

Growing a Greener Estate
Racecourse Estate, Northolt, London Borough of Ealing
Trees for Cities (TfC) for Ealing Council

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Community Engagement Project Award
Project overview

TfC has worked in partnership with Ealing Council since 2010. We first encountered the 1950s Racecourse Estate in 2013 when we created an urban woodland in Northolt Park.

This is a community-led urban ‘greening’ project where retrofit biodiverse interventions were delivered over 10 years. TfC went over and above the usual 2-3 year delivery timeframe, when each programme stage concluded, to access additional funding. It became obvious that longer-term involvement and planning was needed for this community to become more engaged and self-determining, so that green interventions could be truly sustainable. This expansive site needed increased efforts to focus on tree planting, biodiverse interventions and positive community interactions with green space and nature. In doing so, we sought to reconcile a community’s social “disconnectedness with nature”.

Date completed: April 2023

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

The site had no designations or protected habitats. It was an underutilised, species-poor, close-mown grassland with sparsely scattered trees and a few remnants of old field boundary-lines.

Ealing’s BAP vision states “Conserve and enhance habitats that create better, and more interconnected places for wildlife across Ealing” and, “Increase awareness of biodiversity and encourage more people to connect with nature and by doing so take positive actions that benefit biodiversity in Ealing.” A 2019 baseline survey captured the community’s connectedness to nature, alongside other metrics, the mean Index score was slightly higher than the national mean for adults, although 8% of residents scored as “low connectedness”.



2020 - Community Orchard, Racecourse Estate



2018 - Local School tree Planting at Racecourse Estate

What were the reasons behind this project ?

With the delivery of Northolt Park urban woodland in 2013, TfC focused on an area in Ealing with scope to deliver a multi-year programme of tree planting and green interventions to maximise social and environmental impact.

TfC mapped Ealing sites that were in the top 20% most deprived wards in London with parks, green spaces, schools, GP and social housing within 500m of each other, so we could deliver projects in and around these key clustered community hubs.

Racecourse Estate in Northolt emerged as an ideal social landscape to deliver this 'cluster' approach, falling within the top 15% most deprived neighbourhoods in Ealing and the top 20% most deprived in the country. This large, sprawling estate was set in an exposed landscape of close mown amenity grass, with few trees or planted areas. The majority of residents live in tower blocks with no gardens and the estate's green spaces offered a valuable but underutilised resource to the community.

In 2016 early engagement with Ealing Council suggested that the community wanted to form a functioning residents group to bring people together to tackle environmental improvements and antisocial behaviour. Achieving this would be key to future sustainability, harnessing support locally for green interventions, including community gardens, tree lined roads, orchards, flowering shrubs, bulbs & wildflowers.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Over a ten year period, there have been five interlinked programmes of planning, community engagement, tree planting and other greening interventions, each informing the next stage of delivery. TfC has become an increasingly familiar presence to residents on the estate where we have turned ideas into actions.



2020 – Wildflowers across the Estate, Planted By Ealing Council



2019 – Racecourse Estate future plans...



Continued:

1. 2013-2014 Northolt Park Urban Woodland

This project created a 10,000 tree urban woodland, covering 3,000 sqm including open stand copses and wet woodlands with birch, hornbeam, alder, black poplar, crab apple, cherry, rowan, field maple and hazel, alongside an outdoor classroom, making the most of views and vistas with carefully sited benches.

2. 2016-2018 Racecourse Estate Community Greening Project

This stage engaged with residents to improve quality, aesthetics, function and biodiversity of Racecourse Estate’s green spaces; linking people to their open spaces and increasing positive use of the site by bringing people together.

The initial phase involved scoping and master planning for community-led green interventions in shared spaces using structural trees, understory bulbs, herbaceous plants and grasses to provide nectar and pollen-rich sources in areas with little vegetation and biodiversity.

We informed residents and shared information on the benefits of trees, planting and maintenance, supporting ideas and decision making. Over 60 trees were planted, including a new community orchard.



Racecourse Estate Community Greening Events 2016-2018



Northolt Park Woodland Community Planting 2013 & in 2023

Continued:

3. 2019-2020 Petts Hill Primary School, Edible Playground

Petts Hill Primary School, next to Racecourse Estate, was linked to the above objectives for clustered interventions around social activities, for TfC to provide an engaging, multi-sensory way to teach children about growing and eating healthy food through their Edible Playground project. This transformed unused space into a vibrant teaching garden, with raised beds for fruit and vegetables, shade-giving pergola, outdoor classroom and picnic tables. Installation was followed by a full year of student & staff engagement and training.

4. 2019-2023 Growing a Greener Estate – Phase Two

The National Lottery Community Fund enabled continuation of this programme. Using a Theory of Change based on the “Cluster Approach”, TfC collaborated with stakeholders and community groups focusing tree planting, co-design, play and sustainable, active community involvement beyond the programme timeframe. Whilst strategic tree planting continued, smaller courtyard spaces were co designed and installed.

The aim was “to provide access to healthier, greener, more appealing public spaces for residents to connect with nature and enjoy the benefits of trees and increase biodiversity, shade and climate resilience”. It is difficult to quantify successes or failures at this stage of the project. However early data suggests residents have a higher than average sense of connectedness to nature; a greater appreciation of trees and their benefits to Racecourse Estate; direct involvement in supporting the greening interventions over the past four years; and increased access and motivations to be outdoors experiencing the Estate’s greener open spaces.



2021 – Harvest time at Petts Hill Primary School

5. 2021-2023 and ongoing - Green Shoots Community Greening Group

Racecourse Estate was TfC' first long-term, greening intervention at this scale. Starting as a pilot it gave time and space to explore in-depth community engagement for meaningful outputs. The final two years' focus was to establish a "friends group", a long term desire of residents, finally achieved with support of the Freshwater Foundation who enable self-funding of small community organisations.

The residents group call themselves Green Shoots and were constituted in April 2022, with the objective to enhance and protect greenspaces on the estate, support greening activities, bring communities together, and encourage positive use of green space.

In 2023, TfC involvement culminated in the installation of bespoke seating, across the estate, raised growing beds in the courtyards, tree trim trail, and feature Spiral Orchard, inspired by local school pupils.

The legacy of the project will not only be in tree planting and other greening interventions but importantly the constituted and self-sustaining Green Shoots group who are using their voice already, oppose property development on adjacent open space.

"I've always had an affinity with woods and trees, and felt very much that Trees for Cities have given a very good impulse to the area by planting trees, by getting people involved. So I felt it would be a shame for us not to take some positive steps from there to keep looking after the trees" Green Shoots member, 2023.



Spring 2023 - Green Shoots Community Greening Group



Winter 2022/23 Avenue Planting Event

Further information

The project has been subject to a process review, and a working group was established to identify lessons learned and replicability through 8 Critical Success factors, which can be applied to similar future projects. There are many more mid-century council estates capable of receiving retrofit biodiverse interventions to enable quality green space and improved community cohesion.

Having a dedicated Community Engagement Coordinator for Racecourse was essential to support a sustainable constituted community group. This involved long term persistence overcoming initial reluctance and gaining trust at grass roots level.

Budgets have been tight and greater levels of funding are needed to upgrade housing and its associated hard infrastructure. TfC' role was to focus on achievable, softer elements of the estate and create a legacy of high quality tree cover, addressing the lack of nature and habitat within a sterile environment and to win over a transient and reluctant community to participate in and appreciate their revitalised green spaces. The hope is that the community will continue to enjoy and look after the site long after TFC has gone. The prospect looks good with the establishment of Green Shoots, a critical legacy we anticipate will sustain the good work done so far.

Project Team

- Client: Ealing Council
- Funders: National Lottery Community Fund, Ealing Council, City Bridge Trust, Freshwater Foundation, DEFRA/NLHF, Mayor of London - Trees Call to Action Fund (TCAF) - The fund was developed by Defra in partnership with the Forestry Commission and is being delivered by the Heritage Fund, Heathrow Community Trust's Environment and Sustainability Fund, Forestry Commission - Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf), Stanley Smith UK Horticultural Trust, All Aboard Shops LTD, Tides Foundation (Blackrock)
- Other design team members: Grace Walker (Landscape Design Manager), Henry Chafor (Community Engagement Coordinator)
- Volunteer organisations: (Corporate Volunteers) HUEL, AXA, IG, Investec



2021/2022 – Design Ideas for courtyards



Spring 2023 – Spiral Orchard, Northolt Park

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The motivation for the continuation of this project was iterative over 10 years. It came directly from the Racecourse Estate community; their expressed desire to be self-determining and their increasingly positive interaction with tree planting and green interventions on the estate. In a social housing setting with multiple ongoing infrastructure and anti social issues, these activities provided positive and immediate benefits, not always quantified. Despite small budgets, the programme has had significant physical impact, through habitat creation and community interaction. Surveys will be carried out over the summer during Ealing's Tree festival organised by TfC, to support and further evidence this community's journey in becoming connected to nature.



Summer 2022: TfC Irrigation Squad – Henry, Hetty & Sara



Autumn 2022 – Henry, TfC' dedicated Engagement Coordinator for Racecourse Estate



2021 – *Tree Trim Trail and bespoke Seating*



3 sculptures



2 Oak Archways



15 oak raised beds (for perennials and food growing) & 5 oak picnic benches

Green interventions

- 247 standard Trees (including fruit maidens),
- 10,823 whips
- 12 fruit maidens
- 150 lm of hedges (included in the number of whips)
- 17,200 bulbs
- 216 Climbing plants

Built interventions:

- 15 oak raised beds (for perennials and food growing)
- 5 oak picnic benches with adjoining raised beds
- 2 oak archways
- 15 bespoke benches
- 1 trim trail
- 3 sculptures
- 50m of paling fence with a gate

Number of people engaged:

466 adults, 880 children (this could include the same individual attending multiple events)

Green hoots:

- **Committee** - 6 members
- **Friends of the park Whatsapp** - approximately 75 members (constantly growing)
- We plan to leave them with - a tree planting kit, a selection of maintenance tools, 12 litter pickers, gloves & a contact list
- **Green Shoots' future plans** - continue to apply for their own funding (already received £500 from the Freshwater Foundation, and they are applying for a further £1,500), hold more community events in the park (first was the coronation party), monthly litter picks (with "LAGER Can" litter picking group).

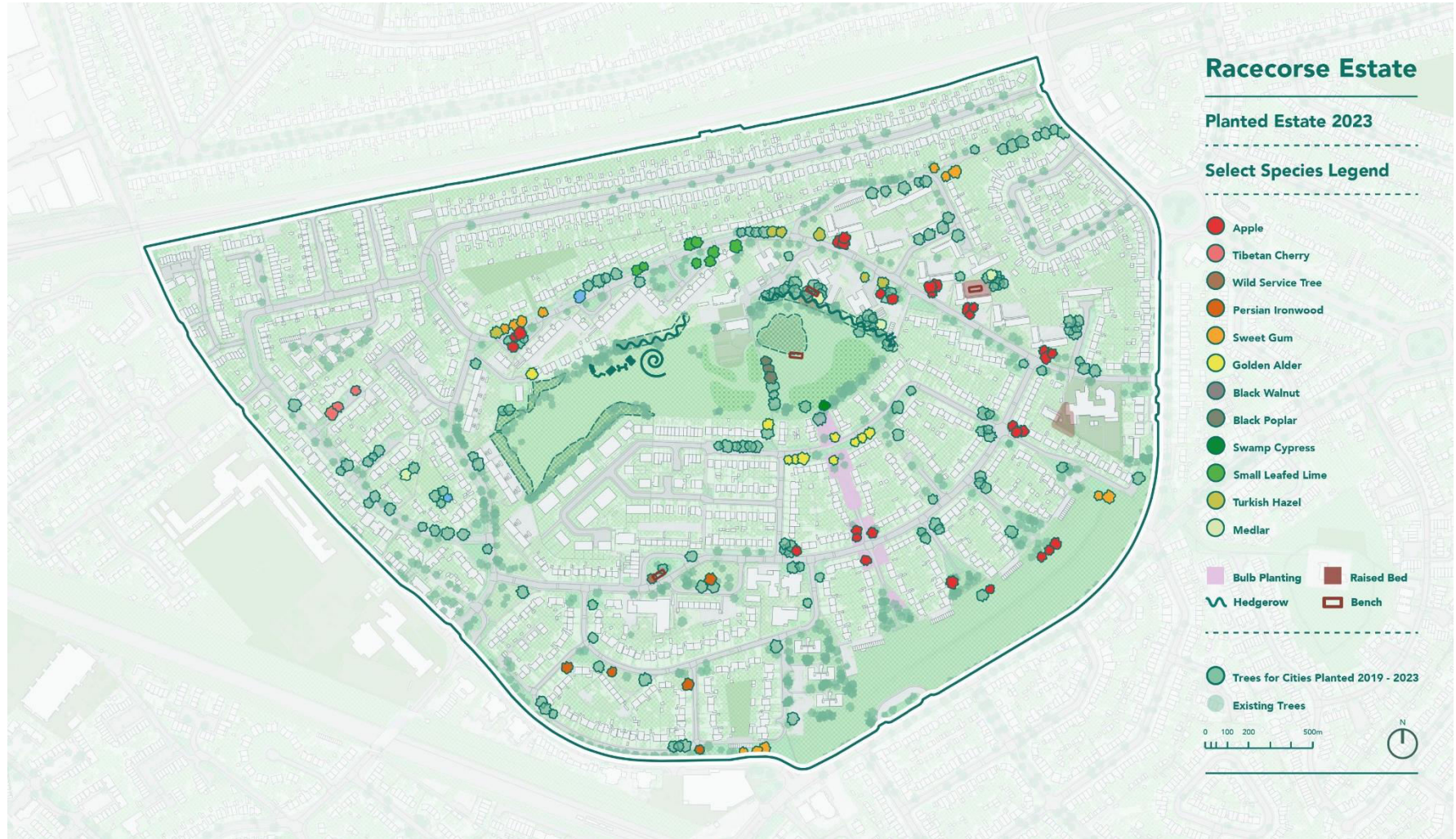
2013-2023 - interventions and people engaged...



Summer 2022 – Racecourse Summer Tree Celebration Event



2023 - Wildflowers and Community Celebration



2019-2023 - Delivered - Urban Greening Interventions