



Active Neighbourhoods — Urban nature delivering healthier communities for people and wildlife



Introduction

Active Neighbourhoods is based in Plymouth and aims to get more people being more active and feeling better by using and improving their local nature reserves.

Neighbourhoods involved in the project experience high health inequalities and have urban greenspaces that have suffered from neglect. These greenspaces have the potential to be beautiful, accessible spaces for people and wildlife, which local communities can feel proud to have in their neighbourhood.

More than one third of Plymouth is greenspace and is surrounded by blue space on its coast, with rivers and streams running through it. This unique green and blue city has the potential to deliver many health and wellbeing benefits for the people of Plymouth, as well as providing special spaces for nature.

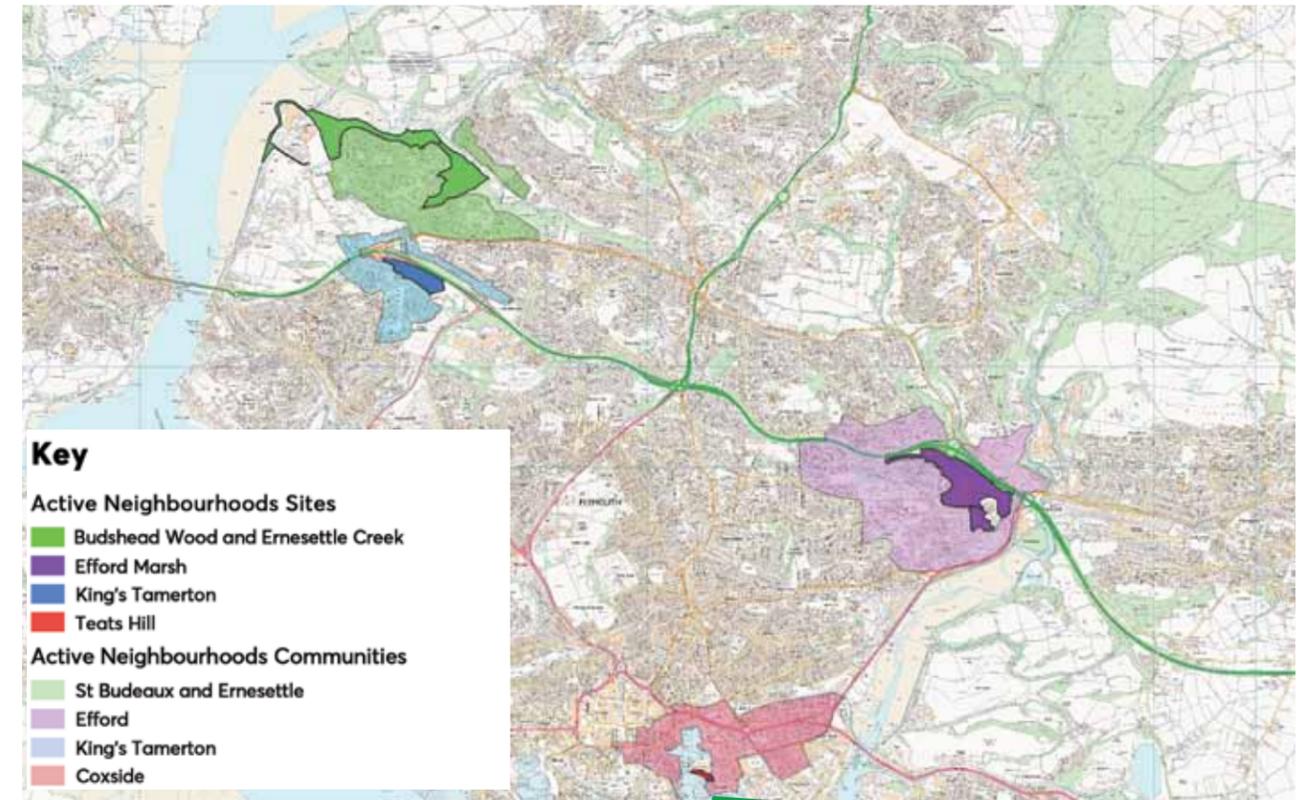
Active Neighbourhoods is a partnership project between Plymouth City Council (PCC), Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) and Public Health's Thrive Plymouth network and funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme over 3 years (£419,000). Match funding for improvements to nature reserves is supported by PCC's Section 106 funding (£254,529), University of Exeter's Blue Health research programme (£19,000) and PCC Public Health's Team (£15,000 in-kind). We also work with a range of local delivery partners and providers to deliver Active Neighbourhoods on the ground.



'Plymouth is growing strongly - but it's not just about creating housing and jobs. We are also creating a city that residents have helped to shape and feel proud of - creating neighbourhoods that are pleasant to live in and that take care of our local wildlife. As the new 25-year DEFRA strategy has just been released - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment - this Active Neighbourhoods report is a timely reminder that in Plymouth we can be proud that we are already delivering a Green Future. One of the exciting ways we're achieving this is through Active Neighbourhoods, as we continue to connect people with their natural environment, improving health and wellbeing across our communities.'

Cllr Nicholson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Transport, Housing and Planning, Plymouth City Council.

Active Neighbourhoods Sites and Related Communities



For Devon Wildlife Trust, Active Neighbourhoods represents a long-held ambition to engage with communities in Plymouth and help ensure the amazing natural assets the city holds are realised and looked after. The corridors of broadleaved woodland, abandoned species-rich grassland of old farmsteads and of course Plymouth's amazing coastline and marine life, offer Plymouth opportunities to engage with wildlife that many cities don't have.

Ed Parr Ferris,
Conservation Manager, DWT

Public Health is excited to be working in partnership with projects that make a real difference to the city's population and delivering a more naturally, healthy Plymouth. Active Neighbourhoods have been really successful at encouraging people in the city to interact with nature, get outside more, connect with their neighbours and contribute to the place they live. We are proud of the impact AN has on increasing physical activity, improving mental wellbeing and contributing towards more positive health outcomes in the city. We look forward to the future of the project and seeing its innovative approaches continue to produce positive health outcomes for many years to come.

Ruth Harrell, Director of Public Health
Plymouth City Council



Local greenspaces and communities are working together to improve health and wellbeing for people and wildlife

Local Greenspaces

Family Events

School Engagement

Volunteering

Citizen Science

Local Community

What we do...

Health and wellbeing can be broken down into physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Through Active Neighbourhoods we aim for communities:

- to be more physically active and feel better
- to have greater social cohesion, with more active citizens contributing towards, and taking pride in improved local green assets
- to have an improved local environment and enjoy more welcoming, accessible and nature-rich green spaces on their doorstep

How We Do it...

Active Neighbourhoods works with communities, using their local green or blue space as a neighbourhood hub. This work is underpinned by a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework to help us collect evidence on the impacts of Active Neighbourhoods, including participant's health and wellbeing and the quality of spaces. This framework is based around the '5 ways to wellbeing' – Connect, Learn, Be Active, Take Notice and Give - researched and developed by the New Economics Foundation

Improved Health and Wellbeing for People

Better Places for Wildlife



Image © Rosie Marsell

Ways we work with local communities:

- programmes are developed for families, youth groups, children's centres and schools, to meet specific community needs
- volunteer and citizen science programmes
- development of greenspace stakeholder and 'Friends of' groups, including residents, local groups and professional organisations
- build capacity and confidence of organisations and groups to access nature such as physical activity programmes being delivered outdoors
- collect evidence on the impact of Active Neighbourhoods on community health and wellbeing through a range of robust monitoring tools

How we improve the quality of spaces:

- community-led stakeholder groups for each greenspace
- improve infrastructure such as accessible paths, gates, signage, and a better welcome
- create and protect more wildlife rich spaces
- gather baseline data on greenspaces such as numbers of visitors, how spaces function in the community and wildlife surveys

"I live less than a mile away from here and never knew this existed- amazing place! I'll definitely be back more regularly".

Jean, Walks for Health participant

Active Neighbourhoods - delivering on the 5 ways to wellbeing.

What have we achieved so far?

A summary of Years 1 and 2

1. Connect

Linking people with each other and with their local environment

f
717 likes
740 followers engaged
82,873 Plymouth users

250
group volunteering/
nature based events
where local people
meet one another

'Becoming an
Urban Ranger',
blog by AN
trainee ranger,
Kieran Shaw-Flach
[https://
antraineeblog.
wordpress.com/](https://antraineeblog.wordpress.com/)

We connect and work with

Buglife (Urban Buzz project), The Tree Council, Plymouth Tree Partnership, Plymouth Community Orchards, RSPB, Plymouth and Exeter Universities, Marine Biological Association, National Marine Aquarium, Ernesettle Environmental Protection, Plymouth Environmental Action, Plymouth Energy Community, TECF, Walking for Health, Friends of Ham Woods, PCC Family Interventions, The Dove Project, Evolve; Spaceshot (Ernesettle Youth Group), PCC Family Intensive Interventions Project, Plymouth Community Homes, Efford Community Centre, Summer Mix, Take A Part, Crazy Glue, Livewell SW, Countryside Management Association



Case Study

What's digital technology got to do with nature?

Tapping into the latest technology craze, such as Pokemon drew lots of young people and families to explore their local beaches and woods with us, as well as spending time with each other! We ran a series of Pokemon safaris in our key nature reserves, including using 12 wristband fitness trackers for participants to calculate their steps and calories burnt.

This proved a great way to have health based conversations and motivate people to get more active in their local green space.

Ashley Tod, AN Community and Volunteer Officer

For me to be able to socialise whilst participating in nature activities is so important. I never thought that after my stroke, I would be able to do anything like this, but because the staff and participants are so friendly and helpful it makes the whole experience enjoyable and I do not feel like a burden. This day was a very important experience for me and I now have a much more positive attitude to being able to do such things".

Sarah, Ernesettle resident

2. Learn

Providing opportunities to explore something new about nature

34 sessions
with **53** teachers,
connecting **360**
children with nature
in greenspaces
across Plymouth

Children walked
821km,
taking
1,211,491
steps

Burnt
20,000
calories

**'I normally sit inside
but I loved getting more
active and doing stuff!'**

**Lexi, Year 6 student at Ernesettle
Community School**



Case Study: Wild Challenge Working with schools to reach families...

We partnered with the RSPBs Wild Challenge, which aims to connect children and families to nature, through activities which work towards bronze, silver and gold awards. We engaged all the schools nearest our neighbourhood greenspaces, building teacher confidence and removing other barriers to encourage teaching in nature - such as knowledge about what to do outside, where to go, getting the support of the school head, and valuing the impact of nature on children's learning and wellbeing.

'Through Wild Challenge we watched children explore new spaces and play more freely in nature. Importantly many children started to bring their families back to take part in a celebration and outdoor theatre event at Ernesettle Creek, and also attended our family events during the school holidays.'

Ashley Tod, AN Community and Volunteer Officer

3. Be Active

Supporting participation in physical outdoor activities for all abilities

More than
98%
of all participants agreed that they were more active and felt better after taking part in Active Neighbourhoods activities

Active Neighbourhoods collaborated with Public Health to launch the Active 10 app: encouraging people to undertake 10 minutes of brisk walking a day and we trained 4 new walk leaders

Engaged
2631
local residents being active in nature

Participants took **8,967,623** steps; covering **66,686km** – equivalent to walking around the world one and a half times! This burnt **265,611** calories



Image © Rosie Mansell

Case Study: Family health and wellbeing...

Family events give families a reason to visit nature reserves and to take part in free family activities, in a safe, guided fashion. Getting people to attend these events has involved a joined up approach of using social media, traditional word of mouth, leaflets and posters. All activities make sure both children and adults keep active, provide opportunities to socialise and also include an element of volunteering.

'Working with Active Neighbourhoods in local woodland gave our vulnerable families a chance to work together in neutral space. Being outside and more active, encouraged more positive behaviour from both children and adults, and allowed participants the freedom to explore the woods and express themselves. It was often the highlight of the family's week'.
PCC Family Intensive Intervention Project (FIIP)

'We went to Teat's Hill today and my son had a great time hunting bugs and making his own rope. The staff are really helpful and welcoming. A great way to get out and keep summer holiday costs down!'
Anna, local parent

5. Give

Leading volunteering sessions which empowers people to contribute to their local area

Residents have volunteered
3270 hours,
over **934** volunteer
days with an
in-kind value of
£46,700

**3 new
'Friends of'
groups for
greenspaces**

'Many of our volunteers have told us how volunteering with Active Neighbourhoods has helped them become more involved in their local community, gaining confidence, new skills and becoming more connected to other residents. Some of our key volunteers are now proud advocates of their local spaces for nature and are helping develop 'Friends' groups to care for these sites in the future.'

Tim Russell, AN Urban Ranger



Case Study: Ray's Story...

One day while I was walking through Budshead Wood, doing some litter picking, I met Ashley Tod (AN Community and Volunteer Officer) for the first time. I had been a shift worker in the MoD for 37 years and began volunteering with Active Neighbourhoods while I was still in full time employment. I am now retired from the MoD and am able to volunteer regularly. Some of the things I get from volunteering include making new friends, camaraderie and being part of a team. I also feel that my general health and well-being have improved by being outdoors most of the time; my self-confidence and motivation have improved; and my ability to work alongside groups of volunteers with differing abilities and life experiences has improved.

I've also learnt new skills in practical conservation, wildlife surveys, have trained as a Walks for Health Leader and rediscovered my love of photography. This year I'm looking forward to leading a nature trail project in Budshead Wood, with a view to rolling out the idea across the other AN reserves too.

Ray Morton, Active Neighbourhoods Volunteer

'I attended the event where we reinstated the ancient hedgerow in Ernesettle and thoroughly enjoyed the day. Tim and Kieran were great and we all learned new skills and the atmosphere was lovely. The smiles on the childrens' faces were fantastic and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the activities.'

Sally, Ernesettle resident

6. Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

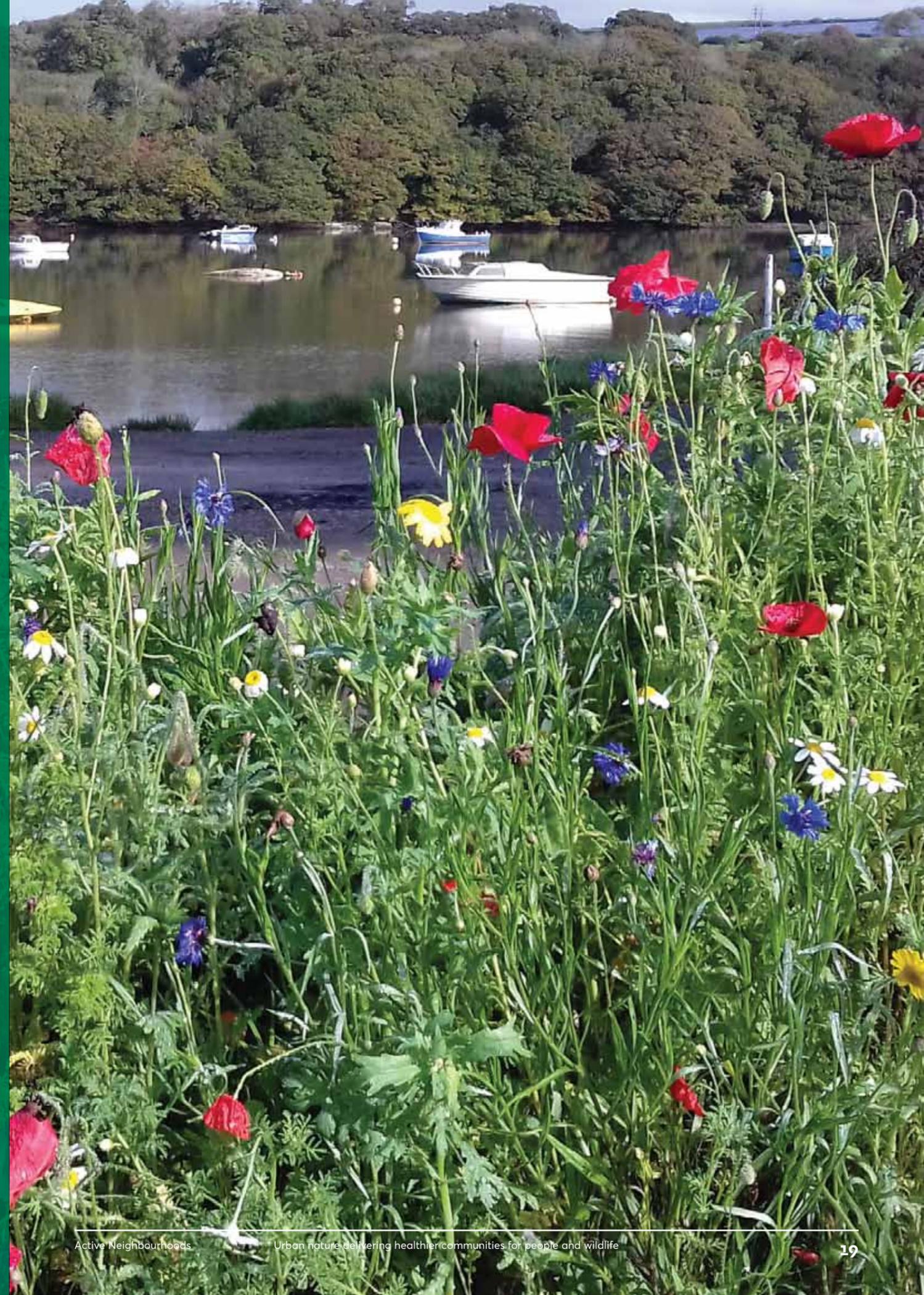
What have we learnt?

Using robust monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques to evidence the impact of AN has been our approach from the start. Some of the key tools we have used are listed below:

- Spaceshaper questionnaire, developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, to assess the baseline performance of spaces. This is a nationally recognised standard and has been used to deliver community consultation workshops and survey site users/local residents
- Digital visitor counters installed at all sites through a student-led digital innovation project called 'Stumpd'
- Baseline ecological surveys of sites delivered through Devon Biodiversity Records Centre and citizen science events with volunteers
- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (short form) to assess wellbeing outcomes for longer-term project participants
- Evaluating events for quality and health and wellbeing outcomes using the Likert Scale
- Linking with more in-depth academic research including the Blue Health Project; initiating a participatory action research PhD exploring urban greenspace interventions and social wellbeing with the AN Project Coordinator as lead researcher; PhD researchers with Plymouth University researching health promotion/access to nature and rewilding initiatives.

Gathering data and analysing it on a regular basis (action-based research) enables us to adapt our approach to delivery and monitoring as we go along. Some of the changes we have made as a result include:

- Incorporating elements of volunteering into family events to encourage local ownership and care of the greenspaces. Combining fun nature-based activities with volunteering has enabled participants to give something back to their community and to learn a bit about their local greenspace.
- Combining traditional community engagement approaches such as door-knocking, attending existing community events, taster sessions and running fun events with new technology-based tools such as Pokemon safaris, NFC trails and effective social media has enabled us to reach a more diverse audience and reach out to more socially isolated residents.
- As well as managing sites to increase biodiversity over the long-term, we've delivered site improvements that show relatively quick visual and habitat improvements to spaces to inspire residents to get involved such as wildflower, tree and orchard planting.
- Adapting conventional wildlife survey techniques over short project timescales has been challenging. We have trialled and adopted innovative methods to evidence changes in biodiversity over the short term - such as simple before and after photos documenting the change in habitat structure and species diversity; recording species and comparing composition and variety between newly managed habitats and neighbouring unmanaged habitats (for example a newly sown meadow and neighbouring amenity grassland); butterfly counts along transects of newly managed habitats; and mapping changes in management and habitat to inform constantly evolving site management plans.



'Teats Hill is one of several European case studies for Blue Health where we're working with the local community to design improvements to blue spaces. Blue Health is all about using planning and design to enhance blue spaces – using small interventions in under-used spaces to potentially have a big effect, what we refer to as 'urban acupuncture'. These interventions can change the way people interact with, use and get the most mental and physical benefits from, blue space.

Professor Simon Bell, Chair of Landscape Architecture,
Estonian University of Life Sciences



Image © Rosie Mansell

Case Study: Blue Health Research at Teats Hill – using robust research to inform decision making...

In Teats Hill, Active Neighbourhoods is partnering with Blue Health – a pan-European research initiative investigating relationships between urban waterways and health - led by the University of Exeter and involving a consortium of nine institutions across Europe.

Active Neighbourhoods and Blue Health are working closely with the local community around Teats Hill beach and greenspace, as well as with organisational stakeholders, such as Plymouth Community Homes, the National Marine Aquarium, the Marine Biological Association and Plymouth Marine Laboratory. This partnership has helped shape the physical redevelopment of Teats Hill and is evaluating any potential changes to community health linked to these changes.

Blue Health are assessing community health effects, with results expected at the end of 2018, through:

- A before and after survey with residents in seven surrounding census areas which looks at their general health, well-being, recreational visits and willingness to pay for improvements to Teats Hill
- A before and after 10-week behavioural observation schedule exploring how people use the site before and after improvements

Capital improvements have started, creating an open air theatre and natural play features, as well as changing some of the amenity grass to limestone grassland and coastal wildflowers.

Blue Health are also trialling a new environmental assessment tool at Teats Hill to assess the quality of coastal environments - this could be used by other local authorities to help them get the most out of blue spaces and decide what improvements could achieve the best health outcomes for local communities and wildlife.

7. Where Next?

Year 3 and beyond

As we head into our third year of Active Neighbourhoods our focus will be:

- Developing more in depth health and wellbeing research, including PhD research on how School Nurses can improve child/family health outcomes through access to nature; Blue Health research results; and how greenspace interventions can influence community-level social wellbeing.

- Delivering the Silver Wild Challenge to our neighbourhood schools and involving new schools to link with the growing Plymouth Outdoor Learning and Education Network .

- Delivering more high quality greenspace through on-site physical improvements such as accessible paths, better welcome signage, way-marking and interpretation and increased biodiversity.

- Protecting the greenspaces for future generations through Local Nature Reserve designations and new Public Rights of Way.

- Reaching out to new audiences that could benefit from enjoying their local greenspaces such as isolated older people.

- Developing new and existing Friends groups and supporting the development of a wider Plymouth Outdoor Learning and Education Network.

- Making use of our evidence on how greenspace can impact on health and wellbeing in Plymouth to demonstrate how the project supports the aims of the Clinical Commissioning Groups and other funders.

Its been an exciting 2 years with Active Neighbourhoods and we're proud of the seeds we've sown within our nature reserves and local communities. We're really starting to capture and evidence our impact on the health and wellbeing of people and nature - and as we look to the future, we're confident that Active Neighbourhoods, will continue to flourish and help deliver a naturally healthy Plymouth.

Jemma Sharman, AN Project Coordinator



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Devon
Wildlife Trust

