

Stepping Stones to Nature Report - Year 2 July 2010 – June 2011

Zoe Goss, Project Coordinator

In our second year of delivery we have made excellent progress towards breaking down both physical and perceptual barriers to using green space.

Key to this success has been:

- Embedding the learning from the first year into our delivery
- Building on relationships with committed partners to deliver more in-depth work
- Broadening our partnerships to have a wider impact
- Working with the project's legacy in mind, building knowledge and capacity of organisations and participants to use green space independently

However, we recognise that the project has limited time and capacity. Although vital, the project's contribution to health is only one piece in the jigsaw puzzle. As well as working with residents to develop care and ownership of local spaces, the final 2 years will also focus on in-depth work with a select group of partners to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to become agents of change within their own organisations and communities.

Year 2 achievements include:

£74k worth of capital works to improve access to 5 natural spaces in the city.

£184k worth of additional funding for access improvements secured from Forestry Commission, S106 contributions and Plymouth Community Homes

£100k additional funding secured from Arts Council for SS2N sites Years 3 and 4 through our partnership with social enterprise 'Take a Part'

609 days of BTCV and Groundwork volunteer time (valued at £30k towards improving site access)

5 social work and 1 community development student placements supported

408 adults, 957 children (under 16) and 82 young people with improved opportunities to experience the natural environment by taking part in 47 events, workshops and activities on site with local residents, 11 schools, 5 children's centres and 5 community based organisations

830 people volunteering to care for natural environments through setting up 3 new Friends Groups, partnership with Groundwork and BTCV and involvement of local schools in litter picks

43 partners involved in the project from community, voluntary, public and private sectors

Integration of Love Parks Week 2011 with Plymouth's high profile Summer Festival supported by the City Centre Company

Report on outcome 1: Natural spaces are easier to get in and around

1.1 Physical improvements to sites

Breaking down the physical barriers to access by installing paths, information boards and bridges has been a big part of the project. Capital works have been delivered on 5 sites this year. The majority of the work has been done by Groundwork and BTCV's volunteers; and has helped them to build skills, employability and improve health.

All improvements have been designed and decided upon through consultation with local residents, organisations and stakeholders.

Woodland Wood

Created circular routes: Additional 1.7km of high quality path, buggy friendly and usable in all weathers; 2 benches, installed with pupils from Sir John Hunt Community Sports College.

Improved physical links between adjacent neighbourhoods of Whitleigh and Honicknowle: Installed 2 bridges across the stream; Installed interpretation boards designed with help from local residents (adults and children) at a family community day.

Community feedback has been extremely positive. Groundwork has been approached numerous times by local users to thank them for the work and there is a noticeable increase in usage by dog walkers, families, 3 local schools and 1 children's centre.

'It was much easier to go for a walk than I thought, new paths have made using buggies a lot easier' **Parent, Whitleigh Children's Centre**

'Really like our new, clean wood...this area really needed better places to play so it's good to see things finally happening' **Parent, West Park**

Ham Woods

Improved physical links between North Prospect neighbourhood and All Saints Academy after consultation with pupils about routes to school through the woods: Installation of 3 bridges; Started a 1.2km path upgrade from east to west for completion in September 2011.

We continue to engage with the wider regeneration process in North Prospect to ensure that Ham Woods is seen as a key green space asset and that physical links to the site are taken into account during improvements.

BTCV are receiving a lot of positive feedback from local users of the woods about the improvements.

'I have spoken to a lot of people this week regarding the work in the woods and they have asked me to say thank you and keep up the good work' **Police Community Support Officer Dave Ryland, Ham**

Southway Valley LNR

Creating circular routes: Groundwork volunteers have started work to create a circular path in the north of the site which is close to two local schools and a children's centre. A schedule is in place to upgrade other paths throughout the site, install seating, tree dens and playful sculptures throughout the site. This will be completed by October 2011.

'Would like an outdoor classroom circle with a fire beside' **Snowy Owl, 2nd Southway Brownies**

'I want a picnic area' **Child, 11**

'Information boards, eg what you might see naturewise each month' **local resident**

Efford Valley

The popularity of the natural play area installed last year meant the route from the main path became muddy and hard to use. This year at the request of local families, we installed a buggy friendly path to reach the play features.

'On a recent visit I was really impressed with what I saw: the new paths, the forest school, the natural play area, the interpretation panels and the wild flower meadow. Already this area is providing a greatly improved resource for locals and wildlife' **Jeremy Sabel, Nature Conservation Officer, Plymouth City Council**

Forder Valley

The improvements last year have made a huge impact in the use of the reserve. Installation of the path and dipping platform around the pond enabled the Open Air Laboratories to use Forder Valley as a key site this year for water quality surveying with local schools and volunteers.

'The use of Forder Valley has been made possible through the SS2N partnership and we will continue to deliver activities here. The pond is teeming with life and scores very highly on the OPAL water survey!' **Alison Smith, OPAL Scientist**

1.2 What we have learnt about physical improvements

Capital improvements help to engage people Visible improvements have enabled us to build both interest and trust from residents who are pleased to see something actually happening. This seems to make them much more likely to join a get involved and/or join a Friends Group to develop the capacity for community involvement/ownership in the longer term.

Simple, good quality interventions = Sustainable and impactful The most successful interventions seem to have been the most simple. For example, feedback has shown that installing a good quality path make a huge difference to people coming out and using the sites. When well designed and constructed, these simple interventions should not be undervalued. They are likely to have a longer term impact and represent better value for money than perhaps more eye catching items such as play equipment / sculptures.

Standard specifications for capital improvements Learning from what worked in Year 1, we have been working with PCC Parks Services to develop a standard specification document for contractors that demonstrates high quality, durability and accessibility for all. This will be completed in September 2011 and adopted for regular use.

Working together = Better service Bringing different Council departments together with the voluntary sector to deliver the improvements has meant an overall improved service. *'I get a lot more calls from the Parks Services now as they realise how the Transport and Highways Service can help them work with contractors'* **Robin Pearce, Public Rights of Way Officer, Plymouth City Council**

Bringing different stakeholders together has led to widening the impact of the project *'I met BTCV for the first time at an SS2N Forder Valley stakeholder meeting and was impressed with their work there. We have now asked them to plant some wildflower areas with our residents'* **Community Officer, Sutton Housing**

Increased use of sites has also included anti-social behaviour and we have had several incidents of theft, graffiti and fires. We are working closely with local police, Plymouth City Council's youth services and residents to ensure that crime is reported and increase levels of ownership within local communities. We have put aside some capital budget for each site to manage this. PCC Parks Services is working on improving their customer service response rate to ensure that damage is repaired as quickly as possible. In addition, we are exploring options for external funding working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector.

'It's a good idea to be doing these works as long as they don't get vandalised. It really annoys me when we [volunteers] do all the hard work to make things better and people trash it. It would be great to see more volunteers. I'm doing what the government want me to do. I'm looking after my local area. Coming out volunteering is great for me. I'm out in the fresh air meeting new people, making new friends. I get to use my experience and knowledge and share it with the team. I think it's brilliant, the work being done for the project. It's making it easier for people to get into the nature reserves and it's giving me and the team better skills that will help us to get back into work.' **Gordon Burrell, Volunteer, Groundwork South West**

'Volunteering with Groundwork has helped build my self-esteem and confidence as an individual. I've learnt of new places of nature in and around Plymouth of which I can take my family to for walks at weekends. It's lifted my depression that I have suffered over many years by having a reason to get up in the mornings and enabled me to form routine within my life. I love the work we do and appreciate the easy access we are creating for members of the public, due to my son having cerebral palsy, I'm now able to easily push his wheelchair through the woods so he can enjoy his environment around him in nature.' **Laura Cole, Volunteer, Groundwork South West**

Year 3: Working towards a sustainable legacy

At this mid term point, after nearly 2 years of delivery, we are learning what works and where we can achieve maximum impact to sustain improvements beyond the life of the project. Plans for Year 3 include:

Improving physical access

- Complete access and play improvements to Ham Woods, Southway Valley and Kinterbury Creek with support from Groundwork and BTCV
- Designate additional Public Rights of Way on above sites
- Identify final site/s for improvement

Improving access to information

- Coordinate and deliver range of activities during Love Parks Week 2011 as part of the Plymouth Summer Festival to raise awareness of Plymouth as a green and blue city
- Support Parks Department to upgrade website information on natural spaces
- Continue to publicise project activities in local media
- Coordinate at least 1 communications working group meeting
- Create quarterly SS2N project e-newsletter

Building confidence of local people to use natural spaces

- Build confidence of residents and stakeholders to use local spaces through series of positive activities on all SS2N sites (Forder, Woodland, Efford, Ham, Southway, Kinterbury Creek)
- Continue to support development of Friends Groups to build capacity of local involvement and ownership for the above sites
- Continue to deliver series of 'mini-projects' with target groups in priority neighbourhoods with partner organisations (including next steps with National Trust, TVAONB, Dartmoor)
- Work with local schools to develop orienteering and nature trails on SS2N sites

Improve awareness of links between health and green space

- Continue to develop walking for health across the city
- Deliver research project with YMCA, NHS and Plymouth University to evidence the impact and the sustainability of a woodland walking group in Ham Woods
- Work with DNPA and NHS on a health promotion campaign for Dartmoor

Organisational Change

- Continue to collate evidence for research project on organisational change
- Set up a Partner Networking group to bring together new partners and identify training needs

A full report for Year 2 will be available on our website by 20 September 2011.

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