



greenminds

greenminds evaluations

**Urban Trees and
Rewilding Corridors
Neighbourhood Management
Trial Evaluation**



**REAL
IDEAS**



**ARTS
UNIVERSITY
PLYMOUTH**



**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund



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. Due to the site being closed to the public until recently, it lacks a longstanding community of users, and its value to the community is still being tested and developed.

Devonport and Stonehouse

Social enterprise trials 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.

Urban 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 critical incident in 2021 which led to calls for the green spaces feel safer and more welcoming. 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.



Image: The Green Minds team at a community tree planting event in Keyham

Methodology

What was proposed?

Across the city there are over 30,000 street trees, hundreds of hectares of woodland including ancient woodlands and many veteran trees. Plymouth's recent Tree Canopy Cover Study revealed that although the city has an average of 17% tree cover, this amount varies across different areas: Budshead has 25.3% tree cover but Devonport has only 5.8%. This urban forest suffered from poor maintenance and underinvestment, and uneven distributions. Some neighbourhoods benefit far more than others. Trees play an important role in wildlife connectivity and strategic plantings have significant biodiversity benefits. Plymouth's Plan for Trees was collaboratively developed with Plymouth City Council, Woodland Trust, Plymouth Community Homes, Plymouth Tree Partnership, Plymouth Open Space Network and the Tree Council.

Using guidance from Plymouth's Plan for Trees, Green Minds enabled targeted interventions to demonstrate the value of trees for society and wildlife their role in renaturing the city, and in climate resilience:

- Invest to promote, protect, repair and enhance the tree resource in select neighbourhoods to complement other investments
- Strategically enhance wildlife corridors in the city
- Improve the setting of select trees in the public realm, to enhance the social benefits (such as urban cooling)

Delivery of investment reflect Green Minds philosophy: collaborative approach with a co-stewardship ethos, working to change mindsets to see the true value of trees.

What was achieved?

Wilding projects were prioritised for Green Minds action in five Keyham green spaces, in the context of a Keyham Green space Plan. The objective of these investments was to make Alexandra Park, North Down Crescent Park, Marley Park, Knowle Avenue, and Linear Park feel safer, more welcoming and accessible, and better for wildlife.

Following initial requests from the community via the Keyham Recovery programme, the Green Minds co-design process included on-site meetings and workshops with community stakeholders, engagement with local schools, and conversations with Plymouth City Council land management staff. Feedback from this process was used to create landscape designs for the five green spaces, which were redefined and updated over several co-design stages. Residents advised on where to locate wildlife meadow areas, tree locations and species, community gardens and natural play areas. This work was complimented by path repairs and the installation of bespoke wildlife-themed benches co-designed with a local youth group.

NATURE BASED SOLUTION TYPE

Tree planting, wildlife meadows and habitat improvements in parks for cultural ecosystem services (nature-based education and training, and social enterprise).

Assessment against Urban Wilding Principles

Support people & nature together	The co-design process ensured that residents needs and aspirations were met at the same time as the sites being wilded. Over 2363 people attended Green Minds events related to Urban Trees and Rewilding Corridors, 73% of which were new attendees. Out of 192 people asked, the following strongly agreed or agreed that spending time in nature was good for their: • Physical health – 89% • Mental health – 94% • Socialising – 79% • Feeling closer to nature – 81%
Promoting nature-inspired leadership	The focus on each park individually, allowed frequent users to come together to contribute their views to its redesign, taking more ownership for its future. Over 580 people aged 0 - 10 and over 190 people aged 11 - 17 took part in events or observed using green spaces in the west of the city.. Over 130 children from three Keyham primary schools completed their social action days creating wildlife meadows with Green Minds through the mini-police scheme, while several groups from the 1st Keyham Scout Group have been involved with wildlife meadow and hedgerow creation, and contributed towards the Green Minds immersive 360 film. Green Minds also reached out local youth group (Keyham Young Voices Participation Group), involving them in the design of bespoke nature themed benches and for many, engaging them with their local green spaces for the first time.
Changing values & attitudes to nature	Wilding of parks represents a significant departure from the past model of parks as highly manicured public spaces. Involving the community in co-design enabled new conversations about what to value in parks. In the initial consultation survey of 43 residents in Keyham, 16 additional comments were made by survey respondents relating to liking the mix of areas for wildlife and people, with several more comments relating positively to more tree planting in the area. This theme continued with the co-design workshops, with many residents recognising the value of wildlife habitats within green spaces: the most popular themes from the co-design workshops were liking the tree / plants species suggested and having homes for wildlife.
Developing co-stewardship for land management	Many local groups were already associated with the green spaces, but did not necessarily engage with nature. Green Minds facilitated 474 people in volunteering, contributing over 960 hours, primarily through the Keyham Green space Improvements (tree planting and wildlife meadow creation). Through Green Minds events, such as a bespoke plant / insect identification session with free meadow surveying kits for Keyham community groups, the project is providing resources and skills to local residents to promote nature connection in their area. As a result, each site now has a lead community group, supporting ongoing stewardship and engagement.
Secure benefits for the long-term	Two community groups recently completed Community Asset Transfers for buildings based in two of the Keyham green spaces.. As these groups become further established in their green spaces, there will be further opportunities to promote nature connection. Similarly, the project has been developing relationships with community hub, Keyham Green Places, located adjacent to Alexandra Park to promote the Keyham green spaces as assets that can be actively used by communities as well as building grounds.
Create purposeful data & information supported by digital infrastructure	The Keyham Green space Improvements demonstrated how grass cutting regimes can be amended successfully, by closely working with community stakeholders, as well as Plymouth City Council Street Services teams, to ensure proposals were in line with community wishes while being realistic for grass cutting teams to manage. Green Minds also enabled baseline ecological data to be collected in west of city sites, with Devon Biodiversity Records Centre surveys showing an improvement in site condition and biodiversity scores from 6.7 to 7.3 out of 10. This data, along with methodology in line with Local Nature Recovery strategies as well as ongoing ecological monitoring of sites, will help contribute to biodiversity datasets, identify priorities for habitat management and connectivity, and promote the importance of city parks and verges in nature recovery.
Create resilient local economies	Within Keyham, three local community groups / organisations are based in buildings within / adjacent to green spaces (following Community Asset Transfers). As their activities develop, there are further opportunities going forward to actively embed Green space activities in their work, promote active citizenship and volunteering opportunities to manage green spaces alongside Plymouth City Council, and promote green spaces as an asset that can be used by all members of the community in addition to the buildings themselves.
Deliver nature recovery at multiple scales	The five parks represent a collective wilding of the Keyham neighbourhood, improving on-site biodiversity as well as enhancing habitat connectivity across the Keyham sites. The Keyham Green space Improvements, as well as Green Minds' projects in the wider Urban Trees and Rewilding Corridors area, has started to address Plymouth's disparity in tree cover by increasing tree canopy cover in the west of the city.

Under the Keyham Green space Improvements, over 150 trees were planted in three Keyham sites: Alexandra Park, North Down Crescent Park and Knowle Avenue..

At these three sites, site assessment data (through the use of adapted SOPARC* methodology and on-site questionnaires) showed:

- **21% increase in the total number of visitors.**
- **71% increase in user diversity: the average percentage difference across all demographic categories (age, gender, ethnicity and ability / disability, excluding prefer not to say).**
- **16% increase in reported health and wellbeing (physical health, mental health, socialising).**

What was a success?

Engagement of school children through initiatives, such as Mini Police, by providing an environmental activity – for example, wildlife meadow creation (in North Down Crescent Park , Alexandra Park). 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. 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.

A co-design process with the community, involving a diversity of mechanisms for engagement, helped create an inclusive way for community stakeholders to contribute to the Keyham Green Space Plan.

Working with local community-based organisations, **Green Minds** coordinated drop-in co-design workshops for each site, often in the green spaces, enabling residents to comment on each of the designs and visualise changes in the surrounding space. Having something tangible to discuss, to represent a vision for the parks, helped to frame the conversations and elicited detailed responses from the local stakeholders.

This gave people the chance to discuss details such as where trees will be planted, where to locate a wildlife meadows. as well as talk about what they loved about the sites as they were. This enabled the importance of local views to be implemented in the Keyham Green space Plan. Designs were finalised through meeting the community groups based within the green spaces on-site, to confirm final details such as checking the feasibility of bench and tree locations, before the final designs were shared publicly.

What could be improved / what challenges were encountered?

Constraints due to staff capacity limited project presence in the Keyham neighbourhood. This impacted the efficacy of information sharing with local residents, and highlighted the limited reach of some of the traditional communications channels.

While working alongside the Safer Keyham / Plymouth Together teams created a positive impact and reached a wider audience than Green Minds could have done alone, there was some learning for internal Plymouth City Council teams (who were not involved in green space management) in terms of processes for green space improvements – specifically regarding communication, liaison and procedures within green space management.

*SOPARC: System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities



What lessons have been learned?

The co-design / asset based community co-stewardship approach works well with the right coordination resource. This means staff with capacity to spend time embedding in communities so there are more opportunities for conversations on-site, rather than through reading material online or on site signage, or hearing second hand. Green Minds site assessment data as well as an independent Safer Keyham Report* reflects the positive impact of Green space improvements and community involvement.

However, we learned that the involvement of local politicians through the process was vital to ensure joined up communications, so that any changes implemented weren't a result of a few 'loud voices' but something the community in general want to see. Whilst the trial encouraged interest and mobilisation of groups, there is a need for ongoing support and coordination, building networks and skills across the Keyham community.

*Find the Safer Keyham report at <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10026.1/20932/Safer%20Keyham%20evaluation%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf?sequence=3>

Following learning from this management trial, additional funding has been secured to create a People's Plan for Nature in Keyham, alongside the legacy project of Green Minds, Green Communities. This pilot project running from September 2023 to March 2025, embeds a Plymouth City Council Officer and National Trust Ranger within the Keyham neighbourhood. This will enable the continuation of the Keyham Green Space Improvements, provide regular on-site presence, and improve community cohesion, connecting people and biodiversity across Keyham.

BELOW: Bespoke meadow and insect identification session for Keyham community groups

BELOW LEFT: The Mini Police in Keyham at a bulb planting and litter picking event



“Green Minds is a great example of taking and adapting research-based approaches to fit the needs and circumstances of a particular situation. Then communicating the new approaches to a diverse audience.”





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This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.



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