



greenminds

greenminds insight paper

**Environmental
Co-Stewardship Models:
Enabling Social
Enterprise**



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

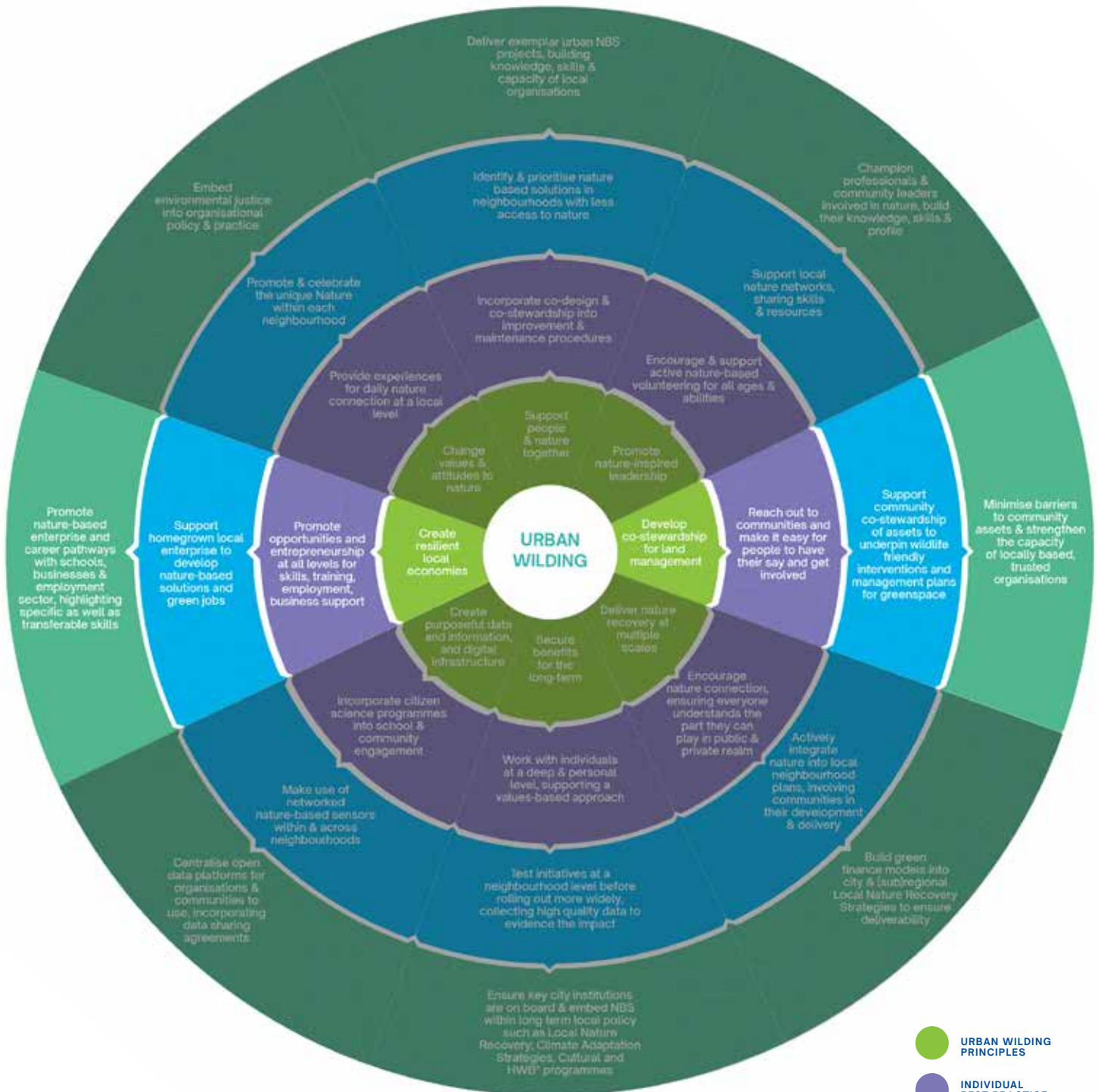
[3] Maller, C., Mumaw, L., & Cooke, B. (2019). Health and social benefits of living with 'wild' nature. Ch 9 in Rewilding. Pettorelli, N., Durant, S., and du Toit, J. (eds). Cambridge University Press

[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 Pioneering Community Businesses in Parks (PCBP) initiative forms part of Plymouth City Council's Green Minds programme.

Plymouth City Council's Green Minds programme aims to put nature at the heart of decisions and inspire a new wave of investment in nature-based solutions. PCBP aimed to create and develop more enterprising, community-led activity in parks to support their financial, social, and environmental sustainability.

PCBP was delivered by Real Ideas, a partner in the Green Minds programme that works with individuals and organisations to harness the power of social enterprise to deliver real and lasting social change.

PCBP demonstrates the value of working with community businesses for local authorities and landowners, for the benefits they can bring financially, environmentally, and socially for parks and green spaces.

'It's about enabling social enterprise to flourish in parks, to meet the Green Minds vision.'
GREEN MINDS PROJECT MANAGER

Local nature-based enterprise 'The Village Hub' supported by a Green Minds grant



Origins of the programme

PCBP builds on other work in the city, in particular the Enrich Programme.

PCBP builds on other work in the city, in particular the Enrich Programme, a one-year programme of work delivered by Real Ideas and Plymouth City Council as a Future Parks Accelerator initiative.

Enrich brought together experts from across social enterprise sectors and council departments to explore how greater social enterprise thinking could be brought to parks and green spaces to bring about financial, environmental, and social benefits. Participants collectively identified areas for development to kick-start new and greater community business activity in parks.

The focus of PCBP was on putting these recommendations and the aims of Green Minds into practice to generate learning about what works in creating more enterprising activity in parks; to understand the financial, social, and environmental benefits; and to create examples of good practice for others to follow.

It was hoped that this work would also develop strengthened networks of businesses and groups who could support one another; raise the profile of opportunities that exist for enterprise in parks; bring other voices into decisions around management of green spaces; bring in new audiences, all of which can support sustainable management of parks and green spaces.

How sites and assets included in PCBP were chosen:

1 A focused approach:

PCBP was piloted in three parks, rather than citywide, to enable the team to focus their energy to achieve action within the short timeframe available.

2 Going where the energy is:

Three sites already had active groups and community businesses “doing great things in these spaces,” on which PCBP could capitalise and build. Similarly, the team focussed on assets where there was already community interest, but where extra support was needed to get ideas off the ground. This included assets in natural spaces outside of the three initial parks.

3 Leveraging relationships:

Real Ideas had pre-existing relationships with many of the community businesses in Victoria Park and Devonport Park, helping to progress the work swiftly.

Putting it into practice

Working together under the PCBP initiative.

Work under the PCBP initiative was focussed on two key areas: bringing together community businesses and groups based in parks to collectively create more enterprising activity:

- supporting enterprising activity in parks through the use of assets.
- development of a resource hub to provide information and materials for communities and landowners interested in social enterprise in parks and green spaces.

There were four planned key phases to the work, as outlined below.

1. Mapping and Defining Activity	2. Developing the Approach	3. Implementing the Approach	4. Embedding the Legacy
Green Minds Intentions • Mapping social enterprise and other activity within each site • Mapping stakeholders within each park, their activity, and their relationships • Identifying key sites and assets to include in PCBP, based on agreed criteria • Creating a forum to launch PCBP, and to engage stakeholders • Establishing leadership groups to bring engaged stakeholders together	Green Minds Intentions • Assessment of strengths/ weaknesses/ opportunities/ challenges within each site • Ongoing engagement and input from leadership groups • Collective idea generation for creating enterprising activity in sites	Green Minds Intentions • Public engagement • Ongoing meetings with leadership groups • Ongoing provision of social enterprise advice and guidance to new and established community	Green Minds Intentions • Creation of an online Resource Hub • Established relationships with supporting Council departments • Community Asset Transfers



Victoria Park

Support through the planning process.

Snapdragons, a Community Interest Company, had recently taken on the lease of a disused bowling green and building. Snapdragons was provided with support through the planning application process, to enable them to carry out improvements to develop the site to provide forest school activities. Their application was successful and work to develop the site is currently ongoing.

This process opened up conversations between the city Council's Parks and Planning teams, helping the Planning team to recognise the challenges that community businesses face in navigating the planning system. This has resulted in the development of simple guidance materials which will support other community businesses in the future, as well as a reduced fee for pre-application enquiries for community businesses. The guidance includes information on the rationale for planning requirements, how to navigate the application process, and signposting to free advice and support.

Trialling multi-use of changing rooms

The mapping process identified underutilisation of the park changing room block, limited to weekend use by football teams. Engagement with the park leadership group identified interest from the Friends of Victoria Park group to use it as a storage space for events and gardening equipment, as well as interest from a local health and wellbeing business, Be:Unique, to use it as a base to set up outdoor fitness sessions in the park. After negotiation with the football club regarding requirements, Plymouth City Council worked with Real Ideas to

draw up licences for both the Friends group and Be:Unique to have a permanent locked room within the building. This has supported Be:Unique to expand their business offer, reach new customers, and helped bring new users to the park. Be:Unique were also awarded a seed grant from the Green Minds programme to support their work in the park.

The success of this pilot has led to Plymouth City Council expanding this approach to other areas of the city. For example, in the north of the city where investment has already been made into high quality football pitches, with a requirement to provide changing rooms, the council is working in partnership to explore the reconfiguration of a community centre to accommodate football changing. This both enables access to a wider range of funding sources as well as minimising pressure on the service to build new facilities without long term maintenance funding in place.

RIGHT: Hedgerow creation at Snapdragons



The Resource Hub

Resource hub to help to enable enterprise within parks.

An online resource hub has been created, consisting of information and tools for those interested in social enterprise in parks and green spaces, focussing on:

- the benefits of social enterprise in parks
- legal structures; funding and finance
- community engagement
- impact

- assets and spaces
- the planning process
- business models

These resources are invaluable for both future entrepreneurs and communities who may want to start something in a park or green space, as well as local authorities and landowners who may want to explore social enterprise in a park setting.

‘It’s about people being more involved in the spaces they live in and having more autonomy and power. They’re on the ground so they know what is needed. It’s tapping into that grassroots expertise. Allowing them to do it themselves is to import and makes best use of the assets.’

REAL IDEAS PROJECT COORDINATOR

‘We have some really strong examples of what’s possible, which will help with some of the fears that surround businesses coming into public spaces and the implications of that.’

**GREEN MINDS
PROJECT MANAGER**



LEFT: Demonstrating how to use Fixed Point Photography in parks

Success factors

Key success factors have been identified through delivery of the PCBP initiative, providing the following key recommendations for others who want to create and build more enterprising, community led activity in parks and green spaces.

1. Understand and respond to local context **2. Work with independent enterprise experts**

Taking time to understand your green spaces, enterprises, partners, assets, and available resources and skills is invaluable for informing decisions around where to focus work, what can be achieved within a given timeframe, and how to achieve it.

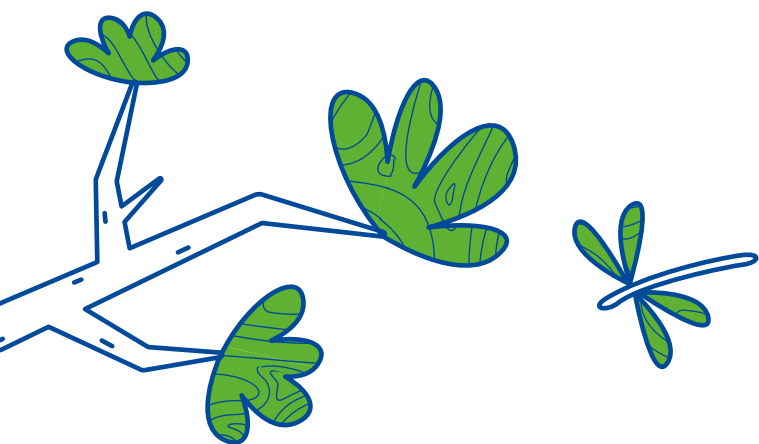
Choosing sites where activity was already happening, where there was already interest in utilising an asset, and where relationships were already established, enabled progress to be made faster and benefits realised sooner. This is important for gaining trust and credibility and building relationships within the community business sector.

This includes being flexible in approach. For example, where a leadership group was not working, it was dropped, and focus shifted to other activity which did have momentum. It is important to adapt to the different contexts of green spaces and the assets and community businesses within them.

Having this local understanding helped to bring different community businesses and groups together, align them around a shared vision, helping to drive work forward and support its ongoing sustainability.

Embarking on initiatives like PCBP is difficult for local authorities to do alone; additional independent expertise in developing enterprising activity can be beneficial, by:

- Helping to develop a clear vision and aspirations for the initiative, providing a focus to achieve action and impact;
- Translating this vision when working on the ground to create shared goals between community businesses and other groups;
- Providing additional capacity to support delivery to happen on the ground, from idea generation to implementation;
- Providing credibility to the work, helping to develop relationships and trust with community businesses and groups;
- Providing enterprise support, unpick complexities, network facilitation, and hold the middle ground;
- Providing social enterprise learning to reach a shared enterprise culture and practice across all partners (councils, landowners, and communities). This can help to overcome challenges around individuals and organisations finding it difficult to adopt an enterprising mindset and defaulting to simply 'doing what they know,' something which can be exacerbated by parks not being seen as enterprising places.



Success factors

3. Design for the long term, with flexibility

Change takes time, and people, priorities and resources can shift. Have an approach, rather than a strict plan, which can be refocused to opportunities as they emerge.

Be enterprising: Income, funding and investment enables long term sustainability, paying for people and running costs, resulting in more social-environmental-economic benefit on an ongoing basis.

Develop resources and tools, which are easy to find and follow, to support people to develop enterprising activity and to overcome common challenges encountered. This will support capacity building and expertise within the sector and among partners, to grow the work and result in greater benefit.

4. Collaborate and be accountable to one another

Multiple departments in local authorities often have responsibility for different aspects of built assets. Effective cross-departmental working is thus essential for enabling progress to be achieved.

Different departments' processes and timetables can impact progress. It is important to understand this, particularly for managing communications and expectations with community businesses and groups.

Building internal relationships can have added benefits in supporting future work of a similar nature and enabling learning to be shared more widely, to improve processes and outcomes for both landowners and community stakeholders.

To ensure buy-in internally, it is important to ensure the work aligns with broader strategic priorities, including inclusive growth, green recovery, and job generation.

Community businesses and groups have limited capacity to engage in initiatives like PCBP. Encouraging and facilitating collaboration between them can help to overcome these challenges, enabling each to take on roles based on their capacity and expertise to achieve action.

Respect that each partner has something to bring to the table, no matter what size or shape, and that trusted relationships may take time to develop.

Demonstrate accountability, promoting honesty and transparency and delivering against agreed objectives.

5. Consider how to demonstrate, celebrate, and build on success

It is important to consider how to measure and evidence the impact of this work, given that it is inherently hard to measure the additional requirements it may place on participating community businesses, and because it takes time for impact to be seen.

Being able to demonstrate impact and success can help to lay the groundwork for more work along similar lines and garner buy-in internally, where concerns can be allayed, value demonstrated, and where impact aligns with strategic priorities.

Start small and build on success; an iterative approach helps businesses test and prove an idea, gain a good reputation, to then scale or replicate the offer.



'This is one way to bring the community together. Everyone is really keen and enthusiastic about it.'

KEYHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH, PROJECT LEAD





“Supporting local nature-based enterprise is a way of bringing other voices into decisions around what’s best for the park in that community, enabling effective stewardship as well as supporting environmental and financial sustainability.”

**GREEN MINDS
PROJECT MANAGER**



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