

Community action to save South Purdown Open Space in Bristol

South Purdown Meadow is a vital piece of green space and wildflower meadow that runs between hundreds of houses in Bristol. It creates a wildlife corridor with a huge range of wildlife, and is a gateway to the Stoke Park Estate from the urban city of Bristol. The grassland is an easily accessible natural area, which many residents use to get away from the busy urban streets to improve wellbeing, enhance their health and spend time with their families.

Local residents have been working to protect this meadow for over a decade from

development by Bristol City Council, which for many has seemed like an uphill struggle. Emily Shimell from the South Lockleaze and Purdown Neighbourhood Group explains more: "For many years, the meadow has been at threat from development. Through ongoing work and passion from local people, the community has recently won the fight to keep this open natural green space and wildflower meadow. Although it isn't owned directly by our community, we feel we have somewhat gained ownership of this space due to our activities, campaigning, position and through trying to protect it."



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The Community Group and local residents have been very active in highlighting the importance of this meadow both for its wildlife and also as a community resource. Events that have been held include:

- Widely attended public meetings about how vital green space is for local residents and wildlife. Developers & Bristol City Council members were invited and attended these meetings.
- A petition to protect their green space, accumulating over 1500 signatures as to why the development should be stopped.
- An environmental education programme on the green space, including walks, talks & activities for families such as bug hotel.
- Attended dozens of council meetings and protested to the mayor, through presentations in the mayor time events, email and in person through questions and interviews.
- Undertook a PR campaign within local Bristol news outlets, including BBC Bristol, Bristol 247 and Made In Bristol.
- Regular social media posts on Facebook and Twitter, using the #SaveSouthPurdown.
- Registered the space as an asset of community value with new registered footpaths.
- Leafleted over 1500 houses across Bristol to gain support from other groups.



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“We now have had agreement from the Bristol City Council after years of campaigning that the development is now being sought in a different location. This is primarily due to the ongoing community campaigning against the development and that the community stood up and really ensured they were heard. We are all thrilled to have managed to save this space, and we want to show others that when a community comes together, it can do great things!” says Emily. “We kept the campaign as powerful and as positive as possible - we believe that positivity draws in support from other residents and groups further afield, and this meant people gravitated towards it and enabled the campaign to grow.”



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South Purdown is within the Lockleaze Ward in Bristol, which is within the top 10% of most deprived areas in the UK. It is an area that does not meet local regulations as to the amount of green space available for residents. The land is part of the Stapleton and Frome Valley conservation area and is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The community undertook a wildlife survey over approximately 18 months from 2013 - 2015. The grassland includes a wildflower meadow that is cut for hay and a flat grassland area often used for activities. Wild flowers present include common knapweed, oxeye daisy, common bird's-foot-trefoil and yellow rattle. Surrounding the park there are small pockets



of woodland and hedgerows. This diverse landscape benefits wildlife, with a large population of bats, slow worms, birds such as the lesser whitethroat, whinchat, stonechat, great spotted woodpecker and green woodpecker seen in recent years. There are seven species of bee including red-tailed, white-tailed, buff-tailed, tree, early and heath bumblebees and common carder bee.

The community group has become very active in the management and use of the site, which has helped towards the success of the campaign. Emily describes their involvement further: "Our neighbourhood group has run a number of outdoor education programmes on South Purdown, including building bug hotels with local families, walks and talks on the wildlife and sustainable woodcraft events. We have arranged community picnics with over 50 local families attending and this also benefitted the campaign encouraging people to back 'Save South Purdown'. The local Army Cadets group use the space for exercise, and there are a number of ramblers and running groups in the area."

Other community engagement activities include a bat detection survey at dusk to help children spot and identify bat species at a time of night, and educating the children on the hedgerows and dusk critters that frequent the site. The local Glenfrome Primary School regular holds picnics and outdoor activities at South Purdown increasing their use of outdoor space and there is a forest school, which really enables children to become immersed in the outdoors, even in this urban area.

It is not all about community engagement. The group also runs regular litter picks to help maintain the space. Although, the site had been noted as 'low value' within council documents a decade ago, the community wanted to demonstrate how valuable this space had really become, and so created a register of usage to demonstrate why South Purdown should be recognised as a vital green space for the north of Bristol. This is forwarded on to Bristol City Council, and an example can be found at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qk49nDolkoY3OsVwi508ydJuB7HS-641dgYO7u80v7U/edit?pli=1>



“Many of these activities have been instrumental in saving the green space, and we have been fortunate to have been supported by local experts, including local conservationists and residents who has spent their lives understanding and learning about the wildlife and history of the green space. Our neighbourhood group has fundraised to help provide activities free of charge to ensure everyone can attend, and now that Bristol City Council have agreed to protect the space, we can't wait to use it in the future” says Emily.

Through the campaign work of the community group, the future for South Purdown to stay as a green space to be enjoyed by people and a haven for wildlife looks to be secure - for now. The community group encourages residents to continue supporting the space and keep its presence in the media high, so that South Purdown continues to be protected and fought for into the future. There are plans to continue to grow the wildlife education programmes and carry out new activities including the creation of a nature trail, erecting bat boxes and making rodent houses, and new bug hotels. The group are looking into achieving official protection from development through a final written agreement with the Bristol City Council who

own the space, and put forward the plans for development originally. This will involve the engagement of local councillors and the mayor with the plight of the green space.

Looking ahead, the community group has held discussions with the local health centre to find out how they could improve access to the outdoors, using South Purdown as a space for improvements to health and education of local people. Emily says “We are thrilled that community spirit and residents groups have managed to win such a fantastic feat and believe this is a great demonstration of how communities can come together around the commitment to conserve wildflower meadows and natural green space.”



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