

Rewilding Islington

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Keywords

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Context

The Rewilding Islington collaboration transpired through London Metropolitan University's (London Met) role as an anchor institution for Islington Council - part of the university's commitment to working with local partners to tackle key challenges in the capital through its London Met Lab initiative. To address its 'environment challenge', the Lab began advising on the council's Environment Steering Group and Greener Together programme in 2021. This revealed an opportunity to apply the university's design-research expertise in 'urban rewilding', developed through the Rewild My Street campaign at its Centre for Urban and Built Ecologies, to live projects planned in the borough. The first is a pilot project to rewild a disused road bisecting a public park to create a pedestrian, cycle and wildlife corridor.

The main partners are London Met and Islington Council, working with industry consultants PiM Studio architects and Eight Associates ecologists. Local residents and community groups are also key partners, who will be actively engaged as the project develops.

The collaboration is located in the London Borough of Islington, which is home to London Met's main campus and administered by Islington Council. It focuses on Islington's 80 hectares of existing parks and green open spaces, beginning with its largest public park, Highbury Fields.

In 2022 the project is ongoing and at an early stage. Concept designs have been developed for an ambitious pilot project in Highbury Fields. These show how the road could be transformed through resurfacing, planting, seating and habitat sculptures, and highlight the species of wildlife that are present onsite or nearby that might benefit. The concept image uses a collage technique developed through the Rewild My Street project, which uses

architectural drawings to inspire and empower residents to transform city streets for wildlife.



'Concept Collage for Highbury Fields'

Image © Siân Moxon [with altered photos courtesy of Nekrasova Anastasiya, Pau, artigas, Clarst5/Shutterstock, Freebie Photograpy, Gallinago Media/Shutterstock, Gordon, H Helene, George Hodan, Imagewell/Shutterstock, Islington Council, Peter Mulligan, Serkan Mutan/Shutterstock, Photomaster/Shutterstock, Keith Pritchard/Shutterstock, Ljupco Smokovski/Shutterstock, Super.lukas, Rudmer Zverver/Shutterstock]

The team is now developing a detailed brief, budget, programme and proposal to seek construction partners. It will be seeking external funding to realise the pilot project through a collaborative bid, for which Islington Council has committed significant match funding.

Process and outputs

London Met's Director of London Engagement and Lab lead, Sophie Clouterbuck instigated the collaboration with Islington Council's Corporate Director for Environment, Keith Townsend. The Lab's environment lead and Senior Lecturer in Sustainability, Sian Moxon is leading the rewilding project, using insights from her Rewild My Street campaign to develop vision drawings for the borough's green spaces. The council's Head of Green Spaces and Leisure, Andrew Bedford is overseeing the project, supported by Nature and Conservation Manager, Sally Oldfield. PiM Studio are working closely with Sian, bringing their practice experience of rewilding projects in London to produce architectural drawings of the proposal. As a core

member of the Rewild My Street team, Eight Associates are advising on the ecology strategy for the scheme.

The partnership is intended to achieve the aims of both the council's Greener Together programme and the university's London Met Lab: Environment initiative by increasing the quality and quantity of greenspace in the borough for the benefit of wildlife, people and climate-change resilience.

The project's design concept has been discussed with relevant council staff and community representatives to inform the brief's development. It will be shared with its primary audience of end users, including local residents, businesses, community groups and the general public, via a thorough consultation process coordinated by the council once initial proposals have been sufficiently developed to enable worthwhile feedback.

In terms of wider dissemination, the project was presented by both partners to a broad audience at NCACE's online 'Culture and Collaborations on Climate Emergency' event in June 2022. It was also exhibited at London Met's School of Art Architecture and Design's public summer show in June/July 2022, as part of a live projects display. It will also feature as part of a case study on London Met Lab: Environment in a forthcoming UK Universities Climate Network briefing paper on 'Universities as anchor institutions for local climate action'.

Evaluation and impact

The project's impact will be measured as it progresses. Evaluation methods will include impact-tracker software and knowledge-exchange recording. Key performance indicators will include securing external funding, delivering the project on time, increasing vegetation and biodiversity levels on the site, and assessing end-user satisfaction.

The collaboration illustrates the potential of combining expertise from academic and local authority sectors to achieve common goals. The Lab aims to ensure London becomes carbon neutral, has clean air and is at the forefront of urban greening, supporting the Mayor of London's world-leading targets. Rewild My Street seeks to reimagine key public spaces in London as wild play streets, pocket parks and tiny forest squares, connected by a network of

green and blue ways, and surrounded by a wild belt. And Islington Greener Together seeks to create and improve green space to make the borough cleaner, greener and healthier.

At a strategic level both institutions have committed to a common goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This demonstrates the values that are emerging from the collaboration of working together locally to tackle urgent, global issues, such as the climate and ecological emergency.

Lessons have already been learned about the importance of a clearly defined brief, budget and programme developed by the collaborating partners to give a project momentum. In addition, the project has highlighted the challenges faced by local authorities needing to deliver timely solutions to the environmental crisis while meaningfully engaging diverse stakeholders in the process. Moreover, it underlines the complexity of translating design-research ideas into built projects, demonstrating the benefits of involving industry partners for their practical expertise. As Andrew Bedford explains, “Working with London Met and its partners is enabling us to create a vision of what’s possible and then engage people in creating a practical, buildable scheme that we can deliver”.

Additional Information

Rewild My Street: <https://www.rewildmystreet.org> & @rewildmystreet (Twitter & Instagram)

London Met Lab: <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/london-met-lab/environment>

Islington Greener Together: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/sports-parks-and-trees/parks-and-green-space/islington-greener-together>

