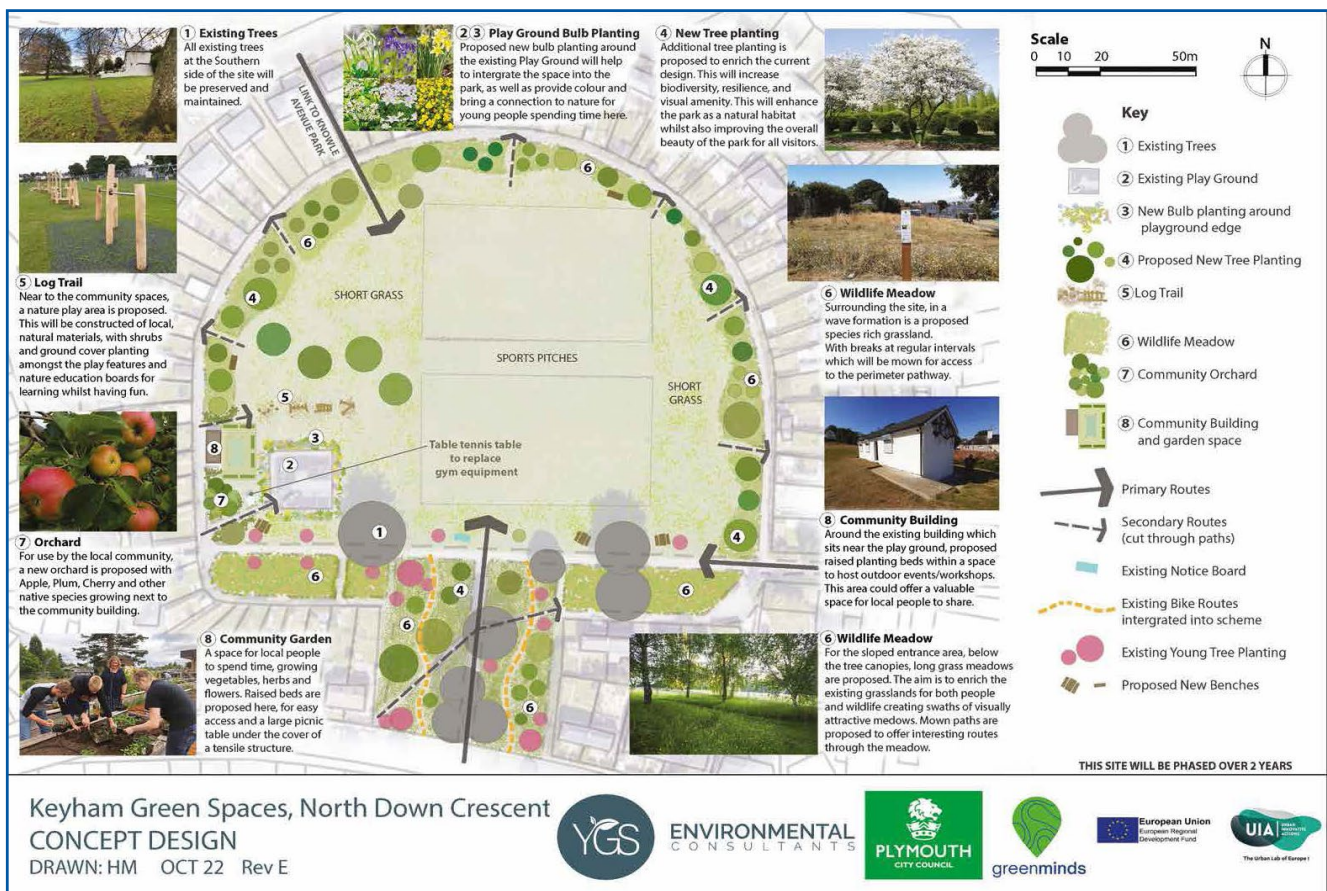


Building on feedback led by the Green Minds facilitators from an Environmental Visual Audit, Community Voices events, ward councillors and local community groups, landscape design consultants were appointed to generate an initial design proposal for each the five parks.

Working with local community-based organisations, Green Minds then coordinated drop-in co-design workshops for each site, where possible, outside in the spaces that they were referring to. This enabled residents to comment on each draft design.

Having something tangible to discuss, to represent a vision for the parks helped to frame the conversations and elicited detailed responses from the public.

Co-design also involved meeting groups on site, to look in detail at how designs would be implemented. This gave people the chance to discuss details such as where trees will be planted, where to locate a wildflower meadow etc., as well as talk about what they loved about the sites as they were. This enabled the importance of local views, dog exercise areas etc to be taken into account.



Putting it into practice... with the community

The next steps aimed to involve community groups and schools in the implementation of the designs to support ongoing co-stewardship.

This included

- the planting of a community orchard
- sowing wildflower meadows in various sites
- planning and delivering tree planting

The Community Orchard is a legacy for the community around Knowle Barton, who will be able to watch the trees blossom, grow, and forage from, as well as support more wildlife around the area.

'It's the perfect day for this...looking forward to seeing the trees grow and picking fruit in future'.

TREE PLANTER



Image: Knowle Avenue Community Orchard



Working with Plymouth's 'mini police' - the links between feeling safe and nature connection

Ensuring public spaces felt safe and welcoming was a key aim for the local community. Working with the local Police helped us to integrate feelings of safety with nature connection.

The aim of Plymouth's award-winning **Mini Police** Programme is to increase trust and confidence of young people and their communities. Mini Police focus on crime prevention including internet safety, anti-social behaviour, road safety and environmental activities.

In line with community aspirations to increase feelings of safety, Green Minds worked with this existing initiative to involve young people in the design and creation of new wildlife areas in Keyham's green spaces.

In one event, 75 children from the mini-police at Keyham Barton, Drake Primary, and Ford Primary schools, spent their social action session in North Down Crescent Park creating a small wildflower meadow and litter picking.

Nature connection was an important element of the sessions, and we supported this by including fun, sensory activities such as wildlife-themed games, poetry and film, capturing participants' feelings and aspirations for nature locally and globally.

Results

Monitoring has found that site usage went **up by 21%** compared to before the improvements, and user diversity was **up by 71%**.

An overwhelming **91% of local residents** surveyed at the end of the project agreed that the sites were accessible and well-maintained, and **77% that they were welcoming and safe**.



RIGHT: Children creating a wildflower meadow. Photo credit Pollenize and Chris Parkes Photography Ltd



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