HOLLINGDEAN ROAD
BRIGHTON, EAST SUSSEX, UK
PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR: OSBORNE. CLIENT: DJ TWO

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Innovation

Project overview

Hollingdean Road is a 198 unit student and affordable housing development. It is a concrete frame structure and will stand six storeys high. The building footprint fills 95% of the available land and is bordered by a rail line, housing and main road.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The site was previously a gas works, hence extensive ground remediation has been carried out which formed part of the planning permission. When we took control of the site the structures had already been demolished. The ecological assessment classed it as low ecological value with no trees present. The ecological enhancement we carried out is above the requirements of planning permission.

Hoarding planter reusing old site signage

What were the reasons behind this project ?

Swifts have seen a 51% decrease in their breeding numbers in the UK between 1995 and 2015 making them an amber-listed species and a Species of Importance in the Brighton and Hove Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Our aim is to protect and enhance the environments we work in and invest in the communities we also interact with. Our Hollingdean Road, Brighton project recognised an opportunity to support this important and threatened species whilst providing a habitat to many other species and investing in the local community.

Public facing planters with swift info boards for the public to read, encouraging participation in the RSPB swift survey

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We reused discarded common garden kit and site signs as planters where possible and planted common plants. There is little spare space on this site so planters were mounted on various temporary structures including the public side of the hoarding for local community benefit. Plants and baths are located for easy watering and the pellet feed is sprinkled in planters ensuring easy management . These factors make it highly replicable. The installation will remain for the rest of the project until September 2019 and donated to the local community thereafter.

Much consideration was given to how we could maximise our support of swifts with very little site space and our presence being of a temporary nature. Innovation took the form of interacting with the RSPB, who visited our site to advise on planting to support swifts as well as the best swift box location and how we can best help them. The site borders a main road and bus route, we mounted infographic boards on our hoarding to inform and engage the local community about the plight of swifts and how they can support them. This includes preserving swift nesting sites, installing swift boxes and planting to support swifts by feeding and attracting insects swifts feed on. We have advertised the RSPB Swift Survey to encourage local people to take part adding data to this valuable study. Sunflower seeds are on the hoarding for people to grow in their own back gardens further supporting swift food sources. Swifts decline is due to disappearing nest sites. We are maximising our efforts raising awareness with our clients to incorporate permanent swift boxes in their building designs. We are also educating our design teams to encourage discussion of swift box installation early in the design process.

New habitats include a bird bath, butterfly puddle and 21 planters. These support insect populations the swifts feed on. The site was mainly rubble; we introduced a greater variety of higher value plant species including native pollinators Dead Nettle, Globe Thistle, Angelica, Scabiosa, Symphytum, Teasel and Meadow Cleary. Swifts are a Species of Importance in the Brighton and Hove Local Biodiversity Action Plan, supporting Swifts assist the aims of the LBAP. Site staff volunteered time to assist installation and are managing the enhancement.

21 planters were located wherever there was room on this tight site such as the scaffold bridge (above left)

Sunflower seeds were provided free on the hoarding for the public to take and grow in their own gardens

Further information

The enhancement is central to and hence improves local connectivity between 3 local parks. The planters were screwed to the temporary structures, planted and then fed with sustainable organic chicken farm waste fertiliser. The bird bath and butterfly puddle were placed on the energy unit roof. Many plants were sourced from The Royal Horticultural Society supporting their important work such as Wild About Gardens. The enhancement is monitored and managed daily by the site labourer as part of his daily hoarding and site checks. The project will leave a lasting legacy having left the local community with an understanding of how best to support the swift population and other bird species for the long-term. The increase in biodiversity is easily evident, prior to the installation there was no vegetation evident on site.

Project Team

- Client DJ Two
- Contractor, Osborne: Mike Dixon, Stuart Carruthers, Kirsty Dunne and Graham Taylor

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The UK is said to be one of the most nature depleted countries in the world with more than half of species in decline. Construction can be perceived as an industry that has a negative impact on nature. It is great to take action to support declining species and help the construction industry on its journey to become a sustainability leader.

Indigenous Dead Nettle and Lavender planted on our traffic route fence

Bird bath and butterfly puddle on top of site energy unit providing drinking and bathing for birds and minerals for butterflies