

South Thamesmead Public Realm

Thamesmead, London, United Kingdom

Peabody Housing Association

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Biodiversity Legacy Award

Project overview (50 words max)

A £10m two-phase programme transforming five hectares of shared spaces into beautiful, accessible, biodiverse areas. Following a masterplan including extensive planting, rain gardens, flourishing parkland, greener pathways and play areas. Phase one, surrounding c.1,700 homes on two large housing estates, completed in 2020 with maintenance ongoing. Phase two is underway.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site prior to the enhancement? (100 words max)

Biodiversity conditions were poor, as outlined in our independent design and access statement. Phase one predominantly consisted of:

- trees (an arboriculture survey highlighted limited species with many not thriving; oversized trees in several courtyards – blocking natural light into homes; root damage to surrounding structures)
- amenity (not species-rich) grass planting
- significant amounts of concrete hardstanding (resulting in poor urban drainage).

While spaces around people's 1960s homes had been maintained, they'd not been improved or otherwise invested in since the estate was built.

Phase two consists of an underused green chain walkway with amenity grass and limited variety of trees.



After: Portmeadow Walk credit Land Use Consultancy



After: Mangold Way credit Levitt Bernstein

What were the reasons behind this project? (100 words max)

This project aimed to green up many of South Thamesmead's grey areas – open spaces that hadn't been improved since the 1960s. The work is part of [Peabody's long-term regeneration](#) of the town, which aims to benefit all residents.

This project aimed to:

- improve everyone's day to day experience of living here, so communities would feel proud of, and happier in, their neighbourhood
- help nature thrive by reinvigorating open spaces
- improve climate resilience
- encourage people to spend more time outdoors and improve their health/wellbeing
- test, and teach us more about, co-designing shared spaces with the community (through phase two)



Before and After: Limestone Walk south credit Levitt Bernstein



Before and after: Portmeadow Walk credit LUC and Peabody



What were the biodiversity measures taken? (300 words max)

This project was guided by our [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) and [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), which both aim to enhance and connect natural spaces, and create healthier and more social places. Public realm enhancements in phase one increased biodiversity by 20%.

We created new habitat areas within the walkways and in the courtyards by:

- Establishing a biodiverse range of trees better suited to particular spaces (replacing those not thriving or too intrusive).
- Introducing a new planting palette- perennials offering rich texture and a long season of flowering colour, aiming to delight and intrigue people.
- Emphasising a native and semi-native planting scheme providing fullness and height, and not needing artificial irrigation.
- Attracting pollinating insects through a mix of plants: native as well as exotic species to extend the flowering season.
- Including wildlife habitat elements: nesting boxes and fruiting trees to promote biodiversity.
- Improving drainage to increase infiltration and storm water retention through rain gardens planted up to increase biodiversity.

Critically, we upskilled Peabody's maintenance team so we could honour and maintain the ambitious planting design. Our five-year landscape maintenance plan, activated after works completed, included routine maintenance operations, as well as maintenance needs for the 'establishment phase' of the project (i.e. the first three years after planting/ sowing). This detailed plan enabled us to calculate maintenance costs, service charges, and the level of skills/resources needed to maintain the new landscape to a high standard.

We involved the community throughout the design and construction process through surveys, drop-in sessions, and other activities (e.g. planting days, birdbox making, etc).

We introduced an innovative way to monitor the impact of enhancements in the second phase, installing audioMoth detectors to record activities of bats and birds until 2029. This low-cost innovation could potentially be used at scale in future public realm improvement projects.



Knautia arvensis- Bumble Bee credit LUC



Juncus maritimus – common Blue Damselfly credit LUC



Geum-Geum 'Prinses Juliana credit LUC

Further information (250 words max)

Local residents have reported high satisfaction levels with their neighbourhood, while biodiversity has increased by 20%.

Phase one involved collaborative working, effective communication and careful programme management between Peabody, designers LUC and Levitt Bernstein, and contractors idverde.

Given the proximity to so many households, we split the construction programme into 16 consecutive phases to minimise disruption. A resident liaison officer (requested by Peabody in the original tender) ensured strong communication with local people.

Members of Peabody's environmental services team shadowed idverde's maintenance team for two years after completion (and had additional training) to learn about the aftercare of these newly created spaces. Peabody also recruited new team members to look after the enhanced spaces. The works and maintenance contract ended with idverde in 2022 when maintenance was handed back to Peabody.

Lessons learned included:

- The importance of involving residents in a meaningful way to ensure long-term stewardship through:
 - being part of making decisions in designs
 - being involved with after care
 - helping to monitor activities
 - having a voice on environmental issues
 - education on nature-based solutions and promotion of our ongoing work
- Being prepared for unexpected issues – e.g. finding design solutions to challenges around ground conditions.
- Bringing in the right people for the job – e.g. experienced staff to support residents, good designers and trained teams for aftercare.



Before: Courtyard off Mangold way credit Levitt Bernstein



After: Courtyard off Mangold way credit Levitt Bernstein

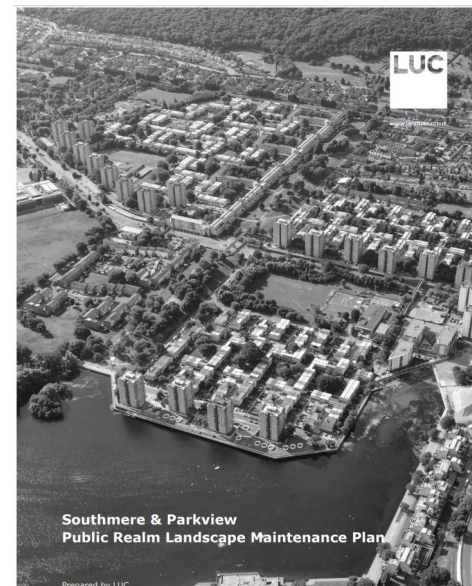
Project Team

- Client(s)/funder(s): Peabody Trust
- Other design team members:

Levitt Bernstein Landscape Architects	Conisbee (Civils)
Land use Consultancy Landscape Architects	Max Fordham (structural, Lighting)
Idverde Landscape Contractors	CBRE (planning)
Potter Raper Ltd (PM, QS, CDM)	RSK Wilding Ltd (monitoring)

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement? (100 words max)

To bring major benefits to people and nature by transforming public realm on two 1960s housing estates, as part of our long-term, landscape-led regeneration of the town. This pioneering £3.7m project (phase one) has radically improved the look and feel of the neighbourhood (1,700 homes), with dozens of bright, beautiful, biodiverse spaces. People can connect with nature on their doorstep, have more reason to spend time outdoors, and feel proud of where they live. As well as boosting biodiversity by 20%, the project has created a more climate-resilient landscape, cared for day after day by our skilled environmental services team.



Landscape Management Plan credit LUC



Skilled Peabody staff credit Peabody