



Avon
Wildlife Trust

Nextdoor Nature Somer Valley Impact Report September 2024



**Funded by
UK Government**



**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

Improving People's Lives

(c) Hannah Bunn

1. Introduction

1.1 Overall Aim

To bring together a diverse range of people to act for nature in their neighbourhoods, creating resilient community groups, enabling a sense of local pride and helping wildlife & people thrive in The Somer Valley.

Secondary objectives

- To work with residents and build a greater awareness of, and connection to, nature in their neighbourhood.
- To embed confidence and skills within a community to sustain a greater care for the local natural environment.

Outputs and outcomes

- 200m² improved green or blue space
- 100 trees planted
- 35 active or sustained participants in the community groups
- 140 improved engagement numbers

1.2 Approach

Team Wilder is a growing movement of people who notice and celebrate nature in their day-to-day lives, by taking the global problem of biodiversity loss down to a super-local level. This enables actions for wildlife to be achievable and contributes to a societal tipping point of 1/4 people taking action for nature, which activates a 'new norm' in communities. By embedding the skills, awareness and confidence to care for nature within individual communities, nature's ability to thrive will become more sustainable, and valued by a greater number of people.

**We put community first:
They lead, they change, they organise.
We listen, we support, we enable.**



“The Nextdoor Nature Project has provided significant benefits to the community of Writhlington. Avon Wildlife Trust have taken time to get to know the residents of Writhlington and have built on the links already established within the Village. They have provided a platform for people to air their views, introduced activities which have been extremely well done and **created opportunities not previously available to residents.** This has all been very sensitively carried out and **we are just starting to put in place the largest of the projects so far.** I see potential for further projects to enhance the work already done and build on the community spirit the Team at Avon Wildlife Trust have engendered.

The Nextdoor Nature initiative comes at a time when Councils have been badly affected by budget cuts and in Bath and Northeast Somerset the Parks department has been particularly hard hit. **To provide alternative projects to people who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, housing, and employment issues, will greatly benefit resident's well-being.”**

- Lavinia Corrick, Local Councillor

2. Delivery

Monitoring Numbers

Improved engagement numbers	667
Active or sustained participants	47
Groups/organisations we are working with	20
Newsletter Subscribers	106

Improved green or blue spaces	350m2
Food - Wildflowers & bulbs	28 seedball packs 150 wildflower plants & 3,650 bulbs
Trees/ hedgerows	
Water - ponds	10
Shelter - eg. bird boxes	15

Building Community

Building trust and getting to know communities was paramount before the 4 projects were chosen. Activities ranged from door knocking, attending events already happening in the area and meeting “community leaders”, listening to people’s values and what they cared about. Individuals and communities were then encouraged to complete a community interest form outlining what they would like to do to enhance their greenspace for wildlife including any support they would need. Overall, there was 17 submissions, the project officer visited all the sites and then presented the proposals to the wider team, who scored each against a project criterion.

The chosen projects are:

- The Red Lion Pub Community Garden
- Bath College
- Writhlington
- Peasedown St John

The next stage was hosting consultation workshops to facilitate conversations, supporting groups to collaboratively choose priorities and offering suggested events and activities. The aim was to find and support potential community leaders who, in time, can support and inspire others to take action for nature locally. For many this is not their norm, and so we invest our time into building self-esteem and confidence in delivering pro-environmental messages with their community.

Our Community Ecologist also visited each site to speak through ideas with locals and provide ecological advice with a written report summary. Building community was a priority across all projects. We worked with the community to host events and promote awareness to encourage participation. Projects were at different stages, so adapting our approach to meet the community's needs was necessary.

3. Impact

The project has engaged with 667 people through door-knocking and talking to people in the community, attending events and meetings, and running events and workshops. Providing events brings new audiences and interest. It is also an opportunity for people to ask questions about wildlife and collectively share nature highlights. We will be creating a feedback form to assess people's increased knowledge and awareness going forward. Activities so far, have ranged from forest school sessions, bat walks, gardening sessions, pollinator craft workshops, bird and bat box building, and a pond workshop. Through this 47 local people are actively taking action for nature with 350 m2 of improved habitat.

“I often use examples of our work together to Full Council Members of a collaboration that **has been a huge success and a massive benefit to our village.**”

-Councillor, Howard Hartley, Peasedown St John

Peasedown St John

Initially a focus at the Hive Community Centre garden, a small group of interested people met several times to steer the design that attracted more wildlife.

This was put on hold and the project moved on to supporting Ashgrove Cemetery by planting wildflowers. Self-led the group then hosted a bird box-making day with 50 people attending as part of the FoN community day.



This was a great success, with boxes erected in people's gardens and in local spaces. Encouraging and protecting hedgehogs has now become a theme for the area. People have commented on the road kill, so we are working with the local parish council to install road signs and the local school to create more signs for the area. Hedgehog habitats will be created, and planting that attracts food sources and shelter. This will be informed by a monitoring campaign, where people map their hedgehog sightings, dead or alive.

Bath College

An initial ecology campus tour took place with our community ecologist for students, tutors and estates officer to learn about the wildlife on their doorstep using various ID apps to record species. After conversations during that day, an informal weekly work session sprung up for students to help clear and manage the previously inaccessible campus pond. Great progress has been made on the space, with steps and a path created. A wildlife and sustainability fair also took place, bird box building was provided by the construction department and pollinator-friendly herbs were sown.



Case Study - The Red Lion Pub Garden

There were many applications from the Paulton area. There are various group members already part of other pre-existing groups, such as Pride in Paulton, Paulton Toad Patrol, Men in Sheds, Holy Trinity Church and the Coal Canal Trust. We brought everyone together to collaboratively prioritise which area to focus on first. The Red Lion Pub garden was chosen as it would be a catalyst for further green projects in the area. This was the first time the group members had collaboratively worked together. There is now an active group of 16 people who correspond via a WhatsApp group, self-organising meetings, workdays, watering, harvesting and more. Below highlights what has been achieved:

- **Avon Wildlife Trust Ecologist visit** – Created a plan for the garden.
- **Community garden Facebook page created** and initial poster designed by group member
- **Community Launch Event** (9th March) Workday to clear site with kids activities – was a huge success with over 40 locals attending!
- **Core planning group** decide to meet on a regular basis and **fortnightly workday sessions** on Saturdays commence.
- **Group becomes established** and starts to work more independently from us.
- **Major improvements to the garden take place**, including building paths, seating, veg beds, an edible hedgerow, planting flowers and creating signs.
- **Community “fridge” is installed**, displaying free fresh fruit and veg for the community.
- **Family events planned** to create new habitats including insect hotels and additional trees for a wildlife corridor and attract new volunteers.

“I’m so glad my neighbour Ian encouraged me to join the group, as i’m getting so much pleasure out of it, **it must be one of the best things I’ve done in Paulton since I moved to here 43 years ago.**”

- Martin Young, Red Lion Community Garden volunteer

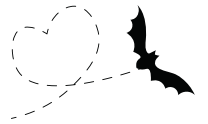
Before



After



Community Organising in Writhlington



Dec 23- Writhlington Playpark selected

An application from local mum Zoe- The Manor Copse Playpark was selected to help transform an underused play area within a lower-income housing estate.



Dec 23 - Local ecologist gets in touch

Local ecologist Emma also emailed wanting to set up a solution for Himalayan Balsam in the area.



Jan & Feb 24 - Door Knocking

As well as meeting local Parish Councillors we found out about a local Action Group who were planning a Big Spring Clean, so we asked to collaborate.

March 24 - Public Meeting

Curo, Banes Parks, and AWT's Community Ecologist met in the park to speak with the local community. It was decided to focus on The Plantation rather than the play area. Met Emma in person who wanted to plan local bat walks.

Local resident Tom offers to make some hedgehog homes for the community.

April 24 - Big Spring Clean

The Writhlington Action Group(WAG) hosted craft activities, a litter pick and provided food. We spoke to the community about what wildlife was in the area and if we could help. Emma confirmed a date for the bat walk & asked us to promote it.



May 24 - Wildlife in the Woods event

Forest School with Creative Roots. Many families told us they are struggling for outdoor play spaces & confirmed the need for something like this in the area. Volunteers from WAG help us and connect with new local residents



May 2024- Community Bat Walk

Many people saw bats for the very first time and by the end of the night, people were asking for advice on how to help bats



July -Community bat Detectors

The community ask to use their Nextdoor Nature budget to purchase community bat detector kits and are planning a bat box building workshop.



Aug- Insect Collage Workshop and Consultation

The community learnt more about insects' roles in ecosystems and were consulted on a plan to create a natural play space and improve The Plantation.

Aug 24 - Self organised bat walk

Over Whatsapp, the community are organising their own wildlife events and sharing stories about the wildlife they have seen.

Sept 24 -Local allotment holders get involved

They will be hosting an event to make bat boxes for the area.

Sept 24 - Curo agree to collaborate to improve the space

Sept 24 - local groups apply for funding

WAG have put in an application to Big Local's Dragons Den fund to provide a nature trail using brass rubbings.

Creative Roots are looking for funding to provide forest school sessions at The Plantation.

Plans: remove flytipping and overgrowth, reinstate the woodland pathway, community days planned to plant bulbs, native hedgerow and fruit trees; seating; a natural play space for children and bat boxes and hedgehog hotels built by local residents.



Impact on the wider community

Communications and promotional material

The What's App groups have proven a great platform for people to share their experiences and sightings. The newsletter has been key to network groups and individuals across the whole area. There are 106 subscribers with higher open rates than usual of 70.3%. Local media has also been impactful with 13 articles in the Midsomer Journal, interview with BBC radio Somerset and various other media outlets.

Sharing peoples stories is the most impactful as messages are better received when they come from other local people. This has been possible through creating a series of short films.

[Red Lion Community Garden](#)

[Writhlington Spring Clean](#)

Networks

Supporting other organisations in the area has benefited the wider community. Collaborations continue with Somer Valley Rediscovered and other organisations, including BART, Rockaway Park and Radford Mill Farm, to build stronger local networks between groups, establishing sustainability once the project ends. For example, we connected the Pride in Paulton group with the Prince's Trust and invited a member from Peasdown and Radford Mill Farm to share their experiences creating ponds at a workshop in Paulton. The pond workshop was a great success with members from Writhlington also attending. The workshop enabled the Red Lion Pub Garden to create a pond and a further 8 ponds were created throughout the Somer Valley.



Cura to breathe new life into nature area, including spaces for children to play

OUT&ABOUT

Chance to 'be part of something special' at community garden

NEXTDOOR: Nature in contributing to the growth and success of the community garden. Whether you have gardening skills or simply a passion for making a difference, Nextdoor Nature and the community garden group would love to hear from you. Involvement, in any capacity, is greatly valued. Stephanie Sharkey, Nextdoor Nature engagement officer, said: 'Let's come together to discuss our plans, share ideas, and collaborate on how



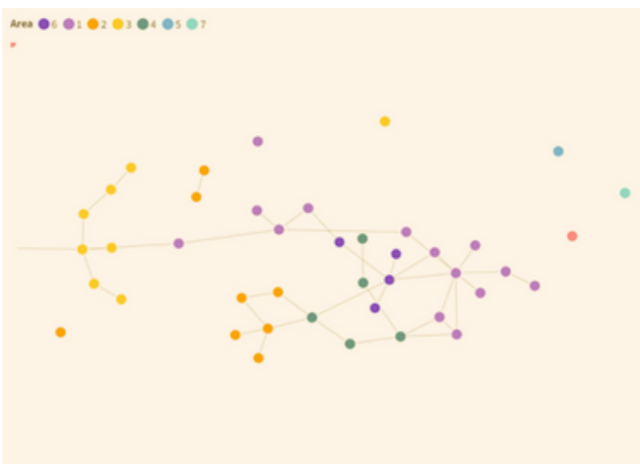
Volunteers and supporters are invited to join the community garden. Like-minded individuals, get involved in a meaningful cause, and enjoy the sense of community groups.



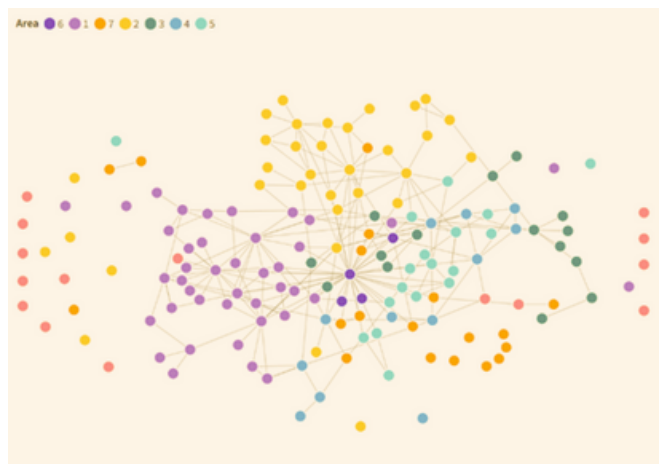
“ We came along today and my son loved it! He’s so chuffed with his mini pond and **he’s told me he is taking full responsibility for the habitat he’s created.** ”
-Emma, Pond Workshop attendee

Below highlights the connection made between communities.

Sept 23



June 24



Summary

The lessons learned from our extensive experience in community engagement is the need to have a presence in the community for a longer period of time, to build trust, networks and for sustainable outcomes and actions to be met.

We want to ensure species for habitat creation are best utilised, whilst enabling freedom for community groups. This is an element of community organising, where we may at times hold back from getting too involved in the designing and planting of a green space to ensure that local people are in control of their learning process, so that they can reflect and learn from their successes and failures. The knowledge gained from this enables locals to be able to support others in the future without input from AWT.

With the staff resources spent to build trust and inspiration for wildlife across Somer Valley, practical enhancements are now being realised. Habitat creation targets will be met and there is now real momentum from local people. With more time and resources to support this momentum, much more could be achieved with local people improving their own local spaces.

For example, The Red Lion Garden is a stepping stone to wider improvements across the Paulton area, and is envisaged as a hub for inspiration to act for nature in other areas. The Plantation in Writhlington has brought the community together with a strong relationship with housing provider Curo – this is just the beginning of what could be accomplished and the Action Group have dreams of using the community space and new momentum to act on the many other social and environmental needs in the area, including food poverty, family activities, and housing.



I just wanted to let you know the very **positive impact** your project has had within Writhlington. You have **raised awareness about the wildlife** in our village, **encouraging residents to value & protect our environment**. You have successfully built links with different groups of residents, something which our group has found difficult to do in the past. Projects initiated by your group have encouraged residents to work together to enjoy our rural setting.

You have organised wildlife workshops using local expertise, promoting local ownership & connections. e.g. local bat walks, and building bat boxes.

Your group has also **linked with other groups, agencies & landowners** to bring together ideas for the development of the Plantation and Manor Copse playground areas, as well as seeking advice from the crime prevention team.

I've been impressed by the way you have approached people. Your group has been enthusiastic, welcoming, knowledgeable, approachable and always encouraging. You've used social media to good effect to promote events and initiatives. ”

- Jane Evans, Writhlington resident