

## Maxted Close Playspace Coves, Isle of Wight

Artecology

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Small Scale Permanent

### Project overview

A task to improve a lost corner in a large housing association estate became a mission to pack biodiversity gains, wildlife encounter, play, discovery and the simple concept of peace in a natural space, into just 400 square metres of mown grass!

The result was a collaboration with Spectrum, and the local community, to produce an amazing sculpted and planted arena, with outdoor classroom, pump track, rock face and stepping stones alongside a green wall, stag beetle castle and a home for Coves' rarest flower! Every part of the hard and soft landscaping has been made wildlife-edible and wildlife-inhabitable.

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

Mown grass and close-board fencing adjoining neighbouring houses and industrial estate. A leylandii hedge, 2 oaks and 2 Norway maples offered isolated habitat but the space had very limited cover or forage and no continuity or connectivity to ground level, nor internally, nor with neighbouring gardens.

### Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

There were no planning or other conditions requiring the work be undertaken. The initiative for change came from Spectrum Housing and the mission to create a multi-use wildlife playspace came from the Artecology team through consultation with local residents and Spectrum.



*Making things and Planting things*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We worked (weekends too!) with local families and Spectrum staff, including maintenance managers, to collaborate on making and the testing-out the biopark:

- Sculpted rock escarpment with fossil designs (palaeoecology), made with cracks and perforations for ground beetles, mining bees and other **invertebrates plus small 'drip pool' hollows beneath the canopy line of the oaks** for micro-wetland habitat.
- **'Pump-track' circuit for scooters and bikes that deliberately enclosed a mini-meadow** in its centre, released from maintenance and allowing floristic content from the original space to grow through. The inner edge of the track was perforated with invertebrate refuge spaces.
- **A set of 'classroom' benches, for everyone, including local school and home-education network** i.e. multi-functional outdoor teaching space with an environmental focus. Plus a seat/hide looking across the whole site.
- Magnifying post, hand-made with local species etched in pyrography, **providing a 'mini-lab' for on-the-spot investigation of finds.**
- **Stag beetle 'log castle'** - high-priority BAP/NERC species with a handful of **annual local records. We've created an area tailored to its breeding requirements** to draw it into the new space.
- A greenwall of high pollen/nectar climbers including foliage foodplants for invertebrates to clad the metal railings and fill the leylandii hedge with cover and food for wildlife.
- The rough area left from the construction site has been put to good use – **we've sown locally collected seed from Pale Toadflax, a scarce plant only known from Cowes on the Island.**



*The Magnifier Post - making the small world bigger*

- All turfs from the parts dug out for sculpting were **saved and stacked to make a 'vertical garden'** with added wild strawberry and sweet woodruff (good ground cover in shade).
- Nest box poles erected with 3 different designs.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

There is great innovation in the combination of hard and soft landscaping techniques to make one Artecology approach to built places for people and wildlife!

## How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

### Further information

The scheme was installed over a period of 3 weeks, with opportunities for local residents and Spectrum staff to visit and contribute ideas as the construction phase continued. The landscape and stag beetle habitat work were both advertised as a public event on 23rd May 2016. Local families joined the Artecology and Spectrum teams for an after-school/after-work evening of planting and digging! This was a great way to make early connections with the local community, and establish a sense of ownership and collaboration then consolidated at the open-day event on 29th August.

The scheme is designed to be added to and, despite its compact form, it leaves room for further interventions as we understand better how people and wildlife make use of the new space.

Our best tips are:

- The built environment is almost always over-engineered and can be perforated for wildlife.
- Greenspace is almost always too flat (because of the tyranny of maintenance) and should be made lumpy.
- A planting scheme should always be edible throughout, in its foliage, fruit, seeds, pollen and nectar.

This is the trinity of Artecology !!



*The whole team*

### What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Maxted has been an inspiring project for me. It has shown me again the amazing power of small places to recover public realm, create biodiversity, make people happy and build social and ecological resilience.