

# REWILDING CAMDEN

## STRATEGY PLAN: 2019-2024

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## 1. Overview

Rewilding is a method of restoring living systems, primarily through allowing and supporting the natural world to flourish - including plants, insects and native animals (especially ones at threat of extinction) as well as soil and water systems. It also acts as a natural climate solution to draw carbon from the air and is therefore a complementary strategy to the decarbonisation of our economy.<sup>1</sup>

Rewilding Camden is a community-led rewilding project supporting the transformation of unused patches of ground across Camden into thriving green, socially inclusive spaces. In September 2019, we worked closely with Raglan's tenants' and residents' association (TRA) to launch our pilot project - Rewilding Camden: Growing Raglan - on the Raglan housing estate; in partnership with Camden Council, Transition Kentish Town (TKT) and Climate Emergency Camden (CEC). We plan over the coming years to undertake similar rewilding activities across Camden Council's housing estates and to share our collective experiences with communities more broadly. In doing so, we aim to strengthen our natural biodiversity, contribute to ecological restoration, deepen our community connections and transform our relationships with the rest of the natural world.

In 2019, Camden Council declared a climate emergency and convened a participatory citizens assembly to discuss how we move forward to address ecological and climate crises. These actions were a significant step towards the recognition of the urgent local and global climate and ecological issues that have already been caused, and will continue to be exacerbated by, our current industrial practices and economic system. As governments must take a leading role in implementing systemic change, we believe that Camden Council is well-placed to support widespread community rewilding efforts due to its land ownership and management role, and contribute to ecological restoration across the borough. It is also essential to acknowledge that communities in vulnerable positions in society, including groups with lower socio-economic power, are generally the least responsible for ecological and climate breakdown but the most

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see, for example, <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding/> and <https://www.naturalclimate.solutions/>

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likely to suffer its adverse effects. Such groups must be supported to lead this process to ensure an inclusive and just transition. Focusing on council housing estates can provide opportunities for such leadership and wider community engagement to emerge and flourish.



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## 2. Our pilot project - Rewilding Camden: Growing Raglan

In spring 2018, Transition Kentish Town were invited to present the idea of rewilding council housing estates to a meeting of the Camden Council Neighbourhood Officers. Following further conversations, we launched our pilot community rewilding project - Rewilding Camden: Growing Raglan - in September 2019, located on Raglan housing estate in Camden.



Our pilot project aims are to establish a series of low maintenance, easily achieved and participatory interventions to deliver as follows:

### **Let nature take the lead**

...for example, allowing the natural meadow to reestablish and introduce relaxed mowing

### **Help nature to thrive**

...through support to natural processes, for example, planting fruit trees to create a community orchard, planting a native boundary hedgerow and planting native wildflower turf, extending the season of flowering through bulb plantings

### **Strengthen community and ecological resilience**

...including through biodiversity (of wildflowers and insects across the estate and surrounding area) and community engagement and cohesion (through a participatory process and ongoing events, a socially inclusive space and improved wellbeing)

## Proposed pilot project timeline:

Date	Action
June - July 2019	<p><b>Planning the rewilding project:</b> we spent time to understand the space, propose and discuss possibilities, and agree a rewilding plan - this involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a walk around the estate with a representative from the TRA, the Camden Neighbourhood Officer and Camden Council grounds maintenance staff</li> <li>● the development of a draft rewilding plan, taking into account factors such as: native plant species, the ease with which plants can be established, which plants/trees encourage biodiversity of pollinators and community connection (e.g. fruit picking), how residents, particularly children, currently and would like to use the different spaces, etc</li> <li>● outreach meeting at a local library, for review and discussion about the draft plan with estate residents and the local area residents association</li> <li>● a meeting with Camden Council to agree on areas of responsibility and support for the pilot project</li> </ul>
August - September 2019	<p><b>Crowdfunding:</b> we sought community funding for the trees, turf, bulbs and climbers, and with an initial target of £2,582 we were successful in raising £2,849. The excess will be used for covering extra initiatives such as a community spring 2020 snowdrop bulb planting event and larger specimen plants to better establish the fruit orchard.</p>
September 2019	<p><b>Official launch of Rewilding Camden - Growing Raglan:</b> we held a community event on the estate to introduce the project, share proposed plans, take people on tours and provide space for questions and discussions. Over 70 people attended, a mix of estate residents of all ages, local residents from neighbouring streets and others from the community. The event also included activities such as juicing local windfall apples on a cast iron press.</p>
October - December 2019	<p><b>Implementing the rewilding project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● week beginning 21 October: Camden Council grounds maintenance contractors (idverde) clearing the space for bulb planting and the wildflower turf</li> <li>● 30 October: wildflower turf received by the TRA</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 31 October: species bulbs planted and wildlife turf laid by TCV/Green Gym volunteers, TRA volunteers and TKT/Camden</li> <li>● 9 November: launch party at Think &amp; Do (ecological and climate issues pop-up community space)</li> <li>● 14 November: meeting with Camden Council to discuss expansion of Rewilding Camden to other estates</li> <li>● 14 November: building a coppiced wood hurdle with TCV/Green gym, TRA volunteers and TKT/Camden</li> <li>● December: further grounds preparation - idverde / Camden Green Spaces</li> <li>● Dec / Jan: hedgerow planting with TCV/GreenGym, TRA volunteers and TKT/Camden</li> <li>● Dec / Jan: fruit trees planting</li> </ul>
2020 and ongoing	<p><b>Next steps and continued support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● more trees planted</li> <li>● March 2020: snowdrops planting</li> <li>● regular maintenance to ensure long-term success, newly laid turf areas left undisturbed in order to establish, relaxed mowing regime introduced</li> <li>● September: additional bulb planting</li> <li>● Ongoing: fruit picking, juicing event, summer social, community monitoring of biodiversity, regular audit of wildflower population by local landscape architect in September and before late summer cut</li> </ul>

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### 3. Our longer-term plan

Building on our pilot project, we plan to undertake similar rewilding activities across Camden's housing estates, share our collective experiences with interested communities more broadly and expand our impact. We envision the Rewilding Camden project might evolve as follows, in regular consultation and reflection with communities and allies.

#### **In the short term (2020) we plan to:**

- successfully complete our pilot project, gather feedback and reflections from local communities and others involved, and undertake five additional projects
- develop a Rewilding Camden website to share project information and explore ways to update and find roles for interested people
- develop a standard rewilding package as a useful starting point for discussion and adaptation for each site, in consultation with residents and others, which will include: community consultation and plans for events to connect/work with the land; the introduction of/support to wildflower turf, fruit and ornamental trees, and native hedgerow; plans for initial and ongoing labour and maintenance; monitoring of ecological and community impact
- use our experiences to support and influence the development of Camden Council's forthcoming Climate Action Plan, to be published in 2020,<sup>2</sup> its associated biodiversity guidance and planning, and other local initiatives relevant to rewilding processes such as the campaign to ban pesticides and integrating natural processes into land management
- begin to explore how we can encourage connections across Rewilding Camden projects, for example, creating space for community members from completed projects to participate and/or answer questions during the development phase of subsequent projects on other housing estates
- connect with allies, funders and complementary projects in Camden and London, in order to deepen our understanding of the contribution of Rewilding Camden to broader rewilding efforts and to build a stable structure for a longer-term project

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.camden.gov.uk/climate-crisis>



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(for example, through partnership with Camden Council and others, and with sufficient funding)

- connect with academics/university students or others to support us with community-led monitoring and other methods of appropriate tracking of our ecological and community impact (including baseline assessment and ongoing quantitative and qualitative monitoring)

### **In the medium term (2021-2022) we plan to:**

- undertake five additional Rewilding Camden projects each year
- deepen opportunities for community engagement and leadership in relation to specific projects, the coordination of the Rewilding Camden project and the cross-fertilisation of experience and ideas across Camden
- explore practical ways to share experiences and ideas, for example, through website case studies, an evolving website map of the rewilding locations, a FAQ document and potentially developing a toolkit to be used by other boroughs (or other council areas in any part of the UK or elsewhere, as contextualised to local situation)
- use our experiences to influence evolving conversations across Camden regarding our human relationship with the land, to understand our ecological context and to encourage participatory decision-making by Camden Council and others that is explicitly embedded in our ecological context

### **Over the longer term (2023-2024) we plan to:**

- undertake five additional Rewilding Camden projects each year
- continue to share our collective experiences to encourage and influence: similar urban rewilding projects, community stewardship of land, decision-making, governance structures and practices, collective imagination and redefinition of urban habitats (particularly in light of increased urbanisation in the UK and elsewhere), and contribute to ecological restoration and decarbonisation of Camden and beyond

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## ANNEX A: Rewilding Camden coordination team

**Debbie Bourne:** Debbie is an RHS trained horticulturalist. Six years ago she and partner Stephen Evans set up Of Butterflies and Bees, a local wildlife garden design and maintenance company. The company donates 25% of its time to pro-bono projects such as Rewilding Camden. For the last eight years, Debbie has been a prime mover in the development of the Transition Town project in Camden and is passionate about creating community gardens around Camden borough. These have included the Platform 1 Cottage Garden at Kentish Town National Rail station, the Listening Space Garden at the Caversham Group Practice, the Sunshine Garden at West Hampstead Overground station, and the Salvation Army garden in Chalk Farm.

**Stephen Evans:** Stephen leads on garden infrastructure build and hardscape design at Of Butterflies and Bees. Stephen has a long history of building community gardens - including many in New York. Stephen has many years experience working in the arena of outdoor learning, in particular with students with special educational needs (SEN).

**Dilip Lakhani:** Dilip is a landscape architect and RHS trained horticulturalist, with exceptional horticultural knowledge built up over many years of growing, observing and specifying planting schemes. He has worked on large housing schemes, garden spaces connected with a specialist counseling centre in Liverpool, and has expertise in community-led landscape initiatives. Over the past eight years has been working with local community groups in Kentish Town planting forgotten corners of the area such as Inkerman Gardens with eye catching wildlife friendly flower beds which has extended his design experience and abilities.

**Susie Talbot:** Susie Talbot is a human rights lawyer who has worked with communities and NGOs around the world to effect transformative change at the intersection of socio-economic rights, corporate accountability, economic policy, gender and environmental issues. She has facilitated interactive workshops in multiple countries and has expertise in: global civil society mobilisation; strategic litigation before national courts and regional/international mechanisms; engagement with UN processes; and creative advocacy to advance social and environmental justice issues using human rights and nature-centred frameworks.

Rewilding Camden is supported by Transition Kentish Town  
<http://www.transitionkentishtown.org.uk/> and Climate Emergency Camden  
<https://climateemergencycamden.org/>

# ANNEX B: Pilot project map

