

stories from

living with nature

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The University
Of
Sheffield.



The Interreg IVB
North Sea Region
Programme



Investing in the future by working together
for a sustainable and competitive region



The Living with Nature Team

Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust holds the BIG Lottery Reaching Communities Award and manages the project.



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Sheffield City Council is the owner of the land involved in the project. Housing Services is the Sheffield City Council social housing provider.



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The University of Sheffield provided professional and academic support throughout the project.



Helen Woolley
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Introduction



What first struck me about Living with Nature was that it had the potential to be about so much more than just developing play facilities or increasing the value of green space for wildlife; it was an opportunity to create a meaningful link between the natural environment and an important part of many people's everyday lives. While many of the individual sites we have worked on are small they all have a vital role in reconnecting people of all ages with the environment that surrounds their homes.

Healthy, living, vibrant community spaces should continue to evolve over time, rather than be created in one go, so at the end of the three year funding programme we do not see it as end of the changes to these sites, more an opportunity for various communities to continue Living with Nature.

Simon Fagg, Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust

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In the beginning

National Context

- 10% of land in England is 'urban'
- 80% (nearly) of English population live in urban areas

Social Housing

- People who live in social housing may have only 1/5 of the number of parks as more affluent areas
- 60% of visits to green space are within 2 miles of home
- Proximity of and access to green spaces in social housing areas can be very important

Source:

Nicola Wheeler (2011) Greener Neighbourhoods: A good practice guide to managing green space, National Housing Federation

In September **2007** Kate Bradshaw went to an event in Leeds run by CABE Space and Play England where she heard Helen Woolley speak and came away knowing that:

- Play areas across many Sheffield neighbourhoods had little play value;
- Housing Services could make the green spaces more interesting in all the neighbourhoods they managed;
- Kate needed more information about how natural play could give better value;
- And that she needed to know more about how to do it;
- After a few days Kate rang Helen and said "can you help me to improve our housing playspaces?" to which Helen replied "I'd love to but I haven't got the resources".

In March **2009** Kate went along, as a reserve for someone who could not go, to an experts meeting about social housing and play. This was held at The University of Sheffield as part of a Housing and Play project that Helen Woolley and Colleen Eccles were doing, funded by Research in Practice. The messages from this meeting were:

- How important play is within social housing;
- Partnership working was important for taking this agenda forward;

This re-emphasised for Kate how important the play and green spaces are and that she wanted to improve them for the residents of social housing neighbourhoods. One important message was the importance of maintenance, especially in a recession and how to deal with maintenance on diminishing budgets.



CABE Space Enabling: developing a strategy

At this event Kate met Liz Hoehnke and CABE Space allocated two enablers to work with Kate: Bridget Snaith and Helen Woolley. From this initial meeting a series of activities took place.

This included workshops with the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Tenant and Residents Associations (TARAs), councillors and staff from Housing Services. The workshops allowed people to share experiences of childhood play, explored issues of play in contemporary society and how existing play spaces could be improved.

From there the Wildlife Trust led in the proposal to BIG Lottery Reaching Communities. CABE Space also supported the Space Shaper tool being used at Tannery Close.

Outcome: A play strategy for Sheffield Homes.

Timeline showing the evolution and development of Living with Nature

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kate Bradshaw hears Helen Woolley speak	Sept							
SH* at TUoS* Meeting (Research in Practice)			March					
CABE Space Workshops			Dec	Jan				
TUoS Landscape Department student projects				April to June	April to June	April to June	April to June	April to June & Sep to Dec
TUoS Knowledge Transfer				June-Dec				
Big Lottery: Living With Nature					JULY 2011 to JUNE 2014			
Research (Masters and SURE students)						Dissertation Topics: 2012: Partnership working, Community Engagement Maintenance 2013: Children's experience of LWN		

*SH: Sheffield Homes

*TUoS: The University of Sheffield

Sheffield Homes was the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) for Sheffield's council housing from April 2004. Following a referendum of tenants the service was re-incorporated back into Sheffield City Council as Housing Services on 1st April 2013. Housing Services provides about 43,000 homes across the City of Sheffield.

The University of Sheffield: student projects

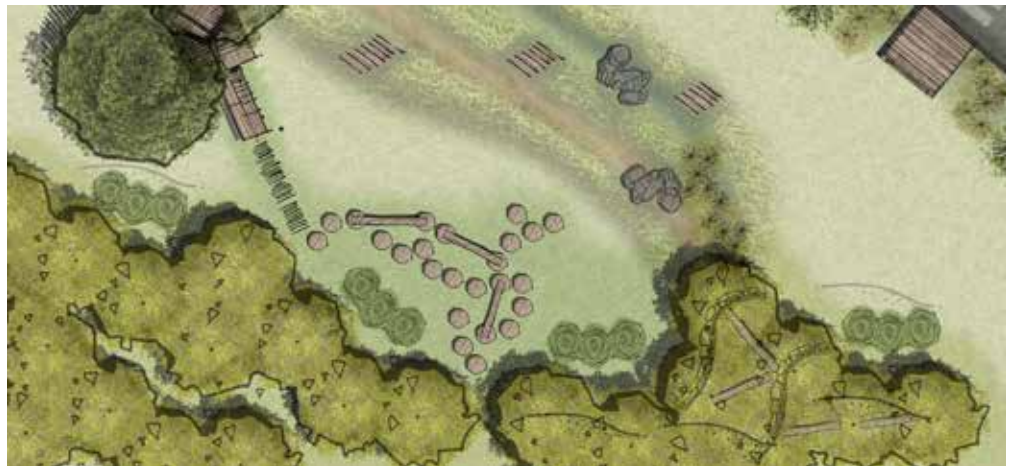
Since 2008 Helen has used some of the 24 sites with her landscape architecture undergraduate students on her module called Social Aspects. Students undertook survey and analysis, research about children's play and play spaces and developed designs for the sites. This has given the students the opportunity to work with real clients.



Hannah Beard, 2012

"Working on this module led me to research into providing equal opportunities for play, particularly for disabled children. This also led me to design more interesting play sites and to reflect on how my own childhood play experience differed from the sterile playscapes we have today. My childhood often involved playing on dangerous sites as they provided elements of challenging play and it was interesting to see if this could be incorporated into a play environment whilst being safe and void of unnecessary risk and is now part of my Master's special project. A very rewarding module."

Peter Metcalfe



Richard Warner, 2012

The University of Sheffield: knowledge transfer

In the autumn of 2010 Helen was awarded **Rapid Response Knowledge Transfer Project** funding by The University of Sheffield. This allowed Alison Somerset-Ward, a graduate Landscape Architect, the opportunity to work with Katie Bradshaw from Sheffield Homes on a part time basis for six months.

The focus for the partnership was to raise awareness of the benefits and need for good quality community green spaces - and especially play spaces - within the organisation. It was done with the understanding that this would be the beginning of a long process due to existing attitudes and funding constraints.

Over the six months of the project Kate and Alison concentrated on the on-going work and development at the 24 green spaces and play spaces under Kate's remit with Sheffield Homes, with a particular emphasis on the role of community engagement and participation of the tenants and residents.

This involved working closely with Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) to promote the redevelopment of local play spaces, supporting them in organising and running a number of community consultation events, outdoor and indoor fun days and a variety of activities to highlight how these spaces could be better used and over time improved. Also explored, were ways in which local residents and the wider community could be better informed and consulted in the decision making process about any changes being proposed in their neighbourhood green spaces.



An important outcome from this Knowledge Transfer project was the work done with one particular TARA (Tenants and Residents Association) at Woodhouse, Sheffield S12. Kate and Alison worked hard together to support and encourage this group, bringing new ideas and introducing some alternative suggestions for developing their neighbourhood play space. Instead of just working with the TARA, the partners networked outside the immediate community to bring in other local groups, widening community engagement and participation and developing relationships with a range of stakeholders.

At this stage in the Living with Nature timeline the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Homes and the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust were working in partnership to prepare an application to the Big Lottery Funding stream 'Reaching Communities' to fund a three year project concentrating on improving play and biodiversity at the 24 play and community green spaces then being managed and maintained by Sheffield Homes.

Work done at Tannery Park during the Knowledge Transfer Project - and some of the outcome from it - fed into the funding application and it became the **pilot** site for the proposed Living with Nature programme.

Living with Nature: initiation and proposal

The Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SRWT) had been invited to - and attended some of - the meetings and workshops that CAFE Space supported. At these meetings SRWT initiated discussions as to whether the issue of the housing play spaces might make a suitable project for a Big Lottery Reaching Communities application. The outcome was the successful application to the Big Lottery Fund and the Living with Nature project was born.

Aims:

- Improvement of green spaces for local people and wildlife;
- Working with communities in 24 social housing neighbourhoods in Sheffield.

Targets:

- To hold 72 events with communities;
- To involve 40 organisations involved in local community green spaces;
- To involve 5,000 individuals involved in community engagement activities;
- To redesign 24 green/play spaces and develop revised management plans for them;
- To carry out works on eight sites identified as priority in the Play Strategy;
- To raise £50,000 of matched funding.

Funding:

- The BIG Lottery Reaching Communities Award was for £415,873 with £50,000 matched funding from EU Interreg SEEDS project and over £106,000 in other matched funding.



Establishing the project



Establishing the Living with Nature project meant completing the staff team and putting in place structures for managing the project.

The Team:

Sheffield City Council, Housing Services

Kate Bradshaw

In her role working for Sheffield City Council Housing Services - and as Community Engagement Officer for the Living with Nature team.

Ian Robertson and Eleanor Kirk,

Ian and Eleanor manage the 24 play areas and open spaces that are the focus of the Living With Nature project. Their role has been primarily as a link between the project and Housing Management teams; colleagues within Parks and Public Realm and other council sections.

Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust

Simon Fagg

The project manager and Chartered Landscape Architect for the project.

Alison Somerset-Ward

Community Engagement Officer for the Living with Nature project based at SRWT (job share).

David Peace

Community Engagement Officer for the Living with Nature project based at SRWT (job share).

Ashley Bailey

Year in Practice landscape architecture graduate supporting both the community engagement and landscape design aspects of the project.

Roy Mosley

Strategic support and management including financial management, business planning, funding and line management of the project coordinator.

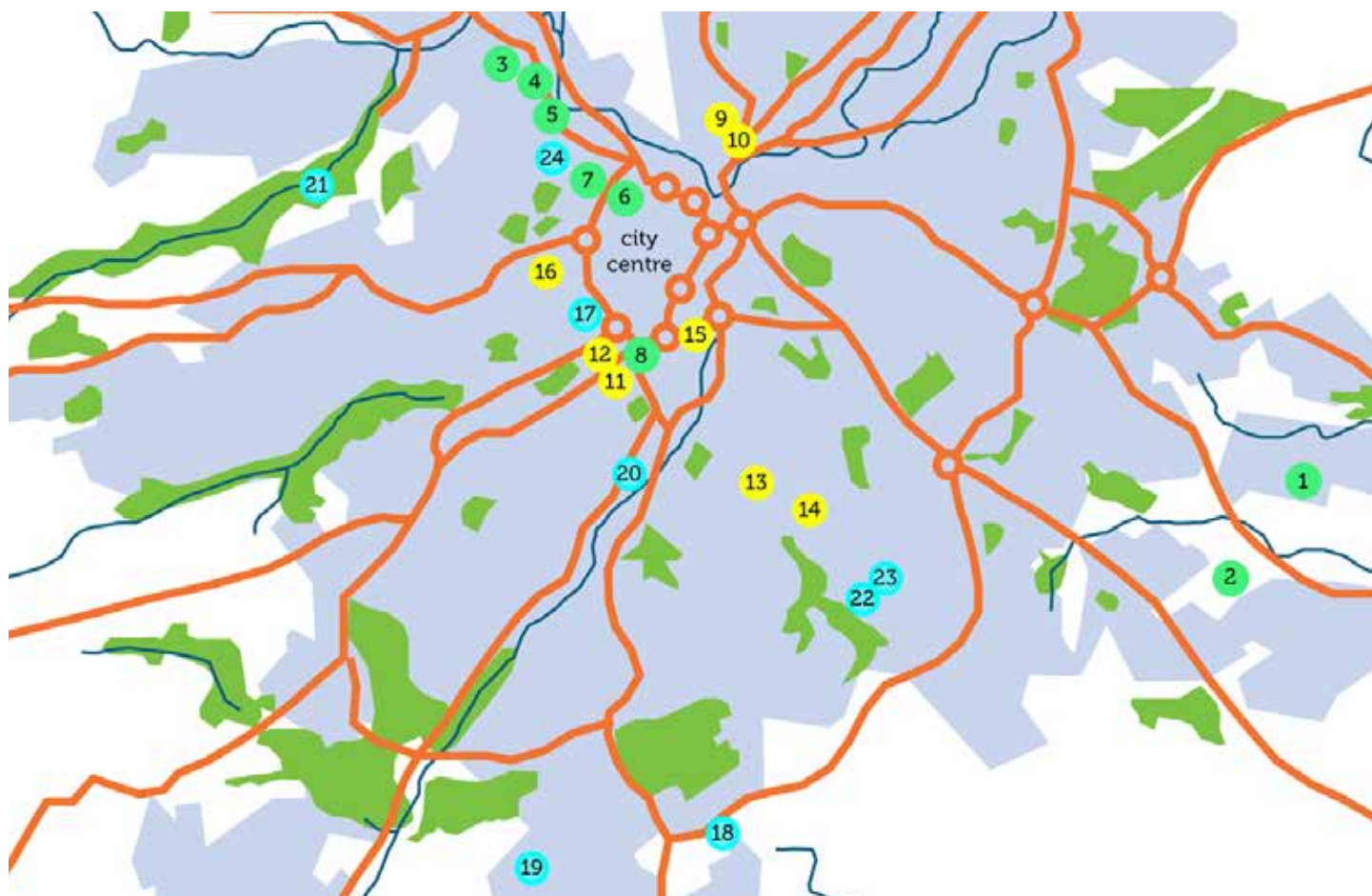
The University of Sheffield

Helen Woolley

Chair of the Steering Group, advisor to the project and responsible for the qualitative evaluation of Living with Nature.

Project Sites: overview

Sheffield is a city of about 500,000 people. 43,000 live in Sheffield City Council Housing Services properties, roughly 20% of the city's population. The 24 sites of the project range across the city from the north west, through the centre and south east of the city.



Living with Nature Sites

The eight priority sites had "works on site" within the three years and the pilot site was Tannery Park. The second and third-year sites had no works on site but were supported by a range of activities and events that are helping local residents to increase the play and nature values of the sites.

First year

1. Tannery Park
2. Dyke Vale Road
3. Burnaby Crescent
4. Grammar Street
5. Philadelphia Gardens
6. Edward Street Flats
7. Jericho Street
8. Randall Place

Second Year

9. Brunswick Road
10. Stockton Close
11. Mount Street
12. Club Garden Road
13. Derby Street
14. Newfield Green
15. Duchess Road
16. Dorset Street

Third Year

17. Exeter Drive
18. Hazlebarrow Crescent
19. Becket Road
20. Sellars Street
21. Long Lane, Stannington
22. Leighton Road
23. Spring Close Mount
24. Addy Street

Project sites: condition and character



Tannery Park was used as the pilot site for the original bid to The Big Lottery, Reaching Communities programme, resulting in the Living with Nature programme. Tannery Park is a neighbourhood green space located within an area of social housing at Woodhouse, a suburb in the South East of Sheffield. The space is surrounded on all sides by residential housing.

For many years this residential neighbourhood area was predominantly occupied by older people with some opting to buy their rented properties after living there as tenants for many years. Over the last ten years there has been an influx of younger tenants which as a consequence has seen an increase in the number of children living locally.

When the site was developed a traditional playground was incorporated into the overall design for the site; over the years this had become vandalised to the extent that most of the equipment was taken out as a matter of health and safety and not replaced. At the start of this project the tarmac footprint of the play area remained and a set of old swings were still in place. In addition a couple of small pieces of equipment were installed on the adjoining grass.



Dyke Vale Road has a distinct sloping landform which creates a natural grass amphitheatre effect and is bordered on one side by woodland and scrub, some of which forms part of the space. Historically there has been a play area here dating from when the estate was built in the 1950's, however over the last ten to fifteen years the play equipment was vandalised and has had to be removed eventually for safety reasons. The grey circle in the photograph is the footprint of concrete and macadam surfacing of the play area and is all that remained other than some metal fencing.

The site is overlooked by housing on two sides and views from the outer edges of the site are very good looking across the valley over to Woodhouse and another part of the Shirebrook Valley Nature Reserve.



Project sites: condition and character

Grammar Street has a large, flat and almost circular area of mown grass surrounded on one half by a steep grassy bank which leads down to the surrounding housing. The other spaces include more grassy banks with a range of semi-mature trees, an area of fenced in 'hard surfacing'. There are fantastic views of the Don Valley, across to the former Sheffield Ski Village at Parkwood Springs and north towards Grenoside and Penistone. The 'official' play area was small and flat with no equipment at all as over time it had been vandalised and become unsafe to the point where it had to be removed.



Burnaby Crescent featured the remains of the old playground, although most of the equipment had been removed due to vandalism. Only the frame of some swings were still visible and the site was no longer usable for play, despite being en route to the local primary school. Burnaby Crescent also forms a link between the surrounding housing of Walkley and the larger space at Grammar Street. It is also a well used thoroughfare with a bus stop at the edge of the site.

Edward Street is completely enclosed by the three and four storey 1930's flats. The site functions as an almost private open space for the tenants and residents, despite the fact that there is full access to the public. The central play area is circled by a road and a fence and is made up of two areas: one which has a circle of concrete and a couple of benches and the other larger area with a mixture of grass, safety surfacing and concrete. The layout of the Edward Street play space means that it can be seen from most flats offering excellent natural surveillance for parents if their children are playing outside.





Philadelphia Gardens is land which was formally the outside space behind what were the Kelvin flats, now demolished. The site contained a basketball court (in poor repair), a small skate park including a concrete bowl and some other play features such as a slide built into the sloping landform and a 'teen' shelter, all of which were in a poor condition with obvious signs of misuse. The site is a haven for wildlife in the area with a good tree canopy and a mixture of deciduous broadleaved species, an established understorey of shrubs and saplings and a mix of ground flora.

Jericho Street is a small, almost semi-private space surrounded closely by flats on three sides. It is set on a number of levels and slopes down from the top of the site to where the formal play space is located. The small traditional play area had a very basic but just usable set of play equipment, consisting of a small space net, a timber 'Wendy house' with wetpour rubber safety surfacing evident (but in poor condition). The wider spaces outside the play area are terraced with a wall and wide path between the level change and mature trees offering some green structure on a wide edge of grass.



Randall Place in Sharrow is closely surrounded by high density housing, both private and rented accommodation, shops, restaurants and light industrial units, and is situated behind one of the busiest arterial roads in Sheffield. The space had some anti-social behaviour problems. Randall Place functioned as a passing place with a strong path network and little reason to stay. With some good tree structure and the remnants of a reasonable original planting scheme this small space had the potential to be a valuable urban green space.

Community Engagement



The community engagement process and activities have been, throughout the project, organised and facilitated by Kate Bradshaw (Housing Services) and Alison Somerset-Ward from SRWT. For the first two years of the project David Peace was part of the team and in the last year, Ashley Bailey joined the team.

Living with Nature aimed to properly engage local people in the development of their green spaces. The team helped organise a number of activities with the following aims:

- To get people back out using the spaces and feeling confident to do so;
- To get different sectors of the communities meeting and talking to each other;
- To allow local people to make a real physical difference to their surroundings.
- To get local organisations such as schools, nurseries, care homes, youth clubs, church groups etc involved;
- To increase the confidence of local groups in their own ability to make a difference and apply for funding;
- To give people new opportunities;
- To raise the profile of the importance of the natural environment;
- To find out how people wanted to use the space;
- To use this knowledge to inform the design.

	Number of activities	Number of people
Tannery Park	24	1,117
Dyke Vale Road	45	2,105
Burnaby Crescent and Grammar Street	34	1,306
Edward Street	13	380
Philadelphia Gardens	26	744
Jericho Street	20	1,078
Randall Place	8	159
TOTAL (more than the target for all sites over 3 years)	170	6,889

The Living with Nature team worked hard to support local community groups and organisations in offering a range of site appropriate events and activities to appeal to as many local users as possible with an emphasis on play and fun. The aim was to try and attract local people back to their nearby neighbourhood play and green spaces and perhaps to reconsider them as places to spend time at in a positive and enjoyable way. It was important not to alienate current user groups such as dog walkers who often become the main users of some of these spaces.

At some of the sites, in particular those where capital works were not planned, the priority was to try and reclaim the spaces for positive uses. If this was successful it could hopefully highlight the potential of the space for local people and encourage them to get involved in its future use for them and their community.

Meet and Greet: a good event to start with

You have to start somewhere. Every Living with Nature site had an initial Meet and Greet, a great opportunity to introduce the team and the Living with Nature project to the local community.

So, how do you get the attention of local people – and especially the kids – to come out and play? What can you offer that represents play that everyone recognises and likes?

The answer, it seems, is a bouncy castle. Everyone young and old – regardless of cultural heritage or background – loves a bouncy castle. There is something about the colour, size, noise and of course bounce which draws people in it's like having a tiny bit of funfair on your doorstep.

Teamed with the bouncy castle the team provided a whole array of den building materials for those who wanted to get creative and make their own play, a key part of the Living with Nature agenda. The combination of recognisable bouncy castle plus a pile of branches and tyres has proved a winning one for children of all ages.

Meet and Greet events have taken place in all weathers and it has never failed to bring people out of their homes and into their local green space. The team have always had hot drinks, juice and biscuits on offer to encourage people to come over and chat over a drink whilst their children play. Talking in an informal way allowed the team to discover information about the space, how it was currently used, any issues or concerns and also about how residents saw its future role in the neighbourhood. No forms to fill in or formal questions to answer, just sharing of information and ideas over a cup of tea and a biscuit.

Before each event posters were put up and flyers delivered locally to nearby homes encouraging the local community to come along and get involved. As many as possible local community groups in the nearby area were contacted which might include a TARA, Mother and Baby Group, hostel, church and the local schools to invite them to come.

When the gazebo and the Living with Nature flags went up, and the den-building materials and of course the bouncy castle appeared, the community knew what was happening and would hopefully come and join in.



Planting: an activity for all ages

Bulb Planting events have helped show local people - especially children - that a little bulb planting can make an uncared space more of a welcoming place whilst also creating a wave of colour in the springtime. Living with Nature has supported bulb planting at fifteen of the 24 sites across the city. The activity has involved ten local schools, two youth groups, two churches, one hostel, a residential home for adults with learning disabilities and nine community groups and has planted over nine thousand spring bulbs across the city.

Most of the children involved loved planting and just being outside, they were keen to learn more about what they were planting, "what will this flower look like when it grows?" was a common question. The team worked with small groups, giving them the chance to explain why we were planting the bulbs, what difference they would make and how they might help to provide a source of food and habitat for some wildlife.

Teachers and youth leaders have commented on the positive impact of children and young people working and just being outside. Encouraging interest in their local environment and a sense of achievement in doing something for their own community green space has been a real benefit for those planting the bulbs and for the overall project.

The Bluebell Wood was a natural progression, as at one of the sites in the south west of the city there is an area of natural woodland adjacent to the play area. In the concept design there was an idea to introduce English bluebells and the team saw the opportunity for a mass planting of bluebells as a way to introduce the local community to the idea of increasing the biodiversity of the woodlands.

The idea was popular and together the community and team came up with the idea of raising money for a local charity, The Bluebell Wood Hospice for Children with a reduced life expectancy. People could 'buy' a bluebell bulb and plant it in memory of a loved one with the money raised going to the hospice charity. Local primary and secondary schools were invited and over six thousand English bluebell bulbs were bought with funding kindly given by the Tree Council.

Local radio station, Radio Sheffield, covered the event and the team were well supported not only by the invited schools but also by local people and by Sheffield Housing Services estates team. Representatives of the Bluebell Wood Hospice were also on site to help plant the bulbs and commented on how special events like this were in not only raising the profile of the hospice, but also in bringing and communities together for a good cause.

A special tree in the woodland was chosen where messages could be left by those planting bulbs to indicate who and why they dedicated their bulbs to. Almost £800 pounds was raised for the hospice and a new area of bluebells established.





Dog Shows were an easy way to acknowledge that dog walkers are welcome at a space. It's a great way to get people together and both dogs and people love it.

Some of the larger sites such as Tannery Park, Philadelphia Gardens, Grammar Street, Burnaby Crescent and Dyke Vale Road have considerable dog walking communities who use the sites on a daily basis. This group may build up a strong sense of ownership and attachment to the spaces they use regularly and can be particularly sensitive to any changes that may affect their use of them. The team have also found that some dog walkers are keen to see these spaces cared for and used in a positive way, often with an emphasis on improving the natural environment.

The negative side to dog walkers is - of course - dog waste left on site, this is one of the main complaints of both children and adults and a real detriment to people fully utilising some of the sites. At two of the priority sites, Tannery Park and Dyke Vale Road, there has been a reduction in the amount of dog poo left on the site.

It's possible that increased activity and improved play amenities have resulted in an increase of visible children on site and an awareness of dog walkers that it is no longer acceptable to leave dog waste where children are playing.

At Tannery Park in Woodhouse the Friends group has now been supported by living with nature to host three annual dog shows, Scruffs. These have proved very popular with dog owners and non-dog owners alike and the dog show is now a regular feature of the events calendar for the Park. The shows have all the elements of a real dog show with a proper ring, classes, judges and prizes. The risk assessment is always a challenge though!

Bonfires have been a great way of holding events when the weather gets colder and delivering outdoor community events can be a challenge. Dyke Vale Road was a perfect location for holding a bonfire night event and, despite the health and safety hoops, the local community hosted two successful bonfire night events on site. Fifty people attended the first bonfire and at the second event had more than a hundred and twenty people enjoying the fire.

A good bonfire is something everyone seems to enjoy across all ages groups. It is hoped that groups at many of the sites will try to make bonfire night into an annual event. This is something local people could come to expect and enjoy as part of a regular set of seasonal events held at their neighbourhood play and community green spaces.

Sports Day at Tannery Park, the pilot site, was one of the first events of the project and it was intended to be something that would happen every year. Tannery Park has now had four sports days and each consecutive year more children have been involved. The sports day has become a popular feature of the park and is well supported by the schools and nursery and by the parents and many local people who come along and cheer the children as they run traditional races including the egg and spoon, sack and three legged races.

The most popular part of sports day is the tug of war. This is something everyone joins in with including teachers, parents and anyone else who wants to. It is a fantastic way to make everyone feel part of the event and allows adults to join in the fun too. There are prizes and a Tannery Park Challenge cup to be won. A sports day is an event which many of our sites could host as it is low cost and relatively simple to organise whilst also helping to engage with local school communities.



Christmas has been one of the busiest times during the three years of the project.

The first Christmas event at Tannery Park was planned as an outdoor winter wonderland but no one expected the eight inches of snow that fell the night before the event which turned the park into a real winter wonderland. It was quickly arranged for the event to be held inside and, thanks to the local Salvation Army who gave use of their hall, a grotto, Father and Mother Christmas, carol singing and mince pies were enjoyed in the warmth.

In the run up to Christmas Living with Nature has delivered a range of craft activities at local schools and for community groups in preparation for both indoor and outdoor events. Glass lantern painting and outdoor Christmas decoration making have been great ways to decorate some of the sites in the winter months.

Some sites have had Christmas parties or winter celebrations and most of these have featured a grotto to house Father and Mother Christmas. Using a variety of natural materials, traditional lights and decorations, broom cupboards and tiny office spaces have been transformed into magical grottos for children from all cultures and backgrounds.



Play Down Memory Lane came from realising that Living with Nature may not be adequately engaging with the older people who lived close to some of the sites. It was important that this group were aware of what the project was about and also allow them the chance to voice their opinions on any proposed changes that may affect them and their neighbourhood.

Change can feel threatening at any age but especially when you are older so 'Play Down Memory Lane' was a chance for the team to start a conversation with older people living locally about children's play; play now but also play when they were young. Most people love to reminisce about their childhood, memories of where they grew up and what they got up to, about games and playing outside, friendships, gangs and street life when they were kids.

This informal conversation always took place in a local community hall or meeting room close to the site where we provided a traditional 'tea': endless coffee, tea and fantastic home made cakes. Sharing memories of childhood play was a wonderful way to remind older people that children are fundamentally the same now as they always have been, noisy, cheeky, adventurous and looking for somewhere fun to play close to home.

Local historians have supported the events at two of the sites, bringing their collections of photographs, books, painting and maps to share with everyone. Local councilors have also attended and commented on the success and social value of events like Play Down Memory Lane in bringing the community together, and we have had support from local media both press and radio.

At Tannery Park the event is now to become an annual feature in the Friends of Tannery Park's calendar of community events due to its popularity.





Many of the sites lack character and/or a visual identity, for example; lack of colour, strong visual features, interesting planting or other natural features. This is true at most of the spaces, making them even less appealing for local people to identify with, especially children and young people.

Getting local children involved in making small but important changes to a space can offer real benefits to both them and the site. Living with Nature used some sort of art and/or craft activity at every site within the programme in an attempt to enable children to see how small interventions such as art work can change the look and feel of a space.

Urban Art has provided a great variety of media, styles and materials to work with which provides interest and appeal to all ages.


My Life Project is a small charity which uses art and media to engage with children and young people. Casper and his team are artists and youth workers who are experienced in supporting children and young people to use art as a way of expressing themselves creatively. By using materials and art languages they can identify with older children and teenagers feel they can have a go without feeling embarrassed in front of peers or adults and be as creative as they like.

Art and Craft events outdoors have used natural, recycled and 'found' materials which were key to many of the creative activities during the Living with Nature project. Materials such as these offer children low or no cost alternatives for making art and crafts with and may perhaps prompt them into collecting their own similar materials in the future.

The Sculpture Trail at Dyke Vale Road play space was an inter-school environmental art project involving two primary schools and one secondary school which are within ten minutes walking distance of the site.

The team were keen for the woodland which forms part of the site at Dyke Vale Road at Hackenthorpe to be better used and understood by children living locally and to introduce the idea to schools that local outdoor spaces such as the one at Dyke Vale can also be places for creativity and for learning.

Teachers at one school have already used some of the activities in their own grounds and children who attended the workshops have reported going back to the site and doing more art there.



Art is a fantastic way to get everyone involved regardless of age, ability or cultural heritage, no language skills are needed. It has been a pleasure and a huge amount of fun to offer a wide variety of people of all ages the chance to explore their creative and 'artistic' side with us and then watch them be amazed and excited at what they can achieve.

The words 'I am not artistic' are often followed by that person then doing something fabulous and unexpected. A recent example of this was an Asian Grandma helping her tiny granddaughter to decorate and camouflage a bird box. She was initially very shy but soon took charge of the whole activity, not just working on her own box but helping others choose materials, giving advice on what they should be doing and generally enjoying being creative and in charge. She had a great time and when the team was packing away she asked when they were coming back and what they were doing next.

The importance of food



It is well recognised that if there is free food and drink offered people will come along to events more readily, so the Living with Nature team provided some sort of food and drink at almost every event or activity. A lot depends on the anticipated weather, type of event and expected audience as to what was offered and pretty much everything has worked. From fantastic Caribbean chicken, rice and peas and patties to chip butties and pizza.

The Living with Nature team has offered posh tea and cakes at Play Down Memory Lane events, free ice cream van tokens at summer events, jacket potatoes and hot soup at Bonfire night and toast your own marshmallows and popcorn at a primary school outdoor campfire session.

Offering food and drink is a key part of hospitality within most cultures and offering a cup of hot tea or coffee to a parent or carer with children playing or taking part in an activity has been key to building trust. These events allowed the team to talk informally and gain valuable information about the sites, play opportunities and about local issues which may be affecting how the site is used. At sites where there is a diversity of culture and language within the community appropriate food and drink is always welcomed and making sure there was vegetarian and Halal options was key.

Crumblefest at Philadelphia Gardens was a celebration highlighting the abundance of fruit to be found on the site mostly apples and pears from a number of mature fruit trees dotted across the space.

Local people would collect some of them but many more were left on the ground and paths to rot which was seen by the new 'Friends of Philadelphia' group as a real shame, additionally some people were breaking branches and damaging the trees in order to try and get the fruit before it was ripe.

As part of the re design of Philadelphia Gardens Living with Nature project coordinator Simon had included a crumble garden area adding soft fruit canes to compliment the existing hard fruit whilst also adding other hard fruit varieties. It was decided that this was something the new group would like to see put in place at the site and that would they make a bid to the Big Lottery for funding to create the crumble garden as a first project for the new Friends group to undertake.

Together with the Living with Nature team they planned and hosted a crumble fest celebration on the site to tell local people about the plans for Philadelphia Gardens and also to use some of the year's best apples and pears from the trees in fruit crumbles and juice for those attending the event. The weather was wonderful, the local café made the delicious crumbles and there was a bouncy castle (of course). Autumn crown making made everyone a prince or princess for the day and the crumble garden plan was met with approval.

The Friends of Philadelphia Gardens went on to apply for the funding for the crumble garden and were very happy when they were recently told their application had been successful.

Talent of Tomorrow originally started off as a small part of a fun day at one of the sites. However, plans got a bit too ambitious and it was decided that this could be a big event bringing two communities from nearby sites together in a youth talent contest held outdoors.

At that time there was only the core Living with Nature team and one volunteer to deliver events but somehow they managed to find themselves with six schools to co-ordinate across three venues. There were heats and finals to organise and everything was planned to take place outside on site! It soon became clear that this was going to be a logistical nightmare. Additionally it was proving to be the wettest summer for 100 years. The bad weather meant the outdoor events had to be cancelled and relocated to indoor venues.

Trying to contact contestants to inform them of the changes in plans at short notice was almost impossible and things started to unravel badly. This was the one time during the whole project where the team really disagreed and tempers were seriously tested. There were regrets about being over ambitious but there were also lots of children and their families who were looking forward to the contest so the show had to go on!

Favours were asked and all the stops were pulled out and, in the end, the team managed to do a scaled down version of the original events. Thankfully it was quite a success with around a hundred and fifty people attending the final and everyone having a wonderful time.



Easter Egg Hunts are a great way to help people rediscover a space and setting a trail which leads through different parts of a site can help those taking part explore new or forgotten places and see them again in a positive light. Easter egg hunts have been used at a number of sites very successfully and they are always popular with children of all ages but especially younger children and their parents.


Encouraging parents to accompany their younger children on the trail is also really helpful and it means they are able to experience the space slowly and through a child's eyes. Familiar places become exciting and important because you are on a hunt for golden Easter eggs and its not 'just the park' it's an adventure. Small changes to familiar places can make them much more interesting and fun and an Easter egg trail can be just such a change especially if there are lots of chocolate eggs to be found at the end of the hunt.

Simple and low cost events such as the Easter egg hunt can be repeated by community groups once the project is over; continuing to encourage local children and families to join in the fun and use their neighbourhood play and green spaces.

Inspiring and changing expectations

Many people still expect a children's play space to consist of a kit of equipment, with a fence around it and a carpet of rubber on the ground (a Kit, Fence, Carpet playground: Woolley 2007, 2008).

Playspaces which use more natural elements such as vegetation, landform and sand provide more opportunities for play and look good (Woolley and Lowe 2013). People in different communities were taken on visits to play spaces in Rotherham which had been designed by the project manager, Simon Fagg, in his previous job as part of the Government's Play Pathfinder Programme (2008-2011).



Woolley, H. (2007) Where do the children play? How policies can influence practice. *Municipal Engineer* 160:89-95.
Woolley, H. (2008) Watch this space! Design for children's play in public open spaces, *Geography Compass*, 2(2): 495-512.
Woolley, H. and Lowe, A. (2013) Exploring the relationship between design approach and play value of outdoor play spaces, *Landscape Research*, 38(1):53-74.

The Living with Nature team drew up the following design principles to guide the creation of the new site plans:

Create stimulating and interesting play experiences.

- Design and install playable features which offer challenge and excitement.
- Make use of natural elements for play including features such as boulders and logs, existing trees, mounds, ditches and landform generally.
- Create features which can be used in different ways, by different people, at different times.
- Create spaces which encourage imaginative play.

Encourage greater use of the site by all.

- Make use of the whole site, rather than constraining play features to a small, fenced area - children don't only play in 'playgrounds'.
- Combine play elements with new planting, existing trees and other features such as artwork or food growing.
- Work with local groups, schools etc to use the site for a range of activities.
- Encourage a sense of community ownership of the site through involvement at all stages.

Increase interaction between people and the natural environment.

- Locate features and equipment amongst natural elements and use planting and landform to define and contain spaces, rather than fences.
- Use bespoke equipment, from local sources, e.g. wood felled on site.
- Design features which encourage users to consider their surroundings or see them in new ways.
- Use of imagery and colours which reflect the natural environment.

Improve the opportunities for local wildlife through habitat creation and changes to management.

- Improve the biodiversity of the sites by creating a range of habitat types.
- Replace some areas currently managed as close-mown grass with other habitat types, including features such as Pictorial Meadows, or just leaving the sward to grow longer.
- Involve local communities in activities such as providing bird boxes - not only creates direct opportunities for wildlife but also raises public awareness.
- Ensure that there is a long-term management plan in place that works in tandem with the design.
- Consider how reducing or eliminating certain maintenance operations can offset some of the costs associated with extra requirements.



Concept and analysis

Analysis of the sites

The process of developing all of the Living with Nature sites began with a series of site visits where the team looked at existing usage as well as physical features, and spoke widely to local individuals and organisations.

A measured topographical survey was carried out and a phase one habitat survey was undertaken on each of the eight sites, with two sites having a more detailed ecological assessment carried out by professional ecologists, due to their more complex, and wilder, character.

Throughout the process the team focused on developing a deep understanding of the site and how it functions within its wider community, rather than purely collecting statistical data. A site analysis sheet was produced for each of the eight priority sites, highlighting the key considerations, showing the wider surrounding area and exploring connections, such as proximity to local schools.



Concepts

Based on a blend of ideas from the initial site visits and discussions with residents, locally based council staff and other community members, a list of Key Aims and a Vision of what each site could become was produced. These formed the starting point for developing a concept plan for each site.

At this stage the focus was more around identifying potential spaces and areas within the site and their optimum location, rather than determining exactly what any individual feature might be. In order to explain the ideas clearly, a series of sketches were produced, giving a clear visual representation of what these spaces might eventually be like.

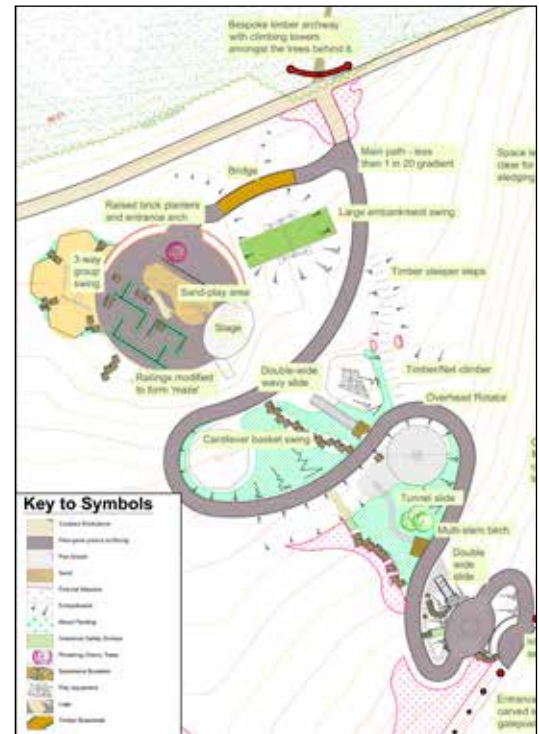
These concepts were then shared with project partners and local communities, initially at on-site events and then left on display in prominent public locations such as libraries.

Design and maintenance

Design Plans

The design plans were produced as a more detailed design, but also allowed for the feedback received on the concepts to be incorporated. In some cases these were revised several times, through formal consultation at TARA meetings, until a final version was reached and agreed upon. The more detailed level of information shown on these meant specific features were selected and allowed for all elements within the design to be quantified and specific areas calculated, to feed into discussions around ongoing future maintenance.

It also meant that there was clear information about the long term plans for any site, to be used as a goal to work towards. In some cases these plans have been largely realised, and in others funding has dictated that only certain elements can be delivered at this stage. As with the last 16 sites though, these design plans can be used to guide future developments and to establish a framework for local communities to apply for external funding.



Maintenance plans

The design plans formed the basis of the management and maintenance documents for each site. The changes to be brought about on each site are not all delivered through physical construction work or planting – in many cases some of the most significant changes to the sites come through changing the way they are managed and maintained.

This goes beyond just reducing the frequency of grass cutting, and uses ongoing management of a site as a way to not only to improve biodiversity and habitat potential, but also to shape the spaces themselves and improve the quality of experience for those that use them.



What happened on site

Tannery Park, as the pilot site, had seen work start long before Living with Nature existed. Unlike most of the other sites, everything here has happened in a series of small stages, although the total value of the work is more than most of the others. Initially three small mounds were created, two with tunnels through them, the old tarmac area removed and swings replaced with newer ones, set in grass. A seating area built out of granite sett filled gabions was created and planted up, an area of wildflower meadow and a few other individual items of play equipment were installed. All this was in place before any kind of masterplan or layout had been produced, which made it a very different proposition to the other sites from a design point of view; it had to draw together and link all the recent elements, while simultaneously creating something with its own identity, that could actually be implemented.



The resulting design wrapped all the existing and proposed features into a spiral which tightens towards the centre, where the swings are. Through the course of the project two areas of outdoor gym equipment were installed, through funding won by the Friends Group, the meadow has been extended, the tunnels improved, a slide installed on the central mound, a 'den' area, complete with large logs and planting created beneath the large holly tree; a new low key path links this to new seating (through one of the tunnels) and a small stage area with boulders has been created. The spiral shape, created by leaving some of the grass to grow long has been commenced, and it is hoped to extend this further in the future.



Dyke Vale Road had physical changes from the beginning of the Living with Nature project and still has a large phase still due to be delivered in summer 2014. At the start of the project Housing Services had committed money for some outdoor gym equipment for the site. This was incorporated into the overall design, influencing its location and the project funded some extra landscape work and tree planting around it, so that it had its own space, rather than just landing in a field.

The second phase involved renovating the old 'tractor park' playground. The circular shape and some of the old metal railings were retained as a reminder of the old facility, but the railings were modified to become a play feature themselves. The area is to be planted on either side with lavender (and *Persicaria* in the wetter beds). A large sand area was installed, with boulders and protruding log to jump off. A three-way group swing, encouraging interaction between users, was installed at the perimeter of the circle. A new path now makes its way down from the north entrance, across the sometimes wet field, improving access for all and linking the features, including the gym equipment.



The next phase will link the large housing area to the site, via a new winding pathway down the steepest part of the hill. This will create a fully accessible path for prams and wheelchairs, with a series of slides crossing each bend and giving a direct and fun route to the main play space. The development carried out so far is well used and when joined by the next phase will create a very exciting space. The money for the completed works has come through Living with Nature's Big Lottery Fund Capital works grant, and from the City Council. The second phase is largely funded with a grant from Viridor Credits, with the money secured through the hard work and dedication of the Friends of Dyke Vale Park, supported by the Living with Nature team.



Grammar Street in Walkley has been one of the most challenging, at times frustrating but ultimately rewarding sites that has been included in the project. Throughout the course of developing it the Living with Nature team have worked closely with the Langsett and Walkley Community Association, who have been a key part of the process.

The physical characteristics of the site offered a complex mixture of challenge and opportunity, but in the end practicalities of land ownership issues dictated what could be undertaken and in which parts of the site. The masterplan included a wide range of features including a large bespoke wooden tree house with wheelchair access, climbing boulders, BMX trails, wildflower meadows and various more traditional equipment. One of the key themes was that each feature relates to its own setting. In the early parts of the project, Grammar St was nominated to receive funding through Britvic's Transform Your Patch and went on to win a public vote for the Yorkshire and Humber region, meaning it received £25,000.



In the end, after various attempts to resolve the land ownership issues, a decision was taken to proceed with works on the Housing land (only a small part of the whole site), that incorporated elements from other areas, while trying to keep the spirit of what was intended for that area. In late 2013 a scheme was completed, incorporating a bespoke timber and rope climbing feature, leading into earth mounds with an embankment slide and a sprayed concrete climbing boulder, cut into the hillside.



Burnaby Crescent has key community partners in the Langsett and Walkley Community Association (along with the Freedom Road Gardeners). The design highlighted the key routes through the site, and with its proximity to Walkley Primary School, aims to make the journey to and from school more fun. The first phase involved the installation of a bespoke stainless steel tunnel slide, which runs down a steep bank adjacent to a flight of steps. After popping out, seemingly from underground, a sensory trail leads on, winding along either side of the main path towards the school. It features a balance beam, boulder stepping stones, sleepers and fragrant low growing herbs. Hardy flowering perennials are planted through the rest of the trail.

Further funding has been won by the Langsett and Walkley Community Association, from Biffaward Small Grants Scheme to install some jumping discs and some large spheres to be painted and decorated by the school children, and from Viridor Credits to create a serpentine 'play mound', meadow areas and further play equipment.

Edward Street had one main priority: to improve the circle of asphalt that the children currently use for playing football. From our discussions with local residents it became clear that this was their number one priority. The Edward Street TARA have won £22,500 from the Veolia Environmental Trust towards this and supplemented by money through SEEDS, via the Living with Nature project and some from Sheffield City Council

A 3m+ high kickwall fence all around the downhill side of this circle, with a lower boundary between the playing area and the main path will be installed. The whole area will be re-surfaced and areas of planting and wildflower meadow created around the perimeter. Urban art workshops with local children will lead to a professional spray can artist decorating the walls and posts with nature inspired themes.



Philadelphia Gardens is probably the most complex site in terms of its topography. Early on in the project a number of improvements to sight lines were identified and a programme of tree works was implemented to improve them and make the area feel less threatening, as this had been identified as a key issue. Various other areas have been cleared back and repaired, the surface to the ball court repaired and an area of rank grassland has been improved to add greater diversity with considerable success. A set of giant swings, funded from a Section 106 agreement, have been installed in this area, to take advantage of the views across the Upper Don Valley, towards Parkwood Springs and this is to be followed by new entrance features.



The new Friends of Philadelphia Gardens Green Space group have won £10,000 from Awards for All, which is to be spent on creating the 'Crumble Garden' – an area of raised beds, carved seating, informal play, logs and boulders, celebrating the fruit naturally growing in the area and providing a focus for community events whilst promoting healthy eating.

Jericho Street started with a first phase of work to create an informal and fun route up through a currently unused part of the site. Sleeper steps, porous paving, a balance beam, boulders, planting and an area of wildflower meadow make up the bulk of this scheme.

A funding bid has been submitted for a second phase which will create a bespoke oak seating area with Storyteller's chair beneath the mature tree, community planting beds, improvements to the existing play area and further porous surface and planting. All these features are designed to stimulate the imagination, foster a connection with nature and create a more fun and interesting environment that is better used by a wide section of the community.



Randall Place was a difficult site at which to generate the community support that had been hoped for and it was decided that Randall Place should receive a more minimal scheme than had originally been planned. The key aim was to make the space friendlier and more inviting; safer and more open; and generally a bit more cheerful.

To achieve this a redundant brick wall was removed and replaced with low railings to match the existing, and 'youth shelter' type structure, which had never been successful. Associated surfacing was removed, some of the fencing around the swings taken out and all the railings and associated street furniture on the site was painted black. A circle of reclaimed jarrah sleepers helps define the centre of the site and provides opportunities for play, sitting on or jumping between. Planting beds have been refreshed with new vegetation.



Sites with potential

All the Living with Nature sites have potential however some communities associated with the sites have engaged with the project more strongly than others. Highlighted here are three non-priority sites which have shown that local community organisations can engage with a project like Living with Nature and benefit, despite having no capital funding to make immediate changes to their site.

Derby Street and Heeley Green TARA

The TARA members at Heeley Green were enthusiastic about Living with Nature from the outset. They could see the potential benefits and support on offer and were keen to work in partnership with the team to bring these about. There was a clear and established desire at this site to focus on growing and there was already a great community growing plot in place which was well used and appreciated by the surrounding community.

It was decided that Living with Nature could help with expanding this interest in growing and, over the months, a new soft fruit bed, herb patch and two large, sturdy wooden planters have been installed. The TARA has contributed financially to the cost of these interventions and Living with Nature has delivered fun activities and events on site to get local people involved with digging, planting and playing. Additionally the design for new play at the site has been welcomed by local people and the TARA are keen to continue working towards making it happen over the long term with support from Katie and the team at Sheffield Housing services.





Beckett Road and the Lowedges TARA

Sometimes it takes a particular individual within a community to help enable change. From the first meeting with Steve from Lowedges TARA he was keen to be involved with the project despite there being no funding allocated for capital works on the Beckett Road site. He recognised the benefits of working in partnership with Living with Nature and of starting an engagement process with the tenants and residents around the site to explore what changes could be made to improve play opportunities there.

After an initial event the idea of a climbing feature of some kind appeared to be something local people were interested in. We took Steve to see a bespoke climbing wall built as part of one of the Living with Nature sites at Grammar Street at Walkley. A further outdoor fun day at the site showing local residents large scale photos of the climbing wall at Grammar Street and of other climbing features is planned. With Steve's drive and enthusiasm and the design and management plans developed by Simon Fagg, the Lowedges TARA supported by Kate will make an application for the funding needed to build a new and exciting play space at Beckett Road.

Sellars Street and the Abbeydale TARA

The Abbeydale TARA have strong and clear ideas about the future of this valued little green space and the Living with Nature team have tried hard to incorporate their suggestions and ideas into a simple but effective plan for the site. The plan concentrates on retaining and building on the site's wildlife value and developing new habitat opportunities along with a new path through the area and opportunities for play. Two very well supported events at the site saw the local community enjoy being outdoors together and using the space. A nature walk, bird box building and decorating and bulb planting were all popular activities along with a fun day with bouncy castle, free ice cream and an outdoor art workshop.

Strong support from the Sheffield Housing Services team is really important because it will help the Abbeydale TARA to take forward the plans for the site. Assistance with making funding applications and other help to host more community events at the site will enable changes to become a stronger possibility in the long term.



Living with Nature volunteers

Living with Nature has been supported by some wonderful volunteers and without their support the team would not have been able to deliver the level of community engagement and range of activities and events that has been achieved.

Jonathan has been the first and longest serving volunteer; in the first two years of Living with Nature he helped at almost every event, sometimes a couple each week. Jonathan became a Volunteer for the Sheffield Wildlife Trust and also undertook the skills training offered as part of the Living with Nature programme.

Jonathan has always had a strong connection with Tannery Park and when the Friends group there decided to invite him to become a Friend of Tannery Park, he did so becoming vice-secretary for the group. He is also a Friend of Dyke Vale Road Park and is their secretary too.



Layne has been - and continues to be - a huge asset to the project and is an active volunteer across the project sites whenever she can help. She has turned her hand to lots of different activities and is fantastic with all age groups but is especially good with children.

Her wide knowledge of animals and nature has proved very useful as have her considerable creative skills. Layne also completed some skills training through Living with Nature and gained level one Forest School Training which she has used during the project and will continue to use at her home site at Dyke Vale Road Park.

Michelle became an invaluable member of the team not only helping with essential desk work in the office for Simon which she was signed up for, but also helping out at a wide variety of community engagement events and activities which she wasn't expecting to do.

She was a natural with the kids especially the younger ones and turned her hand to some exciting stuff; building fairy castles, mural painting, planting a range of things from beans to strawberries, overseeing water fights and generally keeping order at events. Michelle also did level one Forest School training as part of the project which she then used at some of the above events.





Babs is an active member of the Friends of Tannery Park and also of her local TARA. She, along with the other members, have supported every event at the site from the start of the pilot project in 2010.

A unique feature of most events at Tannery Park has been Babs' special outfits, these have included, a Dalmatian for the dog shows cleverly incorporating her mobility scooter, Easter bonnets for the annual sports day event, an Irish Leprechaun for Bring your own Blanket picnic day and St Patrick's day, First World War nurse and pearly queen for Play Down Memory Lane events and many others.

However, her favourite outfit is Mother Christmas, not just at Tannery Park but at lots of the other sites too. Every year since the project started Babs has been Mother Christmas for what must now be hundreds of children across Sheffield. Father Christmases have come and gone along the way but she is 'the real thing' as one little girl pointed out – "He's not real but I think that she really is Mother Christmas".

Fran and Libaan are both student volunteers from The University of Sheffield's MA and BA Landscape Architecture courses. Fran worked on design concepts for two of the third-year sites whilst also researching, sourcing and helping to plant a new planting scheme at Dyke Vale Road. Libaan was the last volunteer to join the project and worked across a number of sites including Addy Street where he designed a new area of planting and helped the team and local children to plant it out.



Annie joined the team as a volunteer for one day a week and stayed for around a year whilst also working as an engagement and education officer at a community farm in West Yorkshire. As an artist and print maker and also an ex-secondary school teacher Annie contributed generously to the development of some of our outdoor and environmental art activities. In particular she worked with Alison on activities delivered in partnership with local schools both in the classroom and on site and was a fantastic asset to the team.



A series of dissertations have been done by students in The Department of Landscape studying for either a Masters in Landscape Architecture or a Masters in Landscape Studies.

A summary of four dissertations give an insight into specific aspects of the Living with Nature project. All the dissertations were focused on the pilot study site: Tannery Park. Before starting their dissertations each student attended a variety of events on site and meetings with the Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) or friends' group in order to make themselves more aware of the context of their research and to become more accepted by the research participants. Each student undertook purposive semi-structured interviews with the appropriate people for their topic from members of the steering group, project team, community groups, organisations or individuals.

Community involvement in Urban Green Space: evaluation of community involvement in urban green spaces in the Living with Nature project by Nuo Ye (Summer 2012)

'The park and the work done there is a topic of conversation in the community.'

Nuo Ye found that prior to Living with Nature, the participants felt that Tannery Park was rarely used by families, children and old people. People walked through it rather than stopping to spend time in it. Most people had never used the site before Living with Nature and some were not aware that the site existed.

Key findings:

- People know about the site because of the project and believe it will become increasingly important for the community as a place for children to play, a place for old people and for dog walkers;
- Community days, picnics, Christmas events, dog shows and sports days were the most mentioned events: showing the importance of holding a variety of different events to meet different people and develop new interests;
- Living with Nature has given local residents a new lease of life: new things to do, meeting different people from different backgrounds, developing new friendships and the opportunity to work together;
- School children: involvement with Living with Nature makes them feel more responsible for their community and gives them a sense of ownership of their community;
- Local people's perception of the men from the homeless shelter has been turned around: it is much more positive than before;
- Everyone said they felt part of the Living with Nature project;
- All respondents said their sense of belonging to the community was greater than before the project started.

Partnership working in the Living with Nature project by Yutong Cheng (Summer 2012)

Key findings:

- Each partner brings added value to the project in the form of specific knowledge, skills or responsibilities. This includes ability to bid for the money, ownership and management of the existing play/green spaces and knowledge of children's outdoor environments;
- Most important issues for the partnership were considered to be good communication and mutual understanding;
- Each partner can benefit from the project by raising the profile of each partner, increasing passion about the changes to the play/green spaces, making a difference to people's lives, ability to work with communities over a longer period of time than often happens for a Landscape Architect, positive use of play/green spaces, providing new opportunities;
- Opportunities for working together in new ways and creating opportunities for dissemination about Living with Nature.

Children's perceptions of their involvement with Living with Nature by Ashleigh Ewing (Summer 2013)

Key findings:

- Before Living with Nature 65% of the children had used the park;
- During Living with Nature 88% of the children use the park more than they did;
- Increased levels of activity and number of people using the park make the children feel safer;
- The children enjoyed the activities such as bulb planting, sports days, tree decorating;
- The children were knowledgeable about how their involvement helped Tannery Park;
- Some suggested more activities between residents, community and schools for the park to be an ongoing success. They want to have events 'for everyone, not just the kids';
- The children wanted to talk about other green spaces in the neighbourhood with issues such as anti-social behaviour, lack of care and lack of community involvement.

Barren Open Space to Community Park: A study of green space management and maintenance of a community park in a social housing area of Sheffield, England by Lifang Meng (Summer 2012)

Key findings:

- Maintenance is undertaken by Sheffield City Council Housing Services, working with Street Force;
- The Friends of Tannery Park and the TARA play an increasing and vital role in the maintenance: doing planting, organising events, making decisions and fund raising;
- The Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust have to produce a design and a management plan for the site as part of the Living with Nature project;
- Sheffield City Council want Tannery Park to be sustainably improved and the local community to continue to value the site;
- Managers and staff would like to see more diversity of vegetation and wildlife;
- Volunteers would like more people to come and join them: some people like the changes that have happened but do not want to come out and help;
- Volunteers also said some people do not understand about the changes to the site;
- The volunteers think the opportunities for play is the most important thing about the site;
- A manager felt that people are happy to see the changes: 'it is a nice place to go to now'.

Reflections on Living with Nature

"Out of the humble beginnings of natural play comes ideas and plans of what could be achieved in their area. It does take time, but local people working with limited resources or bidding for funding, can create effective well used schemes."

Sharron Cadd, Senior Housing Officer

"Our children have been involved in many activities run by Living with Nature which has enabled many of the children to plant and care for a living area which they have never experienced before. By having such ongoing involvement in the area the children have seen it as part of their community and something they have an investment in and responsibility for. Many of our parents are new to the area and indeed to the UK, having a focal point for the children to play means that the new parents have an opportunity to also engage with their new local community."

Karen Ainsley, Learning Mentor, Netherthorpe Primary School

"Engagement is not just one event - it has taken several events at each site to gain trust and give empowerment to the community showing them they can have ownership of their green open space. I hope this will be the legacy of the Living with Nature project."

Kate Bradshaw, Sheffield City Council Housing Services

"Working on the Living with Nature programme has been a unique experience. I have learned so much about the people and places which make Sheffield such a special place to live and about the wealth of neighbourhood play and green spaces just waiting for people to rediscover and make their own again. I hope that the work we have been doing throughout the project supporting local people in trying to re imagine and re invent some of these places for themselves and their communities will have a lasting impact and leave some positive memories of what it is to play and enjoy green spaces close to home."

Alison Somerset-Ward, Community Engagement Officer

"I have enjoyed working with the Living With Nature Team and learning also watching the way they work and the several items they have put in the Park for us."

Alan Charlesworth, Chairman of Friends of Tannery Park

"It has been great to see such a hard working team focused on providing improved children's outdoor play spaces in these housing areas. Kate and Alison have been so enthusiastic and worked so hard with all these communities throughout the project. The designs Simon has brought together really do focus on what the project and the team have been about."

"We should celebrate the way that most of the individuals, groups and communities have been so enthusiastic about the project. It has been a real delight that so many people have been enthusiastically involved and that many people want to continue to work with Housing Services to improve their green and play spaces. New Friends groups have developed and this is really good for the future of these green spaces and the communities."

Helen Woolley, the University of Sheffield

"Living with Nature has enabled and empowered local kids who use the playground to take both pride and ownership of the play space which, in turn, tends to reduce levels of vandalism etc. These small improvements ultimately make a big difference to the local community and provide local children with a space where they can play safely, enjoy themselves and stay out of mischief!"

Damon Pass, Co-ordinator

"The Living with Nature project has been a fantastically challenging experience, if there has ever been a better way to get literally thrown into the working world straight after university this project was it. I have done things that I really 'shouldn't' have been doing that have taught me so much! I have learnt valuable skills on a professional level with Landscape Architecture and communication skills with other people. All this plus obviously being part of a wonderful team (mostly)."

Ashley Bailey, Community Engagement Officer / Landscape Architecture Assistant

"Living with Nature has been a bigger undertaking than I ever thought it could possibly be... and where it's worked best it's been far more rewarding as well. Although frustrating at times, overall I believe a massive amount has been achieved – how these achievements are taken forward by those directly involved and by others will determine the programme's long term success.

"As with life, things are always changing and these changes need to be responded to, What I hope we are able to leave behind is a legacy of people being better able to influence what happens on their local spaces, but also that they have a better understanding of what should and could happen, rather than just a knowledge of what's been done there before..."

Simon Fagg, Project Manager

"As an officer working for Sheffield City Council I feel that I have learned so much during my involvement with Living with Nature. They have shown me how mixing the old with the new can work and how working with the local community and other partners & sharing ideas and best practice can lead to such magnificent results."

Scott Ford, Senior Housing Officer

"During my involvement with Living with Nature, I have met lots of new people all from different walks of life and I have made new friendships. Meeting these people has been good for me, increasing my confidence. I have also acquired a level one forest schools qualification during my time volunteering with Living with Nature, which is extremely useful and relevant. This experience has been truly insightful, enjoyable one and I appreciate having had the opportunity to volunteer my time."

Layne, Living with Nature volunteer

"From a community engagement viewpoint, and as a lover of wildlife, I am really sad that this project is coming to a close. It has been a very positive initiative in the Abbeydale area where the events we have organised together have seen the attendance of far more residents than ever before."

Alison Bodill, Senior Housing Officer

Unexpected outcomes

New friends groups

An important outcome arising from the project has been the forming of three new 'Friends of' groups at three of the priority sites: Tannery Park, Dyke Vale Road and Philadelphia Gardens. These groups will help to continue the work already started and contribute to their future sustainability as neighbourhood play spaces.

Increasing people's confidence

It has been encouraging to see people's confidence to use spaces restored at some of the sites during the project. In some cases just providing a physical presence at a particular site has resulted in children and adults either joining in with activities or playing independently alongside the Living with Nature team.

Reconnecting communities with forgotten green spaces

Some of the sites seem to have been forgotten by local people as places to play or to enjoy being outdoors. By showing how they can be used again for positive and fun activities there has been a real rediscovery at these forgotten spaces.

Reconnecting communities with each other

The diverse nature and wide appeal of the events and activities delivered at the twenty four Living with Nature sites have offered local communities opportunities to not only reconnect with their nearby play and green spaces but also the chance to reconnect with one another or make new links and friendships through using a common space.



Targets for Living with Nature:

- 5,000 people from 24 sites have increased opportunities to influence the design, development and management of their local community spaces;
- 15,000 people have improved access to functional community spaces within their neighbourhoods by the end of the project
- 1,000 people have increased personal benefits from the project - including meeting more people within their community, developing new skills, spending more time outdoors and feeling safer;
- Eight sites are improved for both local people and wildlife;
- At least 40 other organisations have increased opportunities to engage their members in local community spaces.

Targets and levels of activities achieved:

Activity	Target	Child-specific, adult and inter-generational events	Child-only events
Number of events delivered	72	233	117 (50%)
Organisations	40	*64	**24 (37%)
Individuals	5,000	9,325	5,432 (58%) (but many children also involved with the intergenerational activities)

Targets exceeded:

- **Three times as many events were held;**
- **More than one and a half the number of organisations became involved;**
- **Nearly twice as many people took part.**

In June 2014 the Living with Nature team hosted a celebratory conference at The University of Sheffield. This was to celebrate the project and was attended by people from the different communities, members of the steering group and the partner organisations.

*These 64 include the 24 directly related to children and also others including Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs), a homeless hostel, Friends (of a specific green space) Groups, Community Centres, sheltered housing and old people's residential homes, residential homes for disabled people, a local community wildlife trust, the police, churches, libraries, another social housing provider, local urban artists and the Sheffield Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA).

**These 24 organisations include: Sure Start Centres, Children's Centres, Nurseries, Primary and Secondary Schools, after school and holiday clubs, youth group, the Sheffield Parkour Group, a mobile children's library and a local children's hospice.

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