

Beyond the 'usual suspects'?

Engaging diverse communities in co-producing an arboretum-meadow



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Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments
Showcase 22nd June 2022, Design West, Bristol.*

September 2019: Project initiation and planning



Aim

To engage local stakeholder partners in the co-production of an Air Quality Arboretum-meadow on a redundant mini-golf site in Wardown Park, Luton, Bedfordshire, UK.

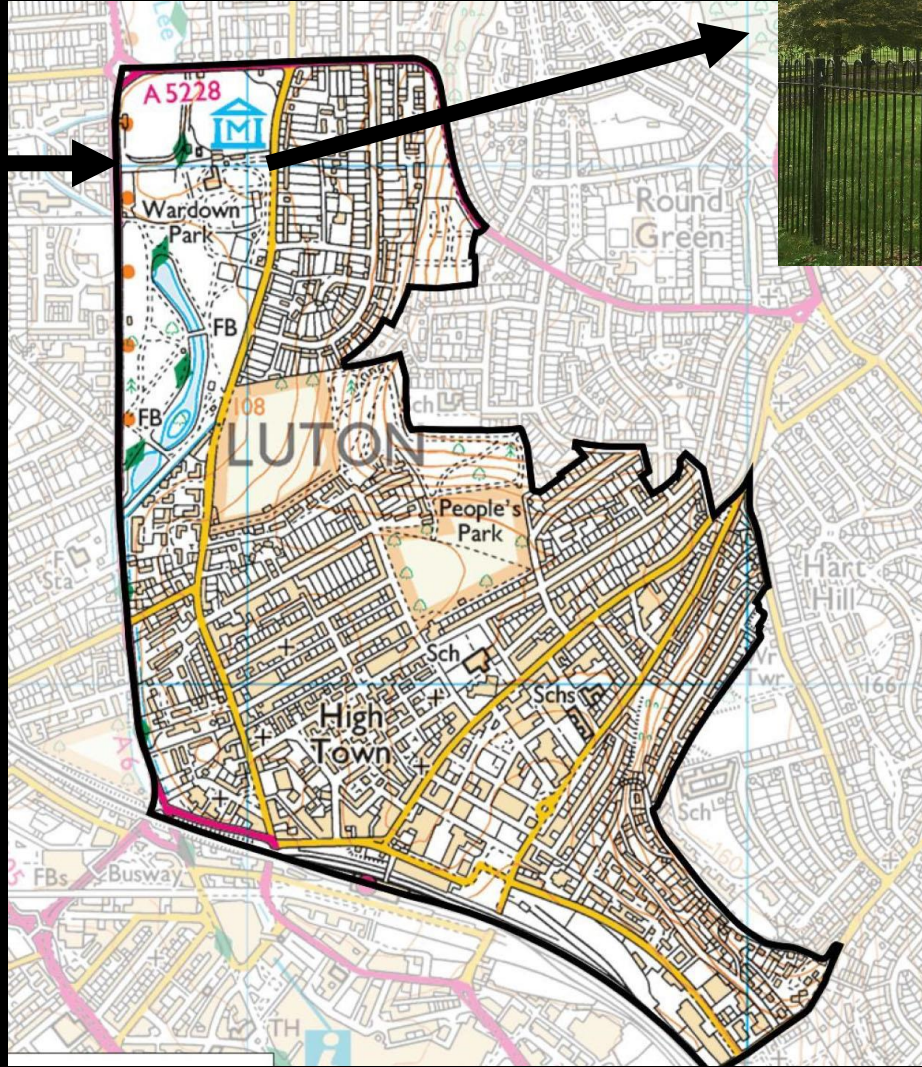


Luton Parks Service, Pictorial Meadows and River Bank Primary

Public engagement award UWE Bristol



The Context



Wardown Park
High Town ward
Luton,
Bedfordshire,
UK.

Source: Luton.gov.uk High Town ward profile April, 2019

The Context

England

Luton

High Town

Compared with benchmark:

Better

Similar

Worse

		England	Luton	High Town
Index of Multiple Deprivation Score 2015, IMD	2015	21.8	27.6	29.6
Income deprivation, English Indices of Deprivation 2015	2015	14.6	17.8	15.8
Child Poverty, English Indices of Deprivation 2015, IDACI	2015	19.9	23.7	24.2
Child Development at age 5 (%)	2013/14	60.4	52.2	47.9
GCSE Achievement (5A*-C including English & Maths)	2013/14	56.6	54.5	51.3
Unemployment (% of the working age population claiming out of work benefit)	2017/18	1.9*	1.9*	1.9*
Long-Term Unemployment- rate per 1,000 working age population	2017/18	3.6*	3.9*	3.8*
Fuel poverty	2016	11.1	11.8	13.6
Older people living alone, % of people aged 65 and over who are living alone	2011	31.5	30.0	43.3
Older People in Deprivation, English Indices of Deprivation 2015, IDAOP1	2015	16.2	21.3	24.0

The Context

41.1% White British (English, Scottish, N Irish, Welsh)

(44.6% in Luton)

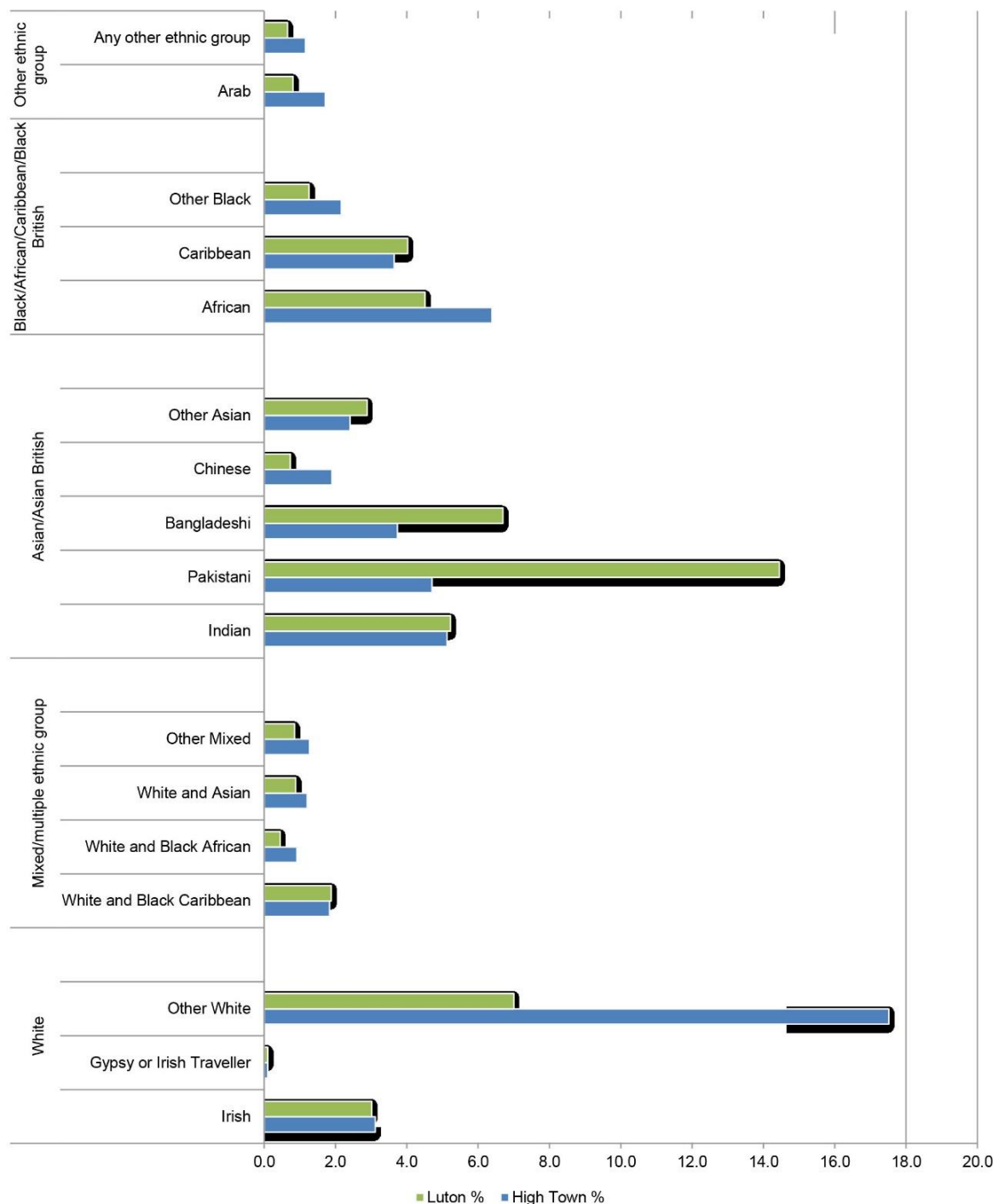
58.9% other ethnicities

92 per cent residents in High Town agreed that their local area was a place where different backgrounds got on well together.

This score is one of the highest in the town (2017 data)

(Perceptions of Luton 2019 Critical research, ward summaries)

Source: Luton.gov.uk High Town ward profile April, 2019



Public engagement and outreach objectives

- To connect local children with nature.
- To provide an educational resource for the wider community focusing on climate change, the value of trees and meadows in relation to air quality, wellbeing and biodiversity.
- To assess the potential for public engagement and outreach initiatives to contribute to “futureproofing” towns and cities by building climate resilience.





February 10th 2020

Workshop and tree planting

To be continued...the plan...

April 2020



Seeding of meadows
with Yr 2 and Eco-
Warriors Riverbank

July 2020



Celebrating
arboretum-meadows
with parents and
partners

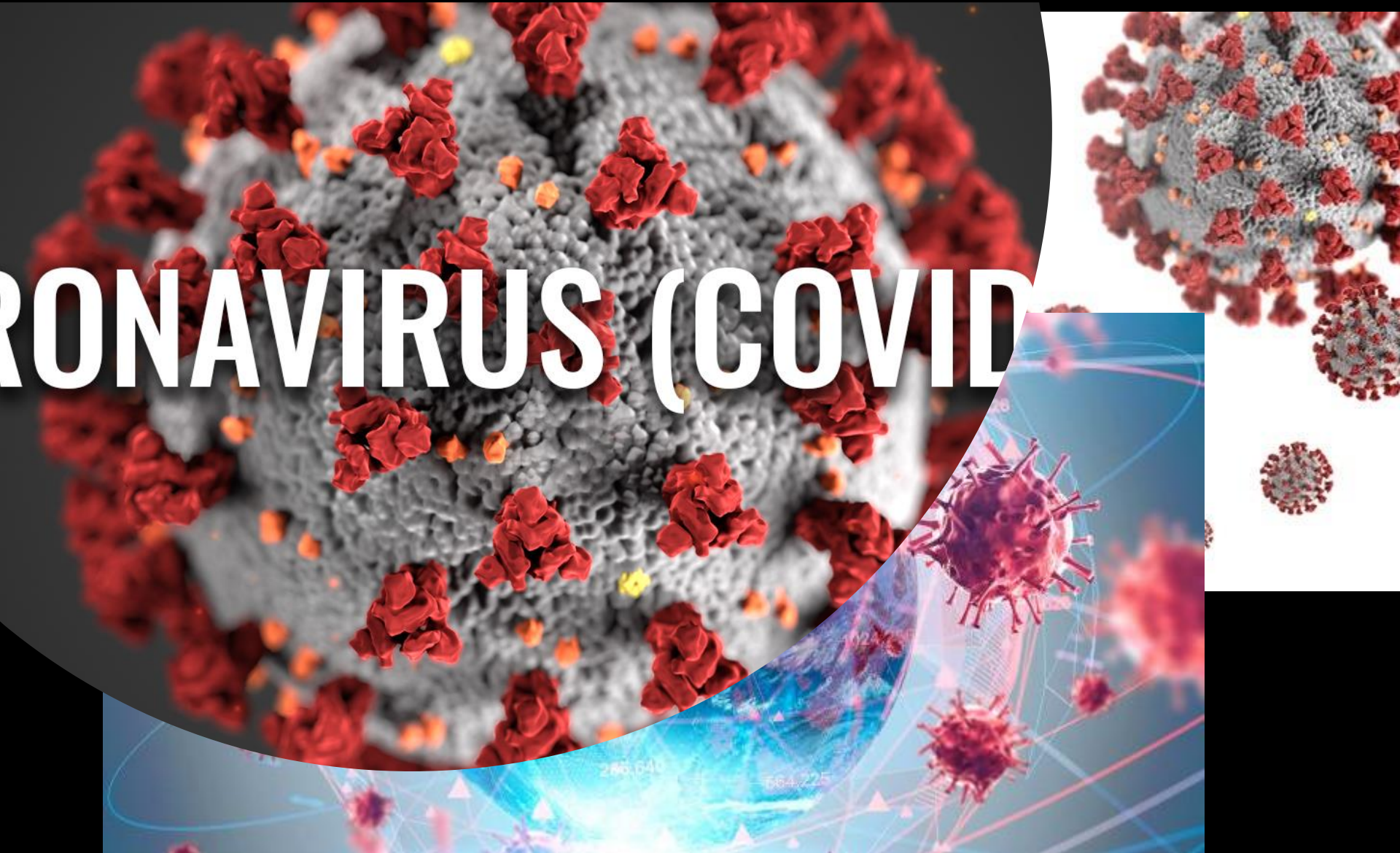
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Installing signage using
Riverbank artwork
CONTINGENT on
FUNDING

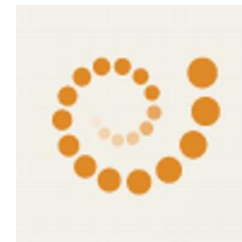
March 2020...

RONAVIRUS (COVID



RESEARCH NEED?

There is a lack of understanding of the priorities of diverse stakeholder groups and their perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of co-production.



Research Questions

- **What are the priorities of different partners involved in the arboretum-meadow project?**
- What are the opportunities and challenges of co-production as perceived by the partners themselves?
- Do partners' priorities and perceptions vary based on their professional role and personal values?

ONGOING IMPACT

- **What is the potential for public engagement and outreach initiatives to contribute to “futureproofing” towns and cities by building climate resilience?**



Research Design and Methodology

In-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 diverse stakeholder partners in different roles (Online June-July 2020)

Stakeholder identifier (ID)	Stakeholder role
S1	Educational professionals
S2	
S3	Parks Service managers
S4	
S5	CEO social enterprise, commercial seed supplier and consultant
S6	Commercial landscape contractor
S7	Landscape architecture professionals
S8	

- **Qualitative assessment:** Participants **priorities, perceived opportunities and challenges** using thematic interview guide
- **Quantitative assessment:** **Nature connection** (NR-6 after Nisbet and Zelenski, 2013), **Climate Change Awareness** (after Hoyle et al. 2017; Hoyle, 2021) (**Values**)

Results

*What are the **priorities** of different partners involved in the arboretum-meadow project?*



7 key priorities identified

1) Nature connection

“Knowing nature” (cognition and environmental education)



“The children we have here don’t know what a conker is...that to me is a big concern. As a child their age I was going on conker hunts on my way back from school. So, for them to look at me in complete confusion breaks me a little bit.”

“So, for me this tree planting project and the meadow that is involved with it as well is a massive thing. For those children to learn something and put their little stamp on the world that will be there in years to come.” (S1)

1) Nature connection “Feeling nature” (emotional wellbeing)

“What we’ve used it for is to take people on transitional journeys. So, when people feel a bit uncomfortable about being outdoors or they don’t feel it’s their place, they don’t feel like they have any vocabulary for this..

.. We found these kinds of projects incredibly valuable to develop that sense of ownership, to feel like people have the right to talk about this and language to speak it.” (S5)



2) Community engagement and belonging

*“We want our children to be involved and feel rooted within the community. 85% of our children speak English as an additional language. They are all part of first-generation families that are coming to us from mostly Bangladesh via Italy and Spain, Romania and a lot of Eastern European countries...less so Poland...**having connections within the community themselves is important and feeling rooted in the local area.**” (S2)*



3) Reputation building and professional advocacy

“...We do not attract sufficient people from diverse backgrounds into our landscape or the green space sector so it is really important to have diversity, inclusion around connecting with diverse communities and the use of spaces....seeing a school with a really diverse backgrounds and people and I think showing families and communities that there are jobs in that sector.”. (S8)



4) Placemaking under austerity



“it was austerity which was the stumbling block, so to be able to identify and work with partners via external funding and work with River Bank primary school to do the planting, it’s sort of enabled us to get the project done and through to where we are now - it has been fantastic to be honest.” (S4)

5) Air quality and climate change resilience

“From my perspective as a green space manager to offset the climate change issues within the town .. and we have poor air quality in a number of areas within Luton.

I’m a great believer of “it’s the right tree in the right place“. We want to maximise the benefits of the trees and therefore it is important to know which trees are good for carbon sequestration and for air quality. (S4)



6) Biodiversity enhancement

“Wildflowers enable environmental benefits.. from the habitats and with regards to pollinators “ (S4)



7) Flagship project = ONGOING IMPACT!

“We have been able to feed that success into other places in to the council strategies and plans to try and make sure in the future if there is any funding ...It won't stop here” (S3)

“I think it is quite a significant pilot project. If it is seen to be successful it may be replicated - who knows?” (S4)



7) Flagship project = ONGOING IMPACT!

“I have several pictures from that day and I have spoken to world Congress events in Singapore, in Oslo in Norway, in Kazan, in Lyon and that little project has been my case study project....

I am in a privileged place...where I've been given these massive platforms. I have had dinner with the former US president...the former US president has just heard about it...

These projects inspire another community in another country to do the same and it goes back to that whole point, 'what can one person's action do, can it make a difference?'so why don't we make every school in every country plant 15 trees? Every school, it would be phenomenal, and why should Luton be unique? It shouldn't be special... I should be telling you now that I've done 25 school since I did that one, but I haven't.” (S7)

Stakeholder Priorities: Results 7 key priorities identified

ID	Nature connection		Community engagement	Reputation-building & professional advocacy	Placemaking (under austerity)	Climate change resilience	Biodiversity enhancement	Flagship project
	Knowing nature (environmental education)	Feeling nature (emotional wellbeing response)						
S1								
S2								
S3								
S4								
S5								
S6								
S7								
S8								

What are the priorities of different partners involved in the arboretum-meadow project?

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Key findings and implications for future policy and practice

- Most partners prioritised cognitive and affective **nature connection** with **community engagement, reputation/professional advocacy**. **Placemaking under austerity** was also recognised as important.
- Fewer partners prioritised **climate change resilience** and **biodiversity enhancement**
- Most partners viewed **diverse partner ideas and expertise** as a positive opportunity of co-production
- **COVID** was viewed as a significant **challenge** by those closely involved in delivering the project the ground. Partners involved more peripherally saw it as an **opportunity**
- Learning from the project has already fed into local planning policy and practice. It has real potential to make a wider international impact

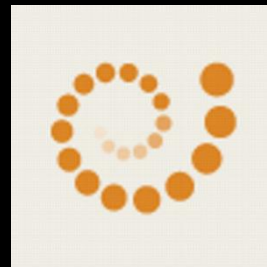


Thank you for listening!

Thank you to all our project partners for collaborating



*Pictorial
Meadows*



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