

How successfully has the environmental theme been integrated into UK City of Culture 2021?



Focus Study

In what ways has cultural programming and other Trust activity increased awareness of environmental responsibility and increased engagement with the natural heritage and natural landscape areas of the city?

Research Centre
Business in Society



Research Centre
Agroecology, Water
and Resilience

Focus study research team:

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Context

- Coventry – ghost town, infamous ring road, brutalist architecture, low levels of community engagement with the natural environment.



- No previous UK City of Culture programme had involved an environmental dimension.
- Coventry's successful bid lacked an environmental dimension
- Increasing awareness of importance of environmental issues in wider society.

Environment came to take its place in the City of Culture 2021 programme

Methodology

Secondary data

- Documents such as bid materials, reports, policy documents, social media posts.

Primary data

- 17 interviews with Green Futures producers, funders, partner organisations etc
- 17 interviews with members of the public who also took part in activities to share their experiences of the interacting with Coventry's natural environment.
- Researchers attended 21 events – 'walking and talking' to capture stories, perspectives and experiences. Nature Connected Index used to analyse data.

Research Question 1: How did the natural environment become an explicit focus within UK City of Culture 2021?

- Original bid had minimal reference to the natural environment or green issues
- National Lottery Heritage Fund issued a solicitation brief:
 - *To enable the people of Coventry to develop an emotional connection to nature through creative programming, leading to greater understanding and appreciation of nature on a city scale.*
 - *To contribute to improved outcomes for nature in Coventry, now and in the future, through reconnecting people in the city with nature.*

‘Green Futures programme emerged to ignite social activism, connecting and reconnecting communities to nature and heritage and prioritising issues that most directly affect them.... through the Green Futures programme, Coventry will become the greenest and most environmentally conscious UK City of Culture to date.’

Research Question 2: How have environmental issues been embedded within the overarching planning, governance and organisational delivery of UK CoC 2021?

Green Futures

- **Growing** – building interest, capacity and skill across local and diverse communities in native species and all things horticultural.
- **Forest** – a multi-layered programme exploring social, cultural and ecological relationships to the natural world and green spaces.
- **WILD-Life** – exploring biodiversity and climate change in relation to both local and global environments.
- **State of Nature**– Coventry State of Nature report to be produced by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) and a Coventry Nature Summit.

- The Green Futures programme focused strongly upon increasing individuals' engagement with, and appreciation of, nature within their local environment.
- Some events were more explicitly activist in their approach.

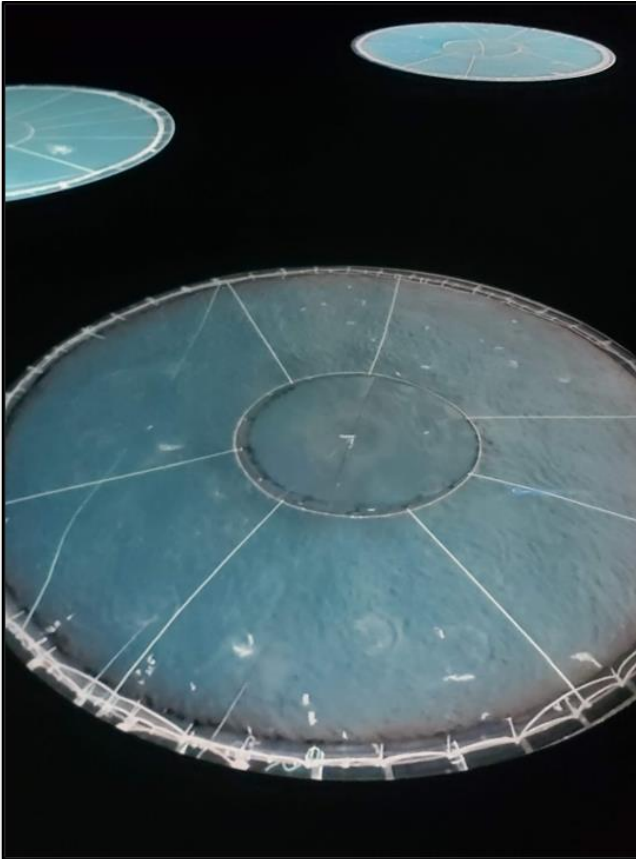


Walking Forest was amazing. This group of women went from a sort of outdoor residential in a Midlands woodland, to coming up with the idea of having a two-day event which talked about the demise of trees that were going to be felled because of HS2. And then the second day was all about the hope from new tree planting and then the good that that would do.

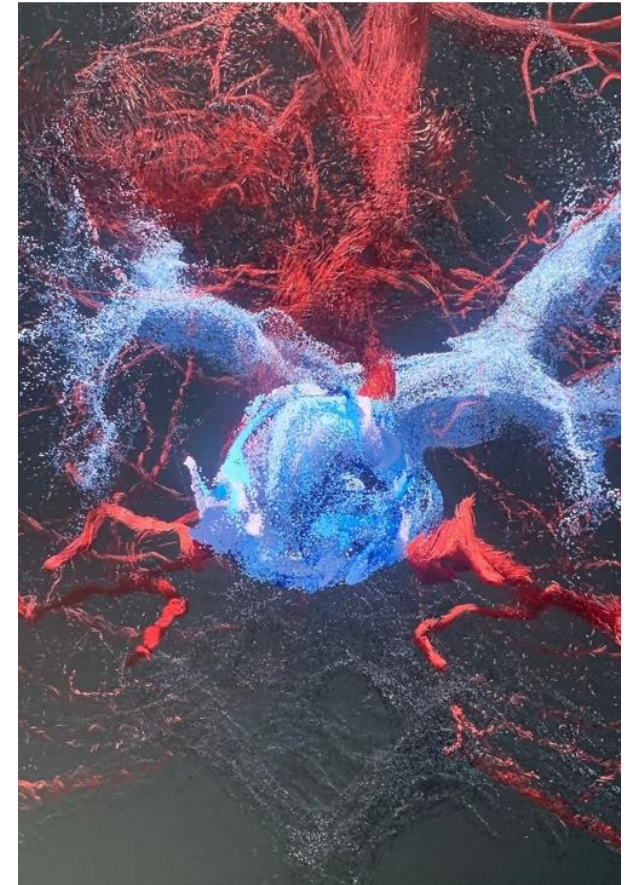
Informant#1

Embedding environment within the wider programme

Salmon, Traces of Escapees exhibit at Turner Prize Exhibit



Marshmallow Laser Quest's exhibition at the Reel Store



Governance tools: the Green Code

Devised by the Green Futures team to promote environmental awareness and responsible practices in the planning and execution of activities during the UK CoC 2021 programme.

Travel	Limit flights on UK mainland Pro-public transport Recognise wider benefits of active travel options
Procurement	Buy local where possible Avoid single use plastics FSC approved timber products Purchase recycled products where possible Prioritise sustainable purchasing options Use bio-degradable or compostable packaging where possible.
Event delivery	Use permanent power supplies and sustainable energy sources where possible Avoid chemical toilets Provide recycling options at events and follow 'zero waste to landfill' policy Recycling options available at rehearsal and production sites
Debrief	Debrief every event with reference to Green Code adherence Calculate carbon footprint of production transport for reporting



High on potential, low on delivery

- Viewed positively ✓
- Low awareness amongst partners ✗
- Limited assurance ✗
- Impacts of pandemic ⚠
- Resource constraints ⚠
- Part of legacy ✓

What's the importance? There was never really a session or an explanation on 'Why are we doing this?' ... We're developing a Green Code, why are we not explaining that, organisationally, to all of our colleagues and to all of our team members? Why is it not part of your induction pack?

Informant #2

Research Question 3 : How People have experienced and practiced the environment did the natural environment become an explicit focus within UK City of Culture 2021?

Conducted 17 interviews with members of the public who also took part in activities to share their experiences of the interacting with Coventry's natural environment.

Analysis of engagement on social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube

Researchers attended 21 events – ‘walking and talking’ to capture stories, perspectives and experiences. Questions that frame the Nature Connected Index used to analyse data.

- Events in green spaces
- Events in blue/green spaces
- Activity in green space supported online
- Physical events indoors
- Online events

Nature Connection Index (NCI)

The following questions are about you and nature. By nature we mean all types of natural environment and all the plants and animals living in them. Nature can be close to where you live in towns; the countryside or wilderness areas further away.

Please tell us how often you agree with each of the following statements, by putting a tick in the relevant box.

CLARIFICATION TEXT IN INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION USED IN RESPONDENT IS UNCLEAR: By nature I mean all different types of natural environment and the things that live in them. It can be close to where you live or further away, and includes green spaces in towns and cities (such as your own and other people's gardens, parks, playing fields and allotments); the countryside (such as farmland, woodland, hills and mountains); and watery places (such as streams, canals, rivers, lakes, the coast and the sea.)

	Completely Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Completely Agree
1. I always find beauty in nature							
2. I always treat nature with respect							
3. Being in nature makes me very happy							
4. Spending time in nature is very important to me							
5. I find being in nature really amazing							
6. I feel part of nature							

NCI items and weighted points index for each point on the response scale - conversion spreadsheet is available.

Statement	Response Scale Rating						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1—I always find beauty in nature	0	1	2	3	5	9	15
2—I always treat nature with respect	0	0	1	2	4	6	10
3—Being in nature makes me very happy	0	1	2	3	6	10	16
4—Spending time in nature is very important to me	0	1	2	3	6	11	19
5—I find being in nature really amazing	0	1	2	3	6	10	17
6—I feel part of nature	0	1	2	4	7	13	23

Richardson, M., Hunt, A., Hinds, J., Bragg, R., Fido, D., Petronzi, D., Barbett, L., Clitherow, T. and White, M. (2019). A Measure of Nature Connectedness for Children and Adults: Validation, Performance, and Insights. *Sustainability*. 11(12), 3250; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11123250>

Sensitivity: Internal

Richardson, M., Hunt, A., Hinds, J., Bragg, R., Fido, D., Petronzi, D., Barbett, L., Clitherow, T. and White, M. (2019). A Measure of Nature Connectedness for Children and Adults: Validation, Performance, and Insights. *Sustainability*. 11(12), 3250; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11123250>



Observational protocol



Study title: An evaluation of the integration of the environment and green issues into Coventry's City of Culture 2021

Observations

- What is the physical environment like?
- What is the context?
- What kinds of behaviour are promoted (prevented)?

The participants

- Who is present at the session (gender, ethnicity age)?
- How many people are participating in the session?
- What are their roles?

Activities and interaction

- What is going on?
- Is there a definable sequence of activity?
- How do participants relate to each other?
- How do participants relate to the activity?

- How do participants interact with each other?
- How do participants interact with professionals?

Details in relation to a specific situation/ activity observed during visit.

- When did the situation being observed begin?
- How long does it last?
- How often?
- Is it unique?
- How typical of such situations is it?

Subtle factors

- Informal and unplanned activities
- Symbolic and connotative meaning of words

Non-verbal communication

Observations

The participants

Activities and interaction

Subtle factors

Subtle factors

Increasing awareness of nature and environmental issues among participants

Raised awareness of small pockets of green nature in the city; the benefits to the local environment e.g. reducing the impact of air pollution, supporting bees and other pollinators; the benefits of using environmentally friendly techniques for managing green spaces in the city, (awareness of detrimental impact of using herbicides,) importance of waste recycling (detrimental effect of littering)



Encouraging people to connect with green spaces

Importance of Green spaces	Explanation	How UK CoC 2021 has enabled connections
Sense of Community	A space to meet friends. A social setting for interactions. An important space for maintaining community connections	Emphasis on the social value of green spaces. Environmental events are not just about experiencing 'nature' but have an important social side
Importance of the environment	Green spaces are important for biodiversity, in terms of fauna and flora	To support residents to realise Coventry's green spaces as an asset.
Good for mental health	Positive mental impact of green spaces. Promotes relaxation, feeling happier and more peaceful	No significant comment from participants
Contrasts with the industrial 'grey' landscape of Coventry	Green spaces contrast with the city's perceived 'grey' infrastructure	Events have helped to celebrate Coventry's green spaces



Encouraging people to connect with green spaces

Observational records statements of participant's connection with nature

Connection with nature statement	Participants comment
Being in nature makes me happy	Feeling of being happy by being in and actively engaged with, nature in the garden Enjoying being in beautiful, calm, green surroundings
Feeling happy and enjoying the beauty of nature	Feeling good about experiencing (seeing, smelling, touching and tasting) The nature space and the beautiful blossoms on the trees, the emerging green vegetation and eating some of the produce grown on site
Being in nature is important to me	Recognising the area and to feeling a sense of ownership of the space and pride in what they have achieved
Feeling a sense of amazement with nature, treating nature with respect	'activity made them connect with their garden in a new way: it was fascinating watching the wildlife in the garden and interesting to note where in the garden the wildlife was most present/ active, which plants attracted pollinators and which features provided good habit for the creatures



Shared impacts

Engaging in the environment by growing food and satisfaction from eating food

Supported mental health and wellbeing

Developed new skills



Improvement in behaviour and confidence

Build positive relationships



Engagement with social media

The word clouds below illustrate the most commonly found words and phrases on the four social media platforms.

Linkedin



Facebook



Twitter



YouTube



Reach into communities

I think that some of the work that was produced was never going to engage to a wide audience in Coventry. I'll give Sirens Crossing as an example, a beautiful piece of work, incredible engagement with amazing artists, but the audience was predominantly white and female and between the ages of 40–60. And, yeah, I think we probably would have known that at the start. I think it's the sort of work that if you had two years' worth of investment, you probably would have been able to disseminate that better and find different points of engagement and different points of learning. It's a genuine learning within that sort of work exists better in a longer programme. And that isn't against the work at all. It's a beautiful piece of work. It's just, you know, did it reach the young people of Coventry? No, it didn't. Did it reach a diverse audience?

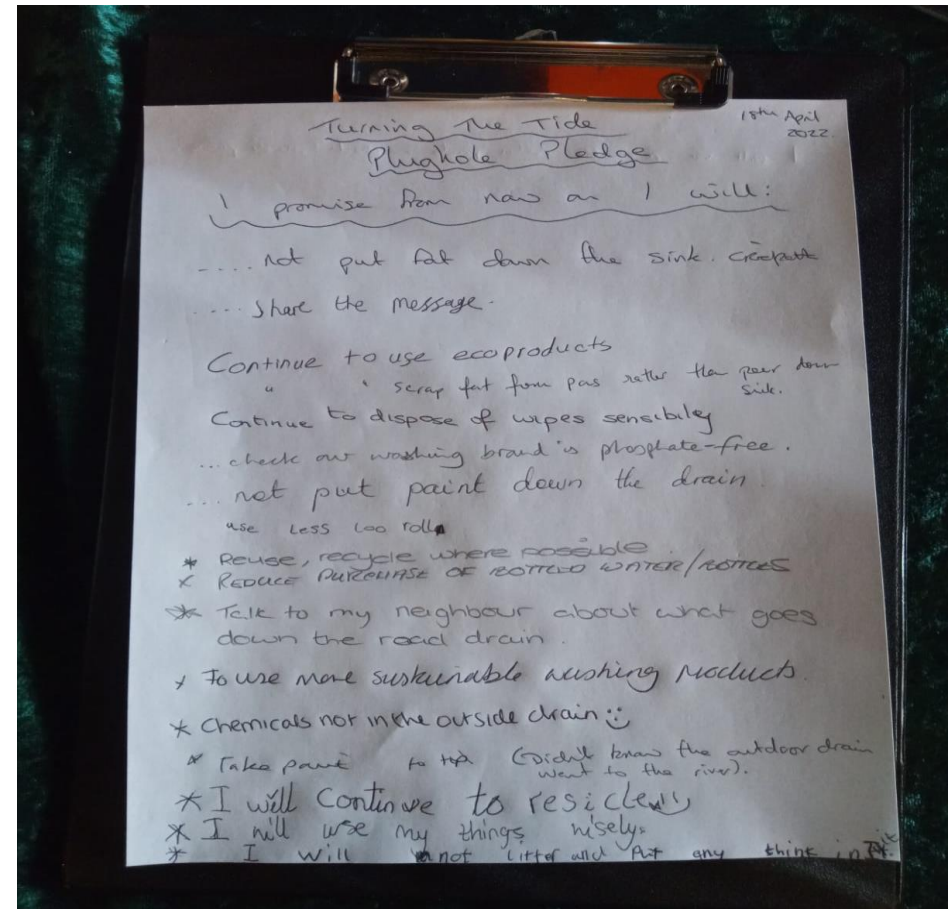


Research Question 4: How behaviours of individuals, communities and organisations have been influenced and changed during UK CoC 2021

Creating impact and intention of pro-environmental behaviour

...The Green Futures environmental events were lovely events, but they didn't necessarily give people an action to take home. It was just a lovely event... And so, I don't know if people made that connection. ...whenever I'm doing an event, I always think what's my take home message, what do I want as an end result of this? Do I want people to just have a nice time?

Turning the Tide Plug Hole Pledge



Organisational Learning and future action

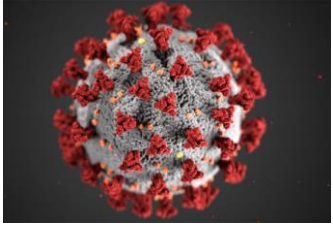
So, there's been a lot of different people that we've been exposed to be able to see what they're doing in a way that we just simply wouldn't have had that access to. And we've been able to engage with people that we don't normally engage with because people are coming to the event.

And just looking at what other people are doing and taking those ideas and taking that inspiration and moving forward as well as the people and the contacts that I've made this year and going forward. ...we're doing things differently now and we're looking to engage with different audiences.



...I think, for what City of Culture have done, because that's going to exist forever, it might take some maintaining, but a lot of the heavy work is done so that will still exist in the city even after they've gone. Some of the development they've done around the city in terms of like, green spaces kind of looking tidier than they ever have before, hopefully, ...they've left people with the knowledge of how to maintain these spaces I think, that's what I'd be looking for from City of Culture.

Research Question 5: What factors affected the delivery of Green Futures within UK CoC 2021?



Severe disruptions affecting planning and delivery

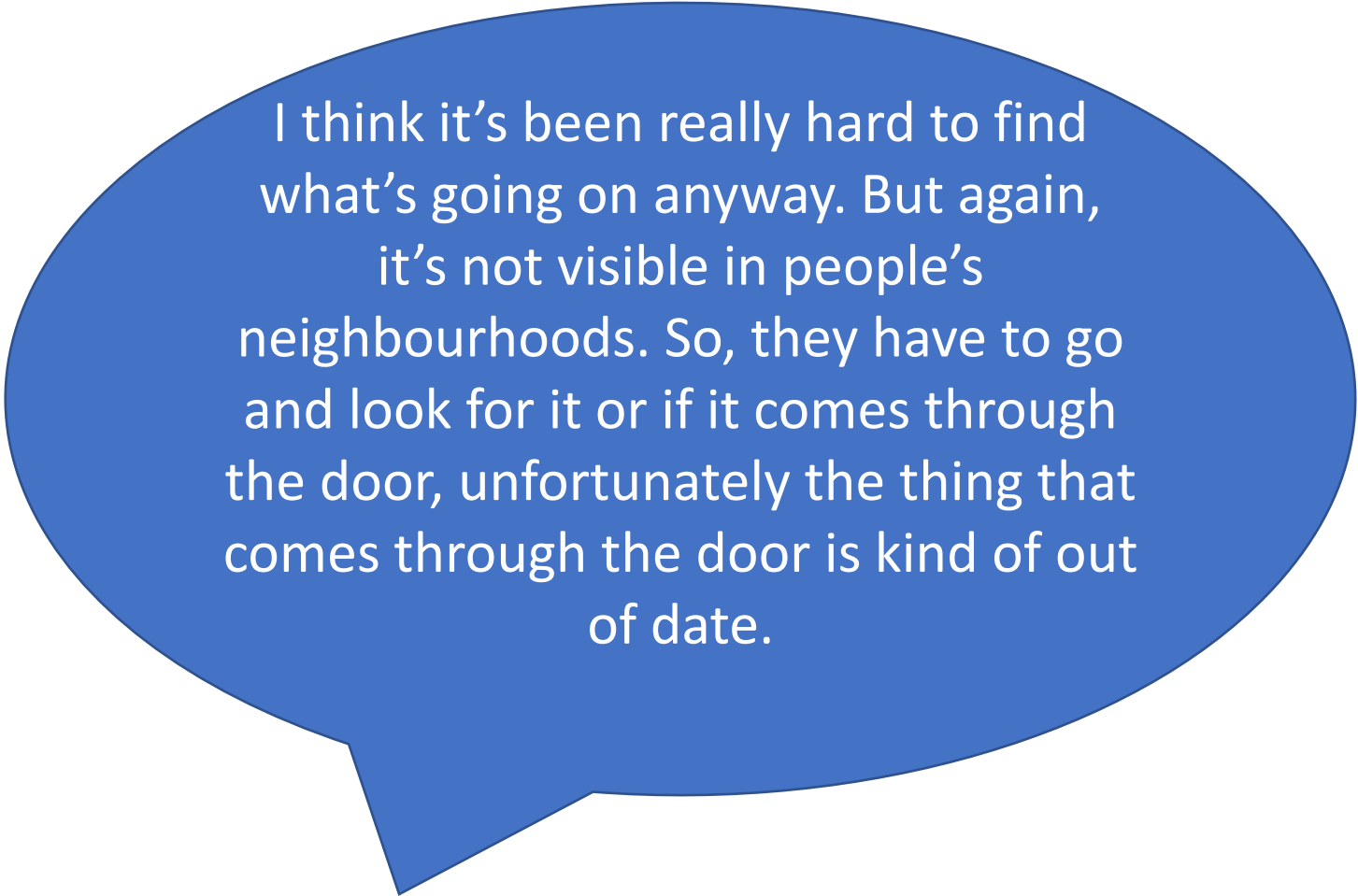
But outdoor activities became really important

So, over the summertime, we managed to do a bit more than maybe thought we could do just purely because a lot of our work was outside. So, we would do loads in the canal basin. And that was really successful. Just because people could move around.

Informant #4

Marketing and publicity

- 'Clunky' website
- Partners not mentioned
- Poor collaboration



I think it's been really hard to find what's going on anyway. But again, it's not visible in people's neighbourhoods. So, they have to go and look for it or if it comes through the door, unfortunately the thing that comes through the door is kind of out of date.

Informant #5

Partnership working and challenges

Our partnership with City of Culture has been really organic. I'm really pleased to say and very authentic.

Informant # 7

It's opened our eyes to a whole range of organisations and individuals, which has been really nice.

Informant #9

But...

- Relationships disrupted by pandemic
- Nature Working Group lost impetus
- Staff turnover
- Late addition of Green Futures to the overall programme

emails into the
void nothing
ever came to
fruition

no lead in
time...no
continuation

Without...consultation
around timescales...or
what's realistic with
that funding

Recommendations

- Build environmental governance and programming from the very start
- Clearly defined environmental objectives
- Mainstream environmental tools such as the Green Code, provide training and examples of best practice
- Try to maintain staffing continuity
- Consult with stakeholders regarding environmental priorities
- Create a forum for partners
- Marketing needs to target a range of platforms to achieve deep reach into communities.

Summary

- Ultimate achievements of UK CoC 2021 are to be lauded
- Hosted during an extraordinarily difficult time
- Personal level interactions and mass events



Cultural events are important conduits for widening understanding and appreciation for the natural environment and stimulating debate about its management.