



Nextdoor Nature Somerset Valley

Impact Report March 2025
Executive Summary



Avon
Wildlife Trust



Funded by
UK Government

**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

Improving People's Lives

Funding secured by

WEST MAYORAL
OF ENGLAND COMBINED
AUTHORITY



Introduction

Nextdoor Nature Somer Valley was funded by the West of England Combined Authority through UK Prosperity Fund in partnership with Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Overall Aim: To bring together a diverse range of people to act for nature in their neighbourhoods, creating resilient community groups, enabling a sense of local pride and helping wildlife thrive in The Somer Valley.

The project ran from May 2023 to March 2025 working collaboratively with four communities in the Somer Valley: Paulton, Bath College Somer Valley Campus, Writhlington and Peasedown St John.



“ The increase in social interactions in my community has been massive and is a beautiful thing to be a part of! ”

Approach

Avon Wildlife Trusts Team Wilder initiative is designed to create long term behaviour change through social reinforcement, training, resourcing and empowering people to take action for nature in their own neighbourhoods. By embedding the skills, awareness and confidence to care for nature within individual communities, nature’s ability to thrive will become more sustainable, and valued by a greater number of people. Our approach used the principles of Community Organising to reach out, listen, connect and motivate people to build their collective power.

Delivery



Establishing trust and understanding communities was paramount prior to selecting the four projects. Activities included door knocking, regular meetings, and participation in events, all aimed at listening to people's values and concerns. Community members were then invited to complete a community interest form. The four projects were selected and engagement work started from January 2024.

The team organised consultation workshops to empower groups in collaboratively determining their priorities and activities. The goal was to identify and nurture potential community leaders who could later inspire others to take action for nature locally. Our Community Ecologist visited each site to discuss ideas with residents and provide ecological guidance, accompanied by a written report summary.

Building a sense of community was a central focus throughout all projects. We collaborated with the community to co-host events and raise awareness, encouraging participation. Nature-related activities varied across the four projects and included practical wildlife gardening, constructing bird and bat boxes, family outdoor activities, litter clean-ups, wildflower planting, bat walks, nature trails, and a hedgehog awareness campaign.





Outcomes

Through our approach we engaged with **1550 people** of which **61 local residents are actively taking a leadership role** to care for nature and running events with their communities.

2720m2 of blue or green space has been improved across the four projects including **925 trees** planted, **15 ponds** created or maintained, and **70 habitat boxes** constructed. Interpretation signs and nature trails have been installed across Bath College Campus, Paulton and Writhlington and 3500 hedgehog information sheets through residents' doors in Peasedown St Johns.

Improved engagement numbers	1550
Active or sustained participants	61
Groups/organisations	40
Newsletter Subscribers	105

Improved green or blue spaces	2720 m2
Food - wildflowers & bulbs	4680
Trees / hedgerows	925
Ponds	15
Shelter - e.g. bird boxes	70

Legacy

Paulton on the Wildside (POWLS) is a vibrant group of passionate residents who gather bi-weekly. Born from their endeavours in enhancing the Red Lion Pub Garden, they have since, in partnership with the local Barrets Estate, Parish Council and Church planted bulbs on a shared green, nature reserve woodland, and in the graveyard. In close collaboration with Pride in Paulton, who continue in their planting quests throughout the village, they have united to design and create a new nature trail.

Peasedown St John - A dedicated small group of individuals enhancing areas for wildlife at Ashgrove Cemetery, Beacon Fields and Eckweek Green. They are actively campaigning for a suitable location for a hedgehog banner and have gained confidence to discuss environmental issues with the Parish Council. The group feeds into Peasedown Environmental Group and will continue to campaign for more hedgerows and the protection of hedgehogs.



Writhlington has been a very successful project with focus on 'The Plantation'. Curo the housing association have created interpretation boards, planted 140m of hedgerow, added fruit trees, a willow den and nature play areas and installed community-made bat and bird boxes. Key active residents now have a good relationship with Curo staff and in March initiated 'Young Plantation Rangers,' a monthly forest school session. In March, locals from various groups held a planning meeting to discuss future collaboration and gathered ideas during a celebration event and Writhlington Action Group continue their great work across the village from litter picking to a new nature trail.

Bath College Somer Valley Campus - Since the 'Conservation Careers talks the Animal Care tutor has committed to work with the groundskeeper and students to maintain the pond and other areas on the site. The newly installed nature trail will be a lasting legacy for new young people to learn, explore and increase awareness of the benefits of nature and how they can take action in the future.

“ I feel more positive about the place I live as I know there are other people who want to do the same things that I do. ”





Impact

An external evaluation was conducted by Meaningful Measures Ltd. Highlights included:

- Almost all respondents gained new skills and confidence to support wildlife.
- Many appreciated AWT's practical and financial support, ecological knowledge, and enthusiasm.

“More people stop to talk to us when we're working in the village, and we can share our ways of helping nature and explain how they can help in their gardens by making even small changes,” said one member.

Behaviour change and wider impact

92% respondents felt they were empowered to make decisions about their local community

80% respondents took action for nature beyond the project (e.g., in their own gardens).

Nearly **70%** encouraged family/friends to take action for nature.

50% had conversations with community leaders to raise awareness.

Increased Connection to Nature

The majority of respondents reported improved relationships with nature after participating.

Health & Wellbeing Benefits

92% respondents had increased social interactions.
50% felt less lonely, and between 47–63% reported improvements in physical and mental health

Conclusions from the report stated:

Every participant expressed their appreciation for the **support** and the **approach** taken by Avon Wildlife Trust. It was clear from several participants that they felt their projects only got as far on as they had, because Avon Wildlife Trust had been involved.

The community-organising model (letting locals lead decisions) was seen as **highly effective**.

Participants valued Avon Wildlife Trust's enthusiasm, encouragement, and hands-on support.

The support with **communication and networking** was crucial in sustaining efforts.

The Somer Valley Nextdoor Nature project exceeded all the desired outputs and outcomes. It successfully strengthened community engagement, improved nature connectedness, and enhanced health and wellbeing. Participants felt empowered to take ownership of local green spaces, demonstrating a lasting impact beyond the project's funding period. This evaluation highlights the long-term value of community-led nature initiatives and the critical role of organizations like Avon Wildlife Trust in fostering sustainable environmental engagement.



Lessons learned and Recommendations

The lessons learned from our experience was the need to have a presence in the community for a longer period of time, to build trust, networks and for sustainable outcomes and actions to be met. The below highlights the key recommendations.

- Projects need to factor in at least 6 months of groundwork and building trust to get to know the community and discover the opportunities.
- Build in capacity to develop and facilitate stronger networks between individuals and groups with a nature focus.
- Map opportunities across the whole neighbourhood not just the project you are working on so everyone can work together for the greater good.
- Build in events and engagement activities to increase visibility in the community and to assist communities to experience, gain ideas and understand what they can do for nature.
- Provide ecologist led training and workshops to build skills and inspire ideas in the community.
- Share people's journeys and stories regularly as this inspires others to take action.

“ I have more knowledge about nature and have had lots of different ideas about how to protect and encourage wildlife ”



“ I've definitely noticed a change in the students when they've been outside— there's a real sense of camaraderie, teamwork, and pride in something they've walked past so many times without really noticing. I'm really proud of all of them. ”

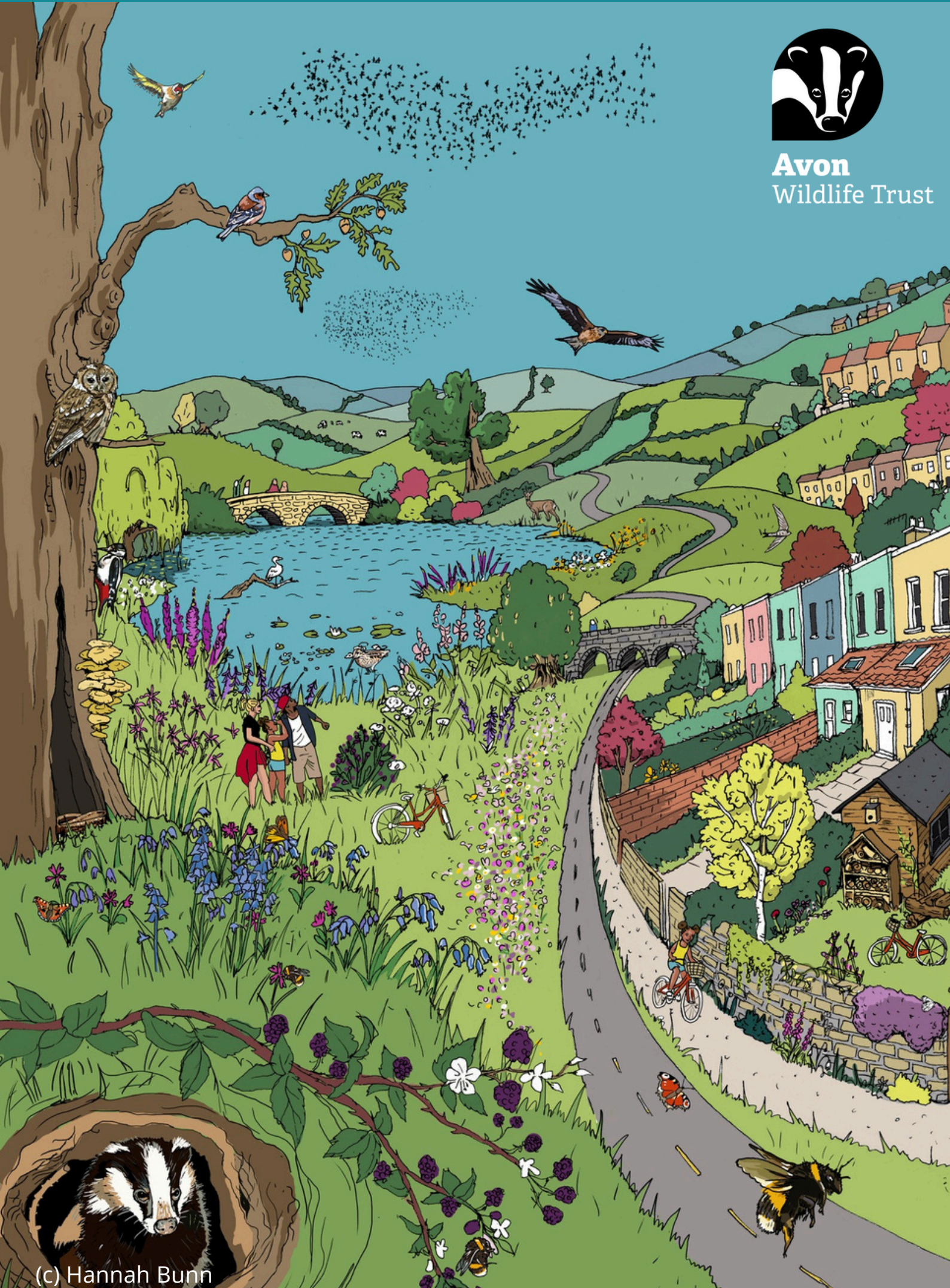
Recommendations from Meaningful Measures Ltd.

The recommendations relate to the current project and then to future projects

- The Somer Valley Nextdoor Nature project has been a big success. It is recommended that Avon Wildlife Trust and existing partners seek funding for Avon Wildlife Trust to provide light-touch support to the community groups. This will allow the existing relationship with residents to be developed further.
- It is recommended that Avon Wildlife Trust continue using a community organising approach when working with community groups as the impact on people, communities and nature is very positive.
- It is recommended more time is spent engaging with communities before projects begin to ensure that appropriate ways of engaging with all residents in the communities are developed.
- It is recommended that there are clear assurances are received that there are no anticipated changes of ownership to land, before community projects are started.



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