



Nextdoor Nature

#TeamWilder Communities in Action

CASE STUDY: Flourish, Woodfield Park, Balby, Doncaster

Tell us a bit about your group/community:

We are a Community Interest Company, housed in a stunning Grade II listed Victorian manor house within the beautiful grounds of Woodfield Park – a site of historic interest. Flourish serves as custodians for the wider park, which is owned by RDaSH (Rotherham, Doncaster and NHS Foundation Trust) but was designated a public open space in 2014.

Woodfield Park itself provides a safe green haven in the heart of Balby, one of the most under-resourced wards within Doncaster, with over 21 acres encompassing gardens, open fields, woodland trails, green gym, and cycle routes. We're surrounded by housing estates, schools, residential homes, and the neighbouring hospital, and within easy walking distance for many residents.

Within the park is a vibrant community of its own – with places to eat and drink, an arts centre, bike shop, yoga studio, squash and leisure centre, antique store, a barbers, hair and beauty services, disability living advice, sensory play, education providers, counsellors, psychotherapists and complementary



therapists, private health care, and other small businesses. Numerous community groups use the space for activities, including forest schools, gardening, art and craft, walking, cycling, tennis, running, singing, peer support groups, and much more!

We believe Woodfield Park creates a unique canvas for us to do something absolutely amazing together, pooling our energy and resources to create a better place for people and for nature alike.

How did you get started on your #TeamWilder journey?

We understand that Yorkshire's wildlife is in crisis, and we know that many people from our community are in crisis too, with significant health inequities amongst the population. We recognise there's a synergistic relationship between nature and people's health, and we care about our planet and our people, so when the opportunity arose to join a social movement to bring people into more sustainable ways of living, we knew we needed to be a part of it! We listened to people living in our community to find out what they thought our priorities for developing the site should be over the coming years. People told us how important it is for them to have access to safe, green spaces, where they can socialise, relax, appreciate wildlife, and where their children can enjoy outdoor play, explore and learn about the natural world. We invited Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to come and talk to our community gardening club and team of volunteers, and the idea of Wilder Woodfield was born. Together, we decided that we wanted to create more areas for wildlife on the site – both because we want to help nature thrive, and because people said they found the simple pleasure of listening to and watching wildlife to be healing.



What actions have you taken for wildlife in your community and why?

One of the first things we did was build nest boxes to put up around the site. We engaged our gardening group in the process of generating ideas and planning projects; they love practical, hands-on tasks and building homes for nature was something they were keen to do. We decided to make open-fronted nest boxes for robins and wrens, as we know that these species are ones that we have on site that people love to see and hear.

Another idea that came from the group was to create a 'sunshine garden' – something really bright and colourful to make people smile when they entered the walled garden. We sowed four different varieties of sunflowers, nurtured them over the following weeks in our polytunnel and then planted them out to create a vibrant splash of 'sunshine', which also provided pollen and nectar for insects in the summer, and then seeds for birds in the autumn.



We've worked with volunteers to create a prairie strip along an area of ground leading up to one of the entrances to our walled garden; we were conscious that this area was doing little for nature and was quite unattractive – perhaps not giving people the warmest sense of a welcome as they approached our area!

We started by digging the strip over to break up the soil and remove injurious weeds; next we sowed phacelia as a natural soil improver which was also loved by the local bumblebees! Once the phacelia had finished flowering, we dug it in to add nutrient to the soil, and then planted the area up with a mix of drought-tolerant, perennial flowering plants and grasses such as echinacea, rudbeckia, achillea, verbena and sedge.



The strip flowered well in its first year and looked so much better with the diverse mix of colours and textures of all the plants, attracting positive comments from site visitors – and it was definitely a hit with the local bees and butterflies too! We are looking forward to seeing it fill out more year on year and observing the insects that come to feed.



In addition to this we've also done some tree planting, putting in 300 native saplings to create a new area of open woodland on site. We engaged a local primary school in this project and the pupils were incredibly enthusiastic and hardworking, which was lovely to see.

More recently we worked with volunteers to create a [stumpery](#) – collecting fallen logs from the woodland on site and nearby [Potteric Carr nature reserve](#), we set these out in a bare area underneath some mature trees and then planted in and around the logs and stumps with ferns and other shade-tolerant perennials. This has created a feature that we can demonstrate to visitors as something they can replicate in shaded areas of their own gardens – often spaces where people are short of ideas for things they can do to add colour and benefit for nature. It should also provide a great habitat for beetles and other deadwood-loving invertebrates and attract birds and maybe even small mammals looking for a tasty treat!



What resources or support have you used along the way?

The saplings for our tree planting scheme were in part provided by [Yorkshire Wildlife Trust](#), with others being generously donated through the [NHS Forest](#) initiative.

Other than that, the main resources we have used have been the toolkits that we gained access to by signing up to become part of [#TeamWilder](#), plus other resources supplied by Andy – these have been really helpful in providing ideas for projects and guidance on how to create new features that offer maximum impact for wildlife.

Has your group empowered or involved others as part of your journey?

When we were initially looking at ideas, we consulted with our services users to allow them to take the lead on identifying suitable projects for our Wilder Woodfield sessions. Members of our garden club – which is a supported group that we run as part of our Green Social Prescribing programme, open to anyone interested in learning about gardening or building new friendships – have been especially prominent in generating the ideas and carrying out the practical tasks such as the building of nest boxes and the creation of our sunshine garden; these were both things that came directly from their suggestions based on things they wanted to see on site and species they were keen to attract.

What differences for wildlife have you noticed as a result of your actions?

We see lots of bees on the prairie strip whenever we walk past, which is a lovely reward for our hard work. Similarly, the sunshine garden attracted lots of insects. Other projects such as the tree planting and stumpery have been so recently completed that their impact will not be seen for some time, but next year we are hopeful of working with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Doncaster Naturalists and the fantastic NHS site team here at Woodfield Park to run a community bioblitz. We hope that this will help us build a better understanding and appreciation of what species are using the site and where to prioritise our energies with future Wilder Woodfield projects.

“ We are keen with everything we do to take our lead from the community and create opportunities for them to connect with the site and each other, and influence what happens here.”

What differences for people have you noticed as a result of your actions?

People have commented on the prairie strip, and we've received lots of positive feedback on this, both from external visitors to the site and from the NHS staff that work here. People have let us know how much they've enjoyed the lovely colourful plants and flowers and all the bees and butterflies they have attracted! It's really improved that area of the site, making it a cheerier place for people to walk through.

Empowerment of gardening club Garden Club members really enjoyed being involved in the decision making process for some of the projects we've done as part of Team Wilder, it gave them a sense of empowerment and they commented on how rewarding it had been for them to see the projects completed.

Have you faced any challenges or barriers in taking your action for wildlife? If so, what were these and how have you tried to overcome them?

The main barrier for us has been juggling priorities – we engage with a lot of people in our outdoor spaces but are never sure each week who will attend, and also as part of the gardening club there are required tasks that need doing to support the effective running of the garden – such as weeding, watering etc – and so it can be tricky at times to build in extra activity alongside these things consistently, when weather and personnel varies from week to week.

More generally, as a small team providing a large range of services at Flourish, everyone needs to be quite flexible and reactive to priorities as they arise, which means that no week is quite the same – this means that things are never dull, but it can also make it difficult when it comes to sticking to plans for sessions and providing consistency with it being quite commonplace for more immediate priorities to arise and staff needing to be reactive to meet the needs of our service users and the organisation.

Has your group formed any new connections or relationships?

We have engaged with a local primary school via the project, as part of our tree planting sessions, where we also provided educational input about the benefits of trees and tree-themed environmental craft activities, alongside the practical planting tasks. The school in question is in the most under-resourced ward of Doncaster and is one we are now building an on-going relationship with; the majority of their pupils live in the immediate vicinity of our site and can come back to check on and help care for the trees that they have proudly planted, and we are hopeful of building on this positive start and invite them on to site for further activities next year.

We have also built relationships with several corporate partners, who have come onto site to lend us support with practical projects, such as our prairie strip planting, as part of their





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Community Social Responsibility programmes – this is a form of support that can be really beneficial to smaller charities and community groups and we would definitely recommend to others thinking of taking action for nature on their sites to contact local companies about their plans to see if they are able to support with person-power and/or materials.

As part of an Action for Nature event which we hosted and ran in partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, we came into contact with a lovely member of Doncaster Naturalists – he is very knowledgeable about nature generally and has a specific interest in Woodfield Park and some of the notable species that we have here, so we are very much glad to have the opportunity to now work more closely with Doncaster Naturalists on future projects – hopefully starting with our proposed bioblitz next year!

We have also built on our existing relationship with the Ian, the Environmental and Waste Manager at Woodfield, and his team. They have been doing some fantastic things themselves for wildlife at Woodfield Park, including creating pollinator-friendly meadow strips along the entrance driveway to Woodfield, which are a lovely sight in the summer as the red campion, knapweed, yarrow, musk mallow and ox-eye daisies all flower. They manage the semi-natural mature woodland on site sensitively, allowing standing and laid dead wood to remain and creating glades where sunlight penetrates to create a rich understory and butterflies and hoverflies come to feed. They've also vastly reduced use of herbicides across the site and planted an acre of native woodland specifically as habitat, with coppicing taking place to create log pile homes for hedgehogs and minibeasts. As our own Wilder Woodfield project has developed, Ian and co have been very welcoming of our ideas. When we reached the point of wanting to expand our actions for wildlife outside of our walled

garden and implement some projects on the wider site, they were only too happy to support our plans to plant some further woodland with school groups, to create the prairie strip along a site entrance route and to incorporate the stumpery outside our walled garden. It is great to have this close working relationship, and we are looking forward to co-creating more project ideas in the future, starting with our fledgling plan for some citizen science community site surveying activities next year.

What have been your favourite moments as part of your journey so far?

Working with the school children has been really rewarding and having visitors to site comment positively on the changes they are seeing and notice the bees and butterflies as they spend time here.




What do you plan to do next?

We have worked with Andy to create two 'Ideas Boards' – one for our Walled Garden, and one for the wider Woodfield site, which Ian also had input into. There are many possible projects that we have outlined as part of these, from creating a butterfly garden, to putting up swift boxes to installing rain planters. We displayed these in the café to gauge people's responses and can now look to implement some of these over time as capacity and funding allows.

We are also in discussion with Andy and Ian about organising a bioblitz for 2025, to engage the staff, volunteers and service users of organisations based on site, plus members of the public, and the partners that we have developed during our #TeamWilder journey such as the schools in surveying the site and helping us to create an up-to-date picture of the species that live here or travel through.



Contact us or find out more:

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