



greenminds

greenminds insight paper

**A Collaborative Approach
for Art, Education &
External Partnerships**



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

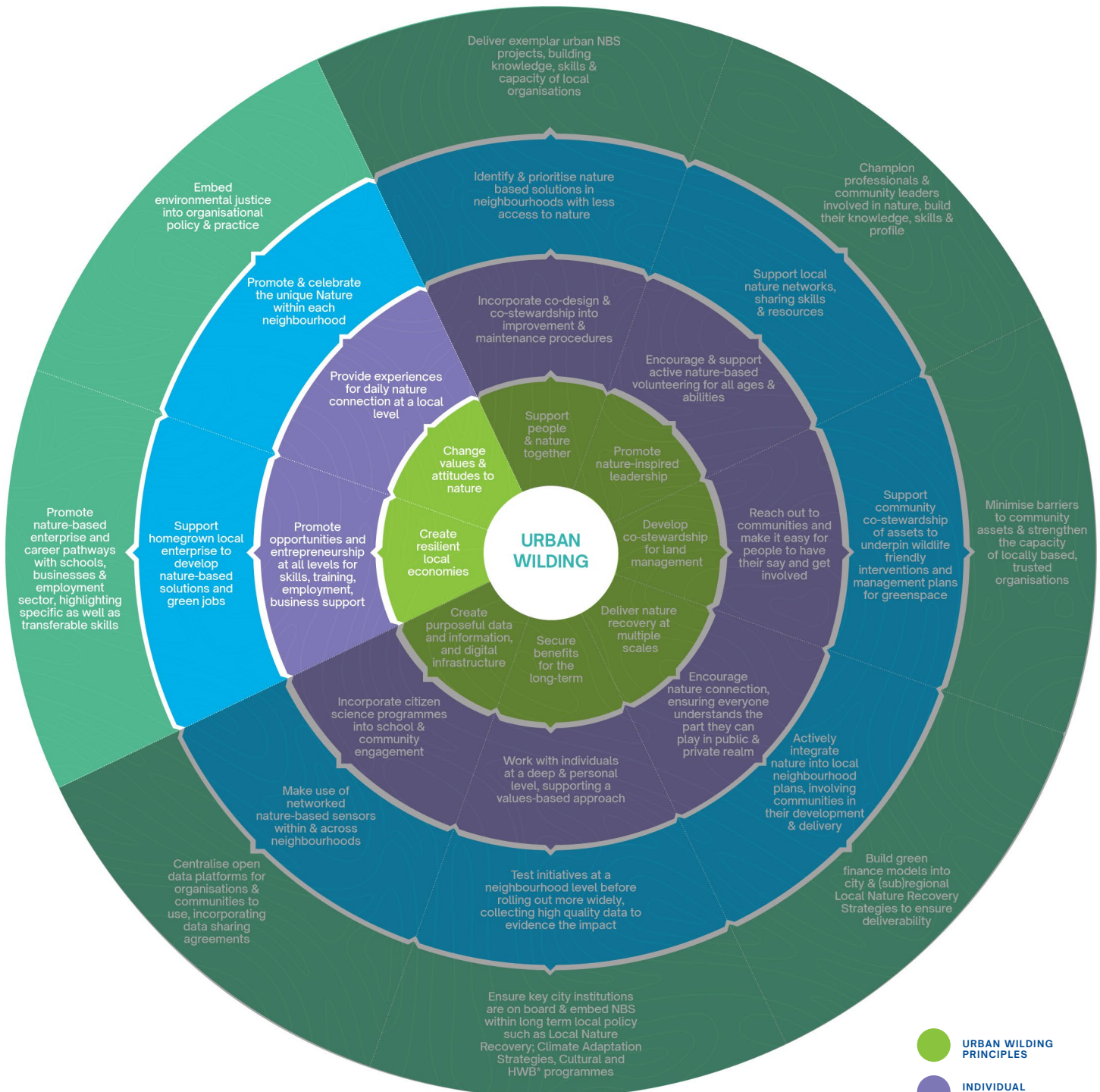
[3] Maller, C., Mumaw, L., & Cooke, B. (2019). Health and social benefits of living with 'wild' nature. Ch 9 in Rewilding. Pettorelli, N., Durant, S., and du Toit, J. (eds). Cambridge University Press

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

greenmindsmodel

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.



Introduction

The Green Minds model engages ‘Changing Values and Attitudes to Nature’ as central to the mission of rewilding people and places. The arts help us express how we relate to the world as human beings and a defining proposition from Arts University Plymouth is that the world needs creatives now, more than ever.

Society faces a critical and urgent need to rebuild its relationship with the environment and as a catalyst for change the arts have a crucial role to play.¹

Arts University Plymouth was the creative partner in the Green Minds project, as it resonated with the university’s established mission for creative learning and social and environmental justice. It was important to model an approach that drew from the shared values and missions of the university and the Green Minds project, and embed these within our working method.

Arts University Plymouth’s Development Team represented the university in the project partnership, worked with partners to identify and create opportunities, and managed these within the university; a dedicated Project Coordinator provided crucial consistency and momentum to the activity.

As part of Green Minds, students from Arts University Plymouth produced seventeen creative works and two exhibitions that have been showcased at partner and public sites; these include murals, interpretation boards, sculpture, photography and textiles. Alongside these works, staff and students have also created digital assets, designed the Green Minds brand identity, hosted workshops, photographed community projects, and participated in Green Minds public events. We are extremely proud of the high quality of work our students produced and this is only part of the story.

In our approach to this project we made a commitment to value students’ participation just as much as their output. We understand the importance of this balance in enhancing students’ creative and professional development, as well as their relationship with nature.

This paper outlines the approaches we took, provides some case studies, and reflects on lessons learned.

Arts University Plymouth’s Participation in Green Minds:

- 428 students
- 9838 student curriculum hours
- 23 projects
- 17 public art works and 2 exhibitions
- 11 paid commissions

¹ Prof. Stephen Felmingham, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic)
Arts University Plymouth, 2022: see [youtube.com/watch?v=Iso9i9x0mW8&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iso9i9x0mW8&feature=youtu.be)



Cas Szubra Title: Connection with Water

Arts University Plymouth principles

All activity should be reciprocal, meaningful, and impactful for our students both in terms of the project objectives and the creative learning journey.

It is important that all participation has the potential to contribute to the students' artistic and professional development; Arts University Plymouth staff are best placed to assess this potential.

Students are not to be considered a low cost option for producing prescribed work. Partners are required to invest in these projects in various ways including time, shared knowledge, feedback, and fees.

In line with the Green Minds model we also recognise that our students are complex individuals who can themselves be impacted by these experiences as well as impacting others. Participation in the project will affect their own connection with nature and shape their future actions.

From the very start and throughout this project it was important for us to recognise the benefits for all stakeholders involved in this process; and to continually assess the opportunity for further or future benefit.

Because of this we were able to recognise the dual benefits of a greater depth of individual engagement coupled with more broad involvement across the wider student body.

Challenges

At the start of the Green Minds project activity we identified that some of our partners had not worked closely with a creative institution before. For some this presented itself as preconceptions regarding the potential of collaboration and how it might work, including possible results and output. While this presented a challenge it was also an opportunity for us to positively impact their values and attitudes towards creative practice and demonstrate how art can be utilised as an effective instigator of societal change.

Some additional parameters for us to consider during planning included the structure of the academic year and the importance of giving priority to curriculum and assessment activities for staff and students. Overall, it was clear that the Green Minds project would benefit if the activity we promoted supported these priorities.

RIGHT: clay workshops hosted by Arts University Plymouth students at Blockhouse Park, Plymouth



Our approach

Our approach developed over time. On reflection, our best-practice examples had the following characteristics:

Solutions focused

We encouraged partners to present us with challenges or opportunities they had identified rather than pre-empting the outcome. This was realised to a varied extent across projects. Though influenced by external parameters, this mindset helped us create an exploratory dialogue with partners – to exchange knowledge and explore areas of expertise. We also encouraged partners to recognise the value of this activity as part of their own community engagement remits, and our recognition of this was an enabling factor for some partners to invest additional time and energy in the collaborative elements of the process.

Co-creation of briefs

Where possible creative briefs were written collaboratively between all relevant stakeholders including Arts University Plymouth Academic and Development Team staff and Green Minds partners, plus any other relevant community or commercial partners. Similar to a rewilded ecological process, this involved a process of ‘letting go’ regarding specific creative outcomes. We encouraged partners to write briefs which offered clear parameters where necessary but which were also non-prescriptive where possible. This would allow students to begin with an initial point of inspiration and then evolve and develop their own creative outcomes.

These then became ‘live briefs’ for students to respond to, with our external partners situated as their ‘client’. From here there were two delivery routes:

Integration into the curriculum: This was best suited to projects where the partner was open to exploring a range of potential outcomes that responded to the challenge or opportunity set.

Open-call: If a project brief was tightly defined or required timelines which didn’t align with the curriculum the brief became an ‘open-call’ to students. This also applied in situations where the work required was felt to be too similar to previously completed briefs.

For both routes we aimed to provide students with access to the stakeholders during the briefing process. This ranged from one-off briefing meetings to more intensive engagements such as site visits and workshops depending on partner capacity.



LEFT: Arts University Plymouth students painting a nature-inspired mural at Derriford Community Park

Our Approach

Samples, pitches and prototypes

Early projects aimed to deliver a final body of work through the curriculum period. However, as the Green Minds project progressed we transitioned to a preferred delivery model whereby students worked towards a final pitch, sample, or prototype as the culmination of their work. This enabled us to promote the value of participation rather than focus only on the final results.

Sharing and pitch events were taken as important moments to celebrate the students' work as well as to undertake any assessment required for the purpose of the curriculum or commissioning processes. Typically these events were attended by

the partner (as client) as well as any other relevant stakeholders and the students, who either individually or working as groups presented their concepts. This included sharing their inspiration, process, sketches or drafts of their ideas, and examples of their previous work.

In order to maximise the impact of the experience for students, Arts University Plymouth sought to ensure that students received feedback on their ideas and their pitches. This was provided by Academic and Development Team staff, clients, and other stakeholders. This feedback was an invaluable part of the students' professional development.

“The value even at the pitching level is incredible - any student who has undertaken this and received feedback will have been functioning at a very assertive and professional level. As far as the course goes the impact is positive, largely in the fact that there is a professional and ethically minded presence adjacent to study. Having opportunities and briefs orbiting the curriculum so students can trial their learning is where we really want our programme to be.

BEN WRIGHT, BA ILLUSTRATION COURSE LEADER

Photo: Tom Milnes's 'Ashnihilation' augmented reality, immersive wilding experience on Plymouth Hoe



Our approach

Student outcomes and opportunities

At the start of every project, we ensured that the expected and potential outcomes were explicit; typically these included exhibition opportunities or commissions.

In the open-call route the commission opportunities were detailed in full and a commitment made by the partner against this; as students worked on these in their own time it was important that this commitment was in place.

For projects delivered via the curriculum route the commission opportunities were often more loosely defined with the partner confirming that funds were available and commissions a possibility should they find a good fit; here students were able to take more innovative approaches to the brief but the commissioning partner retained discretion on how to proceed. In these examples students were still given credit for their work through their course and the partner was credited for their participation as a community engagement activity. The opportunity to pitch to the client also, in several examples, led to direct commissions for other briefs.

RIGHT: Willow sculpture created for Derriford Community Park



“I had a lot of great feedback today about the depth, quality and integrity of your work”

**JEMMA SHARMAN
(GREEN MINDS PROJECT LEAD)**

CASE STUDY

Interpretation boards

The National Trust Saltram, a Green Minds partner, wanted an illustrated series of interpretation boards to inform their visitors about the changing habitats that would evolve in their newly fenced off rewilding areas. The Arts University Plymouth Development Team discussed the requirements and matched it to BA (hons) Illustration; course leaders agreed to incorporate it into the curriculum for sixty Year 2 students as part of a professional practice unit with the National Trust Saltram as the client.

The students undertook a site visit to the Saltram estate, learned about their rewilding work, and had time to observe and draw. They then formed teams to collaborate on design proposals over a four week period. At the end of the design period, the students pitched their ideas to the client.

All of the students who participated were credited for their learning as part of the course and received feedback from the client about their work. The selected teams went on to design the final signs; they continued to work and were required to liaise with the client and project manage the work with their peers. When the final works were installed at the National Trust Saltram a celebration event for the students was organised and hosted by the National Trust staff.

Ongoing impacts

Following the success of this project, the Arts University Plymouth Green Minds Coordinator was approached by partners with other opportunities for signage, posters, or interpretation boards.

RIGHT: Arts University Plymouth Illustration students next to their interpretation at the National Trust's Saltram House

On these occasions it was decided that the open call route was more appropriate as: repeating a similar project was of limited benefit at the curriculum level; it is better that students have the opportunity to expand their practice; it was important to extend the student body participation beyond a single cohort; the clients would benefit from the opportunity to be exposed to a higher diversity of responses and creative approaches.

It was therefore agreed that these would result in paid commissions for selected students following the final pitch. This ensured that the students would: be appropriately compensated; gain practical experience of managing the business and commercial aspects of their practice; be able to represent this work within their portfolio as a professional commission.

In this approach students were successful in securing commissions against their pitches as well as being further commissioned directly for other opportunities. Once the commission was awarded the primary relationship was between the student and client as a professional arrangement; however Arts University Plymouth remained on hand to assist either side as and when required.



CASE STUDY

Interpretation boards

The emergent process was managed by the Arts University Development Team who:

- Encouraged and enabled partners to be open to new ideas and approaches, gauged their appetite for risk and innovation, and guided the project to ensure that their needs would be met
- Identified the most appropriate way to allocate or disseminate opportunities
- Co-wrote briefs to ensure that the creative voice was present from the outset and that briefs provided scope for students to respond creatively and innovate
- Ensured that the client was fully invested in the process and committed resources to the process both as time and/or finance; this included working in partnership with university on the delivery of the brief and providing additional information and resources to the students where required
- Ensured that all expectations and parameters were clear and appropriately managed
- Identified emergent opportunities and instigated ongoing discussions around future working

Outcomes and Impacts

Co-creative processes with reciprocal exchange between stakeholders mirror the natural ecological processes of rewilding. In a classic ecological rewilding context, a key factor is that of ensuring that all the key species are present that are necessary for a fully functioning ecosystem; in a Green Minds context, this means ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged to complete the picture and ensure equitable outcomes. For Arts University Plymouth, the co-creation and co-delivery of creative briefs was an essential part of this. As with ecological rewilding, the co-creative process required

a collaborative and non-prescriptive approach to outcomes. The outcome of this is the evolution of diverse networks and unexpected and socially inclusive developments.

In terms of learning impacts, the students learned how to use their unique creative talents to communicate and promote nature-based solutions from a better informed perspective; enabling students to make a positive difference for nature and to see the value of this for their professional development.

Arts University Plymouth and the Green Minds project benefited from the outlined working model which brings tangible advantages in terms of stakeholder collaboration more broadly:

Students: develop professional skills, confidence, experience, portfolio, grow professional and client networks, impact on their creative practice

Partners: gain experience of the creative and commissioning processes, benefit from exposure to a diverse range of creative responses, source professional creative assets

Project: public engagement deliverables are enhanced at multiple points in the activity, the deep interaction between partners and participant students creates possibility for meaningful impact on values and attitudes, creative works, the final works are a vehicle with which to inform and impact the public, semi-permanent or permanent works create a legacy beyond the end of the project delivery period

Interpretation boards

“We were so impressed with the professionalism and enthusiasm of the Arts University Plymouth students”

OWEN FINNIE, (POLLENIZE)

University: supports and enhances students vocational skills and employability, raises the profile of the student body and individual students, contributes to public and community engagement deliverables, establishes new networks and partnerships and deepens relationships with current partners, instigates opportunities for emergent research and knowledge exchange activity

Arts University Plymouth’s participation in the Green Minds project has benefited our students and our project partners through collaboration on creative projects through the curriculum and live briefs. The model we have developed will continue to influence the way Arts University Plymouth engages with external partners in future projects. For some partner organisations these collaborations have supported their subsequent grant and funding applications by providing evidence of their community and collaborative practices.

When co-creation, co-delivery, and knowledge exchange are applied to a shared commitment to sustainability and environmental justice the impact and legacy of this work is extended and amplified. For Arts University Plymouth, this has provided a catalyst for institutional advances within our own practices, our teaching, research and knowledge exchange; the potential for this to be amplified through our public and community engagement work and as our staff and students pursue their professional practice is substantial. This is demonstrated in our case study of Exploring Hidden Details a collaboration between the University Textiles team and National Trust Saltram as part of Green Minds.



Institutional advances

As part of the Green Minds partnership project, Arts University Plymouth students from BA (Hons) Textile Design visited National Trust Saltram in March 2022, for a design project: Exploring Hidden Details.

Staff from the National Trust hosted the visit and shared their expertise about the estate and its history with the students. The students gathered inspiration from the land, the unique gardens, the flora and fauna, as well as the house at Saltram; they learned that historically the fabrics at Saltram would have been natural. The students then devised a collection of designs using knit and print techniques. The designs created by the students celebrated and highlighted the importance of preserving and developing our outdoor space and allowed them to use nature and the local environment of Saltram to stimulate creative thinking. Their work was exhibited at National Trust Saltram, Arts University Plymouth, and at Plymouth's Lord Mayor's Festival 2022.

"I went to Arts University Plymouth to see the students present their work and it was really inspiring"

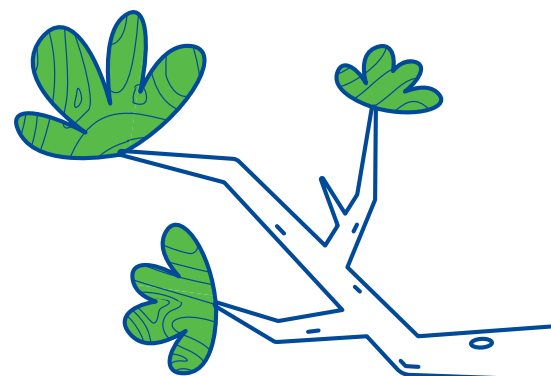
ANDREW CLANFIELD
(PCC NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE
OFFICER & CENTRAL PARK LEAD)

Ongoing impacts:

Exploring Hidden Details will now be used as a basis for an annual curriculum project for the BA (hons) Textile course and a continued partnership with the National Trust Saltram.

The work has been the inspiration for an Arts University Plymouth Knowledge Exchange project funded by Research England; the project is a partnership between the university and the National Trust to establish a dye garden and through the exchange of expertise explore the potential of this for further education, research, and development purposes. Outputs and actions include:

- A series of natural dye workshops at Arts University Plymouth and the National Trust Saltram
- Showcase Exhibition in a regional gallery space
- A digital and physical colour reference archive of colour swatches
- Production of natural dyes for use by the university BA (hons) Textiles Team in curriculum projects
- Continued research and Knowledge Exchange work to expand the scope and scale of activity
- The establishment of a natural dye green house on the university campus



LEFT: Exhibition of natural dyes made by Arts University Plymouth students

**“To say you fulfilled the brief
is an understatement – the
results are better
than I had ever hoped.”**

**JERRY GRIFFITHS (DERRIFORD
COMMUNITY PARK) PCC**





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**REAL
IDEAS**



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