



greenminds

greenminds evaluation

**Derriford Community Park
Neighbourhood Management
Trial Evaluation**



Methodology

Evaluations were carried out by an independent contractor through interviews with key staff involved in project delivery during August/September 2023, site visits, and review of project monitoring information.

The neighbourhood management trials took place in four contrasting areas:

Central Park

Central Park was created in 1928 as a park for the city as a whole. It is highly valued by the people of Plymouth, holding a treasured place in many family memories. It is large and complex, comprising many spaces of different character attracting a diversity of users.

Derriford Community Park

Derriford Community Park is a new green space, wilder than Central Park. It lacks a longstanding community of users, and its value to the community is still being tested and developed.

Devonport and Stonehouse

Social Enterprise trails in Stonehouse/Devonport communities focused on the wilding and development of under-used spaces. Their aim was to develop alternative approaches to management and financing that added value for the local community in a sustainable way.

Trees and Rewilding Corridors

Keyham Green Spaces were selected for evaluation as components of the Urban Trees and Wilding Corridors management trial. Keyham suffered a traumatic shooting incident in 2021 which led to calls for improved safety and to make green spaces more welcoming to overcome the fear of going out. Five spaces were reimagined by their users, mostly living in the immediate vicinity. A strategic plan brought a coherence to this work within the context of nature recovery.

What was proposed?

Derriford Community Park is a strategic greenspace project with the ambition to become a highly valued environmental, social and educational asset, a resource for the people of Plymouth and a regional destination for environmental learning.

Work has begun on engaging stakeholders through a Project Steering Group to develop a small and transferable scale urban wilding project initially focused on the introduction of beavers to an enclosed site in the **Bircham Valley**. The investment will provide site infrastructure to establish a population of beavers in the Community Park within the Bircham Valley, equipment for monitoring the impacts on the natural environment, an education, interpretation and viewing lodge and the development of interpretation tools to provide an immersive experience in a prehuman adapted environment.

To date baseline data has been captured throughout 2018–19 and academic stakeholders from Exeter University have 2 PhD placements either operating or being recruited who will monitor and evaluate the impact of beaver introduction on socio-economic and eco-hydrology at this site and others in the region.

Future phases will look at investment into site infrastructure, monitoring and interpretation hardware and software around other keystone and charismatic species introductions. This would potentially include water voles, cranes, large herbivores, terrestrial and freshwater invertebrate species.”

Assessment against Urban Wildling Principles

Support people & nature together	Derriford Community park is a core asset for Plymouth, providing health and wellbeing benefits for people, especially children and young people, from across the city. Green Minds investments were designed to enhance the quality of those services, for example the footpaths and cycle trails, the wildlife watching cabin. 3716 people were involved in Green Minds events at Derriford Community Park, of which 41% were new attendees. Of the 271 people asked, 88% strongly agreed or agreed that spending time in nature at Derriford Community Park was good for their health and wellbeing. In relation to Green Minds events, the following strongly agreed or agreed that spending time in nature at Derriford Community Park was good for their: • Physical health – 88% • Mental health – 87% • Socialising – 87% • Feeling closer to nature – 89%
Promoting nature-inspired leadership	DCP has a dedicated volunteer workforce, inspired by the quality of nature in the park. For example, volunteers undertook much of the monitoring work on the beavers following their introduction. During Green Minds, 2055 volunteers were involved contributing over 11,500 hours through formal volunteering events, beaver fence checks and educational placements. The wildlife cabin has developed an exceptional role in the engagement of young people in nature to address mental health challenges. Attending Green Minds events 24% of people were aged 0 – 10, with 8% aged 11 – 17 and 9% aged 18 – 24.
Changing values & attitudes to nature	A unique outcome of the DCP investments, is the increased value that mental health professionals are placing on nature and outdoor experience as a tool for improving mental health amongst children and young people. A mental health worker commented, ‘I think they [children] were able to take a step back and take a moment to be in the environment, listen to the birds and look around them and pick up objects’ and enjoy a greater sense of freedom.
Developing co-stewardship for land management	DCP has a large and active volunteer workforce, contributing to management of nature in the park. During Green Minds, 2055 volunteers were involved contributing over 11,500 hours through formal volunteering events, beaver fence checks and educational placements. Formal volunteering events including over 100 practical volunteering sessions, 16 citizen science events and 2 bioblitzes. The majority of activities included habitat restoration, wildlife / plant identification and tree planting.
Secure benefits for the long-term	A management plan guides site enhancement and operational activities, aiming for continuous improvement in habitat quality.
Create purposeful data & information supported by digital infrastructure	University of Exeter were commissioned to evaluate the hydrological impacts of leaky dams for flood management, which included the use of automated flow meters and dataloggers.
Create resilient local economies	DCP forms an important component of Plymouth’s natural infrastructure, which plays a central role in the city’s development strategy – the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan.
Deliver nature recovery at multiple scales	Site improvements at DCP sits within a city-wide strategy for biodiversity and nature recovery.

What was achieved?

The 6.5ha beaver enclosure was created (fencing, screens in the stream, a pond) and a pair of beavers successfully introduced. An observation hide was created, designed to also be used as a classroom. It has proved to be a very popular facility. The Hayloft at Poole Farm Phase 1 renovations are complete, and phase 2 renovations were completed at the end of January 2024, with additional funding secured to add value to it as an additional space for visiting groups. Planting has enhanced walkways and cycle routes, and a tree nursery has been established. Over 40 leaky dams have been made in the Bircham Valley to complement beaver action.

Sadly, the beavers escaped when the enclosure was damaged during a storm. A new, more robust, screen has been designed and installed, to prevent a re-occurrence when beavers are introduced again. Council staff have also raised the enclosure fence to exclude deer, as a staff and team development exercise. A new pair of beavers are due to be introduced this autumn.

Monitoring has shown that the leaky dams are providing a significant benefit to storm water management, through attenuating water flow.

More widely at DCP, over 25 hectares have been restored following completion of Forder Valley Link Road, working with volunteers and project partners, including: 2940 trees; 880m deer fencing, coppicing/woodland thinning, installation of 10 leaky woody dams in Bircham Valley, bracken management, meadow management and restoration.

RIGHT: Male and female beavers meet. Photo credit, Chris Parkes Photography Ltd

What was a success?

The beavers were an outstanding success. Not only did they prove enormously popular with the public all over the city, and further afield, they started to modify the stream in a positive way through their own brand of eco-engineering. The story received national news coverage and online engagement was high, with the video of the beaver being released **gaining over 126,000 views** – the largest engagement of the year for city council communications. A ‘name the beavers’ competition with local schools was really popular and the names created a sense of relatability and pride in Plymouth. Brian and Beryl were chosen as they are two Plymouthian artists, **Brian Pollard** and **Beryl Cook**.

Allied to that, the observation cabin has been very popular with school and special needs groups, as a safe space for education and mental health activities. Its design as an ‘outside/inside’ space has proven valuable for specialist mental health work with children and young people.

Given the recent creation of the park, **a Spirit of Place process** was instituted. Facilitated by a specialist, members of the community were engaged in a process to think about how they experienced the park and what that might mean for the community as a whole. The map and text above was the outcome of that process and helped us to accelerate the development of the park as a special place in the minds of local people.



A 10 year strategic partnership between Plymouth City Council and National Trust emerged from the Green Minds trial in 2022. This partnership will support the development and governance of Derriford Community Park as a separate charitable entity, cementing its approach to co-stewardship. In 2023, funding was secured from the UK Youth Investment Fund to develop the site as a nature-based hub for children and young people. This will support both the development of the site as a Green Skills hub and support co-design and long term governance by young people.

What could be improved/what challenges were encountered?

The design of the beaver enclosure is vital in an urban area because of the hazards of vehicular traffic and the higher potential for disturbance from noise and human activity in general. As a response to the beaver escape it has been redesigned, especially where it crosses the stream, which is a particularly vulnerable point. Deer have been removed from the enclosure and a deer fence erected, and badger tunnels installed to allow them free movement.

What lessons have been learned?

The Plymouth Beaver Steering Group of experts that had been convened to advise on the beaver introduction proved immensely valuable after the unfortunate death of one beaver in a traffic accident after the escape. They helped to review the potential reasons behind the escape, and advised on the way forward.

The power of charismatic species is not to be overlooked! Beavers fit that bill and have huge potential in appropriate urban areas to engage the public in nature recovery, and to deliver real nature-based solutions for storm water management and biodiversity.

As a **new** greenspace site in the city, Derriford Community Park was unique within the Green Minds trial. With limited public use prior to the intervention, there was the opportunity to build engagement from the ground up, trialling new approaches. With the support of the Green Minds partnership and funding, this enabled the team to set the scene from the outset as a place for innovation around Nature Based Solutions, where the appetite for risk was higher.

RIGHT: Grates on site at Derriford Community Park

BELOW: Interpretation board at Derriford Community Park



NATURE BASED SOLUTION TYPE:

Natural flood management, including beaver reintroduction for dam building and man-made leaky dams to reduce flooding during heavy rainfall.





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