



EIT Climate-KIC SATURN

Project newsletter

#1

Birmingham

The city of Birmingham is working on three different pilot actions to re-develop and enhance peri-urban areas of the metropolitan area. Through the SATURN project the landscapes and heritage of the valley will be enhanced and further investigated. Same actions will be developed in the city of Birmingham where some important heritage green areas will be recovered and enhanced through the Naturally Birmingham plan and input from the community. Local partners will also develop the Food Growing programme to create synergies between different food networks and engage them in common initiatives or innovative entrepreneurial opportunities.

Source: ESA-European Spatial Agency

HAMIRA SULTAN

Has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made your project users, customers or partners; more or less aware of the natural environment?



Hamira Sultan
Consultant in
Public Health and
FPA Director -
Birmingham Public
Health

I would say definitely more aware. We've seen increase in parks usage in Birmingham through Covid19. I think staff in Birmingham City Council are more aware of the natural environment too.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/37/Boats_on_Handsworth_Park_pond%2C_Birmingham.JPG

As a project leader do you see connections between the impact of COVID-19 and the global Climate and Ecological Emergencies?

Absolutely – Covid 19 is impacting communities unequally – be they BAME, low wage earners or living in deprived communities. We know that poor air quality related to the climate emergency also impacts certain communities disproportionately. Also green space and prioritising investment in it is something that can help support both the climate emergency and Covid 19 response.

As a project leader do you see how your involvement in the Saturn project could help tie all 3 of these agendas together?

Yes – I think so. Having access to academics in this field as well as other case study leads will really help.

IAN WYKES

Ian Wykes
Development Manager
Tame Valley Wetlands NIA
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust



Has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made your project users, customers or partners; more or less aware of the natural environment?

Overall our experience is that due to lockdown people are having more direct contact with their local environment. This can be demonstrated by the increase in sharing of images of wildlife across social media which we have picked up on our channels: an increase of people reported issues regarding footpaths, pollution incidents etc. Figures from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust would bear this out. We run a national campaign once a year called "30 Days Wild", the uptake has been higher this year with 725 sign-ups by mid-May compared with 512 in 2019. The Trust has had an increase in of 350 followers on social media during lockdown and an increase of 60 new subscribers to the weekly blog Nature News.



https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2016/08/18/17/05/birmingham-1603396_960_720.jpg

As a project leader do you see connections between the impact of COVID-19 and the global Climate and Ecological Emergencies?

I think the increased awareness in the environment can only be positive, but it is leading to some negative behaviours nationally. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/15/rspb-flooded-with-reports-of-birds-of-prey-being-killed>

I think there has been increase in fly tipping as municipal waste sites have been closed, but there are no specific details for the wetlands. I am sceptical what the legacy will be once people get back to normal. Obviously lack of travel/commuting will have a huge benefit to air quality and CO2 and this is clearly evident in the Tame Valley. In my opinion the most overwhelming impact will be the resultant massive economic downturn and recession we are now in and likely to be in for the foreseeable future. This economic crisis will have far bigger impacts on climate change and environment than the virus itself. Anecdotally, in Tame Valley there are some of the busiest parts of the UK road network and there has been a huge drop off on vehicle movements.

As a project leader do you see how your involvement in the Saturn project could help tie all 3 of these agendas together?

I would suggest shared experiences across Europe can only be a good thing. It will be interesting how different national approaches to Covid (in particular Sweden) have on the questions above.

CHRIS BLYTHE



Chris Blythe -
Director
Social Farms
and Gardens

Has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made your project users, customers or partners; more or less aware of the natural environment?

I think that overall the COVID-19 pandemic has made all of us more aware of our natural environment. Visits to parks for example are at a level which is above pre-pandemic levels according to the data used in the government's daily briefings. We are all coming to value the natural environment more, but also 'new' people are becoming engaged more, either as a result of being at home during lockdown and going for walks for example, or through the substantial press and social media coverage of our damaged food chain and the impetus this is giving to people to grow fruit and vegetables at home. Fears around food security and labour shortages are highlighting to people where their food comes from. We also have evidence from our member survey that volunteers on farms, gardens and green spaces, particularly those who are isolated or vulnerable are becoming increasingly distressed by their inability to attend outdoor projects they would usually spend time in.

As a project leader do you see connections between the impact of COVID-19 and the global Climate and Ecological Emergencies?

Absolutely yes, weaknesses of some infrastructure and supply chains and their lack of resilience under stress has been highlighted. Crises and stress are becoming increasingly likely due to the climate emergency. It's becoming clear that the poor and marginalised globally are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, making them even more susceptible to other issues brought about by climatic and environmental stresses. As above really, COVID-19 is highlighting who is more and less resilient in the face of shocks, and as usual it is the poor who suffer. I think there's also a big question in this country and I'm sure in others too about the narrative of blame that is told to the population by government and media – "It's that person sitting on park bench who caused thousands of needless deaths from COVID-19, not our chronic underfunding of the health service over years, or all those nurses we worked into the ground"... Who will benefit from contracts to deliver work in the wake of COVID-19? Some large companies stand to do very well (disaster capitalism), when contracts could go to coalitions and alliances of smaller, community based groups and deliver much greater impact and lasting change. I am sure that this is also the case for environmental and climate crises.

As a project leader do you see how your involvement in the Saturn project could help tie all 3 of these agendas together?

SATURN is very well placed to tie all these agendas together, given its operation across 3 very well established and linked themes and scales. By bringing together projects and ideas on a city and wider scale, SATURN enables us to share good practice, learn from others, and hopefully start to make some small changes to the systems that need to change



https://live.staticflickr.com/8282/7852552326_5422d5bced_b.jpg