



greenminds

greenminds case study

Growing With Nature Network



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

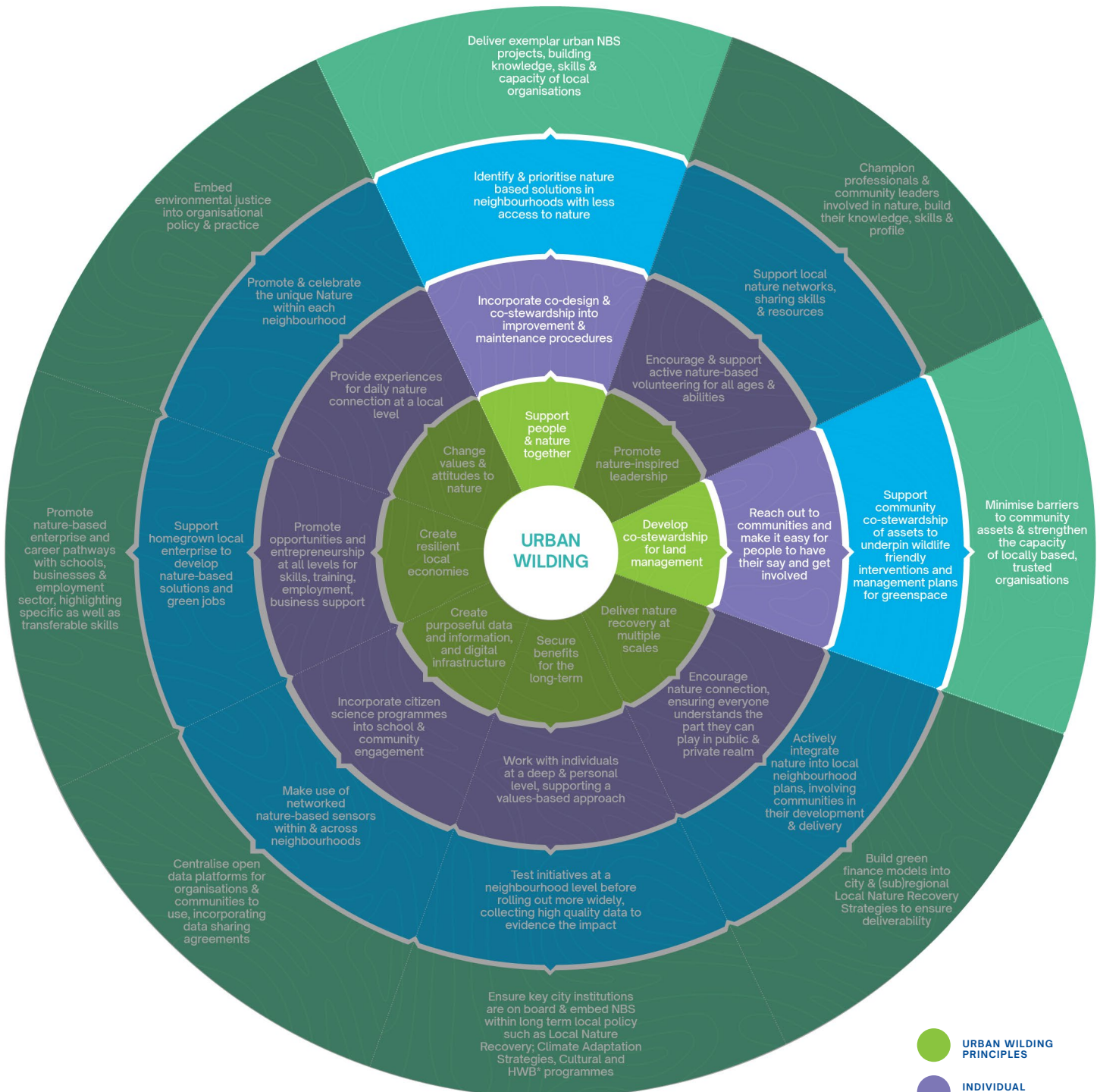
[3] Maller, C., Mumaw, L., & Cooke, B. (2019). Health and social benefits of living with 'wild' nature. Ch 9 in Rewilding. Pettorelli, N., Durant, S., and du Toit, J. (eds). Cambridge University Press

[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.



What is Growing with Nature?

As the Green Minds project moved online during the pandemic, stakeholders called for opportunities to connect with like-minded people on the issue of urban nature, which had become suddenly so much more important to people as work places were closed and normal social interactions curtailed.

A 'Plymouth Rewilding Network' was established to support people who wanted to take wilding action and provide guidance on how to complete wilding projects.

Throughout 2020 - 2021, Green Minds ran a series of networking events and produced online resources to support wilding action, before commissioning Food Plymouth to lead these activities in 2022. The Plymouth Rewilding Network became known as 'Growing with Nature', to create a more inclusive network (overcoming different perceptions of 'rewilding'), encouraging more gardening and growing groups to get involved.

The name Growing with Nature came about partly due to different perceptions within communities to the word 'rewilding', with some people considering this to mean

untamed, neglected and untidy, or unrelated to gardening or growing. We wanted to be inclusive, bring people with us and support a wider range of participants, helping them on a journey towards more nature friendly approaches and practices. Our rationale was to educate and persuade, helping people to incrementally see the advantages and accept more 'wildness', thereby creating the conditions to introduce more wildlife friendly spaces and methods within their projects.

This brought together three initiatives: Growing with Nature Network, All Ways Apples project, and a Permaculture training and development programme.

RIGHT: A Growing With Nature Network event in Devonport

A 'Plymouth Rewilding Network' was established to support people who wanted to take wilding action.



The initiatives

Growing with Nature networking events

The Growing with Nature Network events had seasonal themes, which included guided tours of growing projects led by community members, sharing project updates, advice on wilding and wildlife-friendly practices, as well as time to network and take part in activities offered by attendees (such as seed / plant swaps). **Networking events rotated around Plymouth to be more inclusive and provide an opportunity for people to attend from across the city.**

Feedback from participants has shown the network has been of huge benefit in relation to knowledge and skill sharing, as well as allowing groups across Plymouth to make connections and support each other outside of Growing with Nature events.

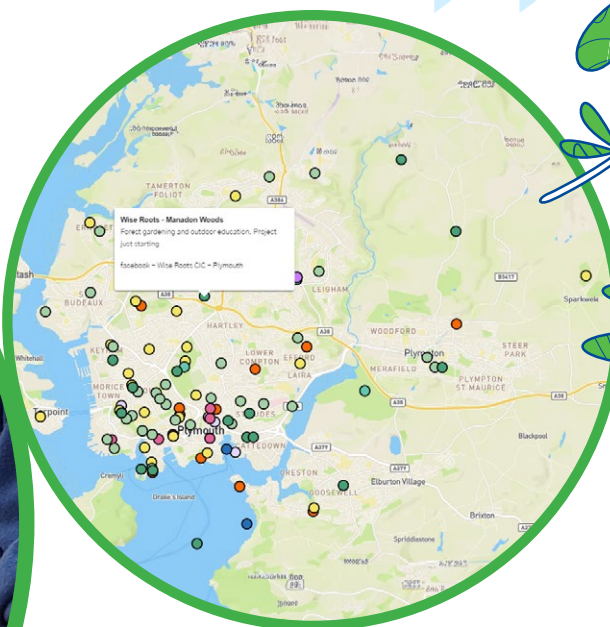
BELOW: Five 'All Ways Apples on Tour' events happened at Green Minds sites (primarily Central Park, Poole Farm and Keyham neighbourhoods), attended by over 400 people.

All Ways Apples activities

Orchards and apples have proven to be a popular focus for community activity in many villages, towns and cities. In Plymouth an events-based programme brought people together to press apples for juice and to learn about tree care and other orchard-related nature-based projects and environmentally friendly practices.

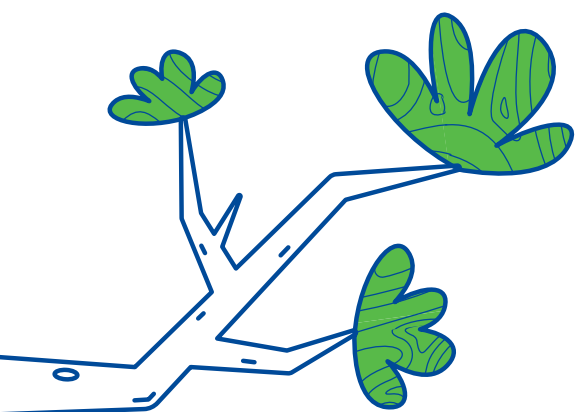
The All Ways Apples events that took place in Keyham neighbourhood proved to be a valuable opportunity for engagement and community conversations regarding the ongoing Keyham Green space Improvements¹. The Green Minds team and partners were able to talk about the fruit trees planned for new community orchards there and how people could get involved with tree planting and tree care. There was also an opportunity for local schools to get involved, with children visiting their local community orchard and taking part in nature-based activities.

“There’s such a buzz around these events, it’s something about connecting with each other over really positive projects... it’s like mycorrhiza connecting plants, we’re all connected.”
– PERSON



ABOVE: To complement the networking events, Green Minds partners at The Data Place created an online mapping platform as a way for people to find information and get involved with wilding and growing projects citywide.

The initiatives



BELOW: A Growing With Nature Network event



Permaculture design training

Whilst Permaculture originated in agricultural systems, its ethos of connecting with nature and learning from working within natural systems provides an approach to urban green space design, allowing wild spaces to thrive in smaller urban spaces.

Green Minds funded places for participants on two permaculture courses delivered by Tess Wilmot (Food Plymouth) and international permaculture specialist Klaudia van Gool. One of these was a 12-day Permaculture Design course for community growers and green space guardians, while the other was a bespoke five-day Introduction to Permaculture course for professionals working on environmental and community focused projects.

Holding the permaculture training courses at Green Minds project sites (Poole Farm, and Snapdragons CIC in Victoria Park) allowed participants to immerse themselves with nature in the city and 'see with new eyes'. Using permaculture design skills, people were empowered to observe, analyse, research and find solutions in a wide range of settings and scales for their design exercises. Every permaculture design is different, designed to be appropriate for the people involved and also taking into account that 'earth repair' is needed for the site and the wildlife.



It has been a truly profound experience for me to begin to understand the importance of Permaculture Design and its principles and ethics.

Lessons learned

Growing with Nature - finding common ground and creating a Movement

- Engagement with nature during the pandemic awakened a passion for nature in many people and the GWN network opened a way of connecting with like-minded people during a time of heightened individual isolation and anxiety
- Mapping activities using interactive online tools helps people to find out what is going on in their immediate and wider community, and helps to provide a sense of shared purpose
- Growing food and tending community green spaces can bring together many community- and nature-focussed organisations and provide common ground to enable effective collaborations in support of multiple community objectives such as Nature Connection and improved mental health

Permaculture – a community centred approach to wilding green spaces

- Permaculture design principles help people to understand the systemic character of urban nature, and to create more durable designs delivering multiple benefits
- Its approach, which places natural systems at the centre of the process, is well suited to design for urban wilding - an understanding of nature through permaculture principles can aid an active transition to wilder green spaces in cities giving parks operatives new insights into urban nature

Community Orchards

- People love orchards! They provide blossom and fruit and are a great focus for community and school events.
- Picking and pressing apples for juice provides a fun activity with a tangible product that people can enjoy and associate with care for orchards and their biodiversity, enhancing connection to nature.

“I have been in parks for 33 years keeping things tidy, pruning and cutting. Now I understand. Taken my head space out of the formal Victorian park. Never thought I would feel this way. Huge change. Amazing.”

– PERSON





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