



ERDF - PA6 Summative Assessment Wild Campus Cirencester Project

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Wild Campus Cirencester project was awarded European Regional Development Funding (ERDF), under Priority Axis 6 (preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency), as a result of a successful application to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government)'s [OC11R19P 0972](#) call published in June 2019.

The call offered a minimum £350,000 and maximum £731,000 to activity specifically focused on developing ecological networks, green infrastructure, and/or natural water management solutions within Gloucestershire's urban and urban fringe areas. The call noted that, in 2019, there was need to improve urban and urban fringe areas by increasing biodiversity and restoring degraded ecosystem services and asked that proposed project activities specifically result in C23 outputs - habitats with improved conservation status.

In response the Royal Agricultural University (RAU), in partnership with Cirencester College (CC) and Cirencester Deer Park School (CDP), presented the Wild Campus Cirencester project. The proposal aimed to utilise the 60 hectare 'education quarter' on the west side (urban fringe) of Cirencester, Gloucestershire, as a mechanism to deliver:

- a) **55,171m² (5.5 hectares) of rehabilitated land** (C22 output), broken down as:
 1. Shrub and hedge planting: 1,059m².
 2. Wildflower planting: 3,135m².
 3. Lavender and hardy herb planting: 125m².
 4. Tall grass borders: 2,379m².
 5. Diverse sward creation: 39,870m².
 6. Woodland thinning: 6,300m².
 7. Pond planting: 765m²
 8. Lighting improvement: 33m².
 9. Heritage orchard planting: 1,500m².
 10. Bird and bat box installation: 15 m².
- b) **249 hectares of habitats with improved conservation status** (C23 output) by creating a forage- and cover-rich dark corridor to connect existing, but currently isolated, bat populations located on either side of the project site.

The proposed project outputs intended to enhance habitats for the benefit of:

- a) wildlife:
 - The habitat enhancements were designed particularly to benefit bats. Records showed nearby evidence of eight bat species: common, soprano and Nathusius' pipistrelle, noctule, serotine, lesser horseshoe, brown long-eared and barbastelle.



- The project included additional interventions (e.g. nest boxes and hibernacula) to support other rare and protected species. Records showed nearby hedgehogs, tawny and barn owls, house martins, swifts, house sparrows, mistle and song thrush, dunnocks, skylarks, common toads, common frogs, smooth newts, great crested newts, slow-worms and common lizards.
- b) local people:
 - Research showed that engaging with wildlife-rich environments benefits people's wellbeing. By engaging the communities on the campus, and in neighbouring Cirencester, with the project, RAU and their partners suggested the wellbeing of local people would be enhanced.
 - Noting that natural capital is a foundation for prosperity, and that enhancing habitat quality supports inward investment, RAU and their partners felt that the project location, at a high-profile educational site, would motivate further investment in the area.

The Wild Campus Cirencester project was awarded £356,460 of publicly matched funding, made up of £119,027 for capital expenditure and £237,433 for revenue expenditure. The total project costs were determined as £712,920. Managed by the Royal Agricultural University (RAU), the final timescale agreed for delivery of the project was 03 February 2020 to 30 May 2023.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

This report, which forms Stage 3 of the ERDF requirements for reporting and communicating project outcomes and impact, seeks to provide insights into project performance, assessing the:

- continued relevance and consistency of the project;
- progress of the project against proposed and contractual targets;
- experience of delivering and managing the project;
- economic impact attributable to the project; and
- cost-effectiveness of the project and hence its value for money.

The assessment concludes with a summary of the key lessons for:

- Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester College, and Cirencester Deer Park School - should they expand the existing or embark on a new yet similar project.
- Gloucestershire's environmental organisations - could similar initiatives be emulated elsewhere in the county.
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - for future programme development and delivery

The assessment was carried out by a third-party assessor, using a mix of the following:

Desk-top research and literature review - The third-party assessor accessed and reviewed the following documents and details:

- The original call (OC11R19P 0972) published in June 2019
- The Grant Funding Agreement between, the then, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the RAU, including the attached full application and appendices on output and spend profiles and the original ecologist report
- Project Change Request documentation
- E-Claims - the online platform through which the project submits financial and output claims to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for approval and payment
- Stage 1 - summative assessment planning documents
- Stage 2 - data collection and reporting details and evidence, including testimonials
- Project management documentation, including meeting minutes
- Before and after photographs depicting implementation of initiatives
- Maintenance plans
- Project web pages, social media sites (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) and project blog



Informal, semi-structured interviews - The third-party assessor completed semi-structured interviews with key project staff, and relevant stakeholders, including:

- Deb Govier, Wild Campus Cirencester Project Manager, RAU
- Rebecca Elton, Wild Campus Cirencester Technician, RAU
- Teresa North, Director of commercial services and facilities, Wild Campus Project Sponsor, RAU
- Kelly Hemmings, Senior Lecturer in Eco Systems, RAU
- Ian Grange, Senior Lecturer in Environment and Countryside Management, RAU
- George Haynes, 1st Year Foundation Degree Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management student, RAU Conservation Club Volunteer
- Zane Wintershoven, 1st Year Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management student, RAU Conservation Club Volunteer
- Declan Horton, 2nd Year British Wildlife Conservation student, RAU Conservation Club Volunteer
- Jim Grant, Principal, Cirencester College
- Jane Dowdeswell, Assistant Financial Accountant, Cirencester College
- Nathan Hall, Estates and Environmental Manager, Cirencester College
- Stuart Williams, Senior Outdoor Instructor, Cirencester College
- Will Masefield, ERDF Wild Towns Project Manager
- Roger Mortlock, CEO, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

Questions included:

- Establishing the interviewee's role/connection with the Wild Campus Cirencester project
- Exploring how the delivery of the Wild Campus Cirencester project evolved over the delivery period
- Gathering perceptions of benefits, outcomes, and impact of the Wild Campus Cirencester project for project beneficiaries, for RAU, and for the GFirst LEP area
- Gathering perceptions on the challenges faced in delivering the Wild Campus Cirencester project
- Understanding lessons learned

In addition, two semi-structured workshop sessions were held with the delivery teams at RAU and CC to garner opinions on how any changes in external context influences project delivery, to gather opinions on quality and effectiveness of project management, and to understand lessons learned.

Site visit - The third-party assessor carried out site visits on 17 March and 23 March 2023 to verify that the implemented initiatives, as described in project documentation and depicted in photographs, were still in place at the time of writing this report.

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SECTION 1: PROJECT CONTEXT

1.1 RATIONALE FOR DELIVERY

The context: In 2019, according to call OCR11R16P 0299 which was intrinsically linked to the Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (GFirst) European Union Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) strategy, the Opportunities and Threats to the Local Economy from Environmental Dependencies LEED Toolkit Level 2 Report for GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership, published in 2014, and the draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), there was a county-level need in Gloucestershire to:

- further exploit Gloucestershire's natural environment, already one of the county's greatest assets
- improve the local environment to ensure it could act as a catalyst to local economic growth; it was anticipated that an improved environment would attract inward investment, increase visitor spend, reduce the cost of adverse environmental conditions to communities and businesses, improve health, and generate employment.
- improve urban and urban fringe areas of Gloucestershire by increasing biodiversity and restoring degraded ecosystem services in those areas not in receipt of, or eligible for, Countryside Stewardship scheme funding or supported by other agri-environment programmes.
- contribute to Gloucestershire becoming a 'magnet county' and the "*greenest place to live and work in England*".

At a site-level, there was a need or desire to:

- walk the talk - the RAU is recognised as a leading place to learn about land management and enterprise, for professionals and the next generation. In addition, the RAU was a partner in Gloucestershire's Local Nature Partnership (GLNP), which was developing a Nature Recovery Network in the context of Government's Environment Bill.
- Create greater habitat connectivity - CC already had some more general works underway as part of a 'green campus' initiative, but the Wild Campus project offered more focus and a rationale for cross academic quarter activities.
- Complement previous ERDF investments to support innovation by enhancing the environment with native trees and extensive wildflower planting; the Growth Hub and Inspiring Agri-technology Innovation projects are co-located at RAU.
- Directly support GFirst's commitment to enhancing habitat to promote natural capital and support inward investment; the RAU was considered a catalyst and investment target for GFirst's agri-tech priority.
- Build on the activities of the adjoining ERDF Wild Town Cirencester project, which had already started implementing initiatives to enhance habitats across the town.

At a species-level, as identified in an independent ecologist report compiled by Dr Elizabeth Pimley from Wild Service, there was a need to:

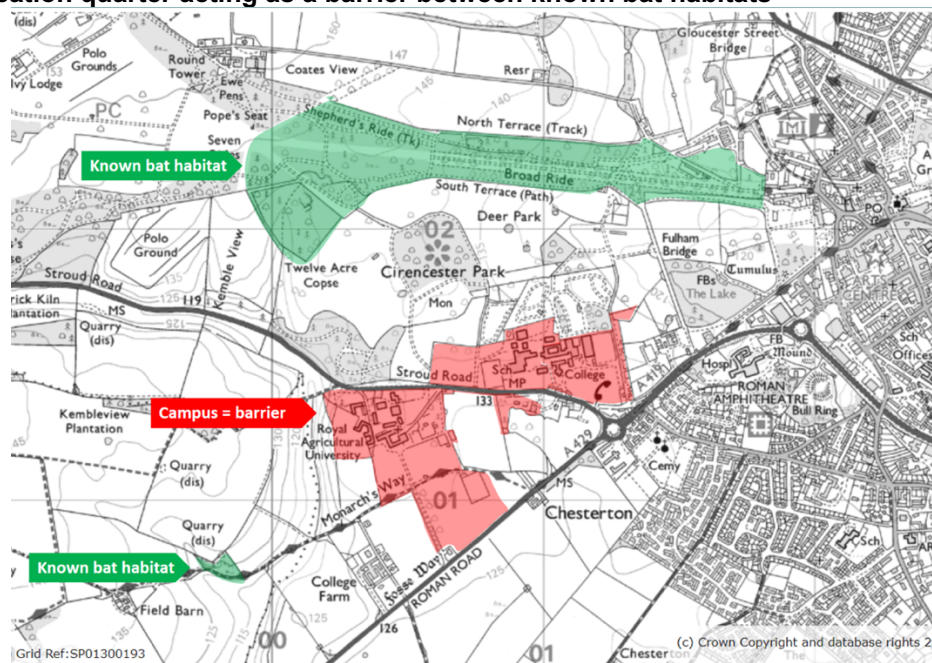


- Enhance site habitats, particularly to benefit and connect bat populations. Records showed nearby evidence of eight bat species: common, soprano and Nathusius' pipistrelle, noctule, serotine, lesser horseshoe, brown long-eared and barbastelle.
- Support other rare and protected species with dedicated on-site green infrastructure interventions. Records showed nearby hedgehogs, tawny and barn owls, house martins, swifts, house sparrows, mistle and song thrush, dunnocks, skylarks, common toads, common frogs, smooth newts, great crested newts, slow-worms and common lizards.

Market failures: In 2019, the following key market failures were identified:

- At a national-level, as identified in successive reports - the [Lawton Report](#), [Government's 25 Year Environment Plan](#) and the Wildlife Trusts proposals for a [Nature Recovery Network](#) - the market was failing to connect habitats at a landscape scale.
- At a county-level, more work was needed to develop quality habitats through green infrastructure, particularly in those areas not already supported by environmental funding.
- At a site-level, there had been no commercial business case for habitat improvement. While it was considered that there was a long-term strategic benefit to aligning land management activities with institutional commitments to sustainability, the short-term cost and aesthetic impact of making such changes presented a barrier. In addition, piecemeal or ad-hoc changes to land management, usually agreed to meet student and visitor requirements - the main market drivers for the institutions in the partnership - drove an underlying risk of habitat fragmentation.
- At a species-level, the 60 hectare 'education quarter' had isolated areas of enhanced habitat, interrupted by large, manicured areas that were considered inhospitable to bats and other wildlife. Bright floodlighting around sports pitches, car parks and buildings presented a particular barrier to bat species which records showed were prevalent in the surrounding woodlands. Map 1, below, depicts the location of the known bat populations and the campus area acting as a barrier.

Map 1: Education quarter acting as a barrier between known bat habitats





Rationale for the project: In direct response to call OCR11R16P 0299, the GFirst ESIF Strategy and the market failures identified, the RAU-led Wild Campus Cirencester project aimed to:

- a) Showcase a strategic approach to nature's recovery, in partnership with the university's neighbours, CC and CDP.
- b) Rehabilitate land to achieve habitats with improved conservation status that benefit wildlife on campus and across the surrounding area:
 - Ensure habitat enhancements particularly benefited bats – ensuring thriving local bat populations.
 - Include additional interventions (e.g. nest boxes and hibernacula) to support other rare and protected species – ensuring thriving local populations of rare and protected species.
- c) Engage campus communities in wildlife-rich learning opportunities
- d) Have an indirect impact on local natural capital, wellbeing, and prosperity.

What was the project seeking to do?: The project sought to make transformative habitat improvements across a combined 60 hectares of land, located on the fringes of Cirencester, owned and managed by three educational sites - a university, college and school - to create a Wild Campus connecting the urban landscape to the surrounding, rural countryside.

Specifically, the Wild Campus Cirencester project aimed to create a dark corridor for bats and a haven for birds, small mammals, amphibians, and the pollinators and other bugs they eat. Planned interventions included:

- Replacing or improving outside lights in line with Bat Conservation Trust guidance
- Planting >1,000m² of wildlife-friendly native shrubs
- Planting >3,000m² of wildflowers where insects can forage
- Diversifying four hectares of lawn - leaving long grass, providing further food sources and cover
- Planting native species to enhance five existing ponds
- Thinning woodland to provide better habitat for bats, enhance ground flora and create refugia for small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and bugs
- Planting a small orchard with heritage fruit trees, further diversifying insect habitat and food sources
- Installing 150 bat boxes, swift boxes, owl boxes and house sparrow terraces to enhance roosting and nesting opportunities
- Making five hedgehog shelters and five reptile hibernacula

Map 2, overleaf, highlights the locations of the main interventions listed.

At the time of the full application, it was intended that this approach would deliver:

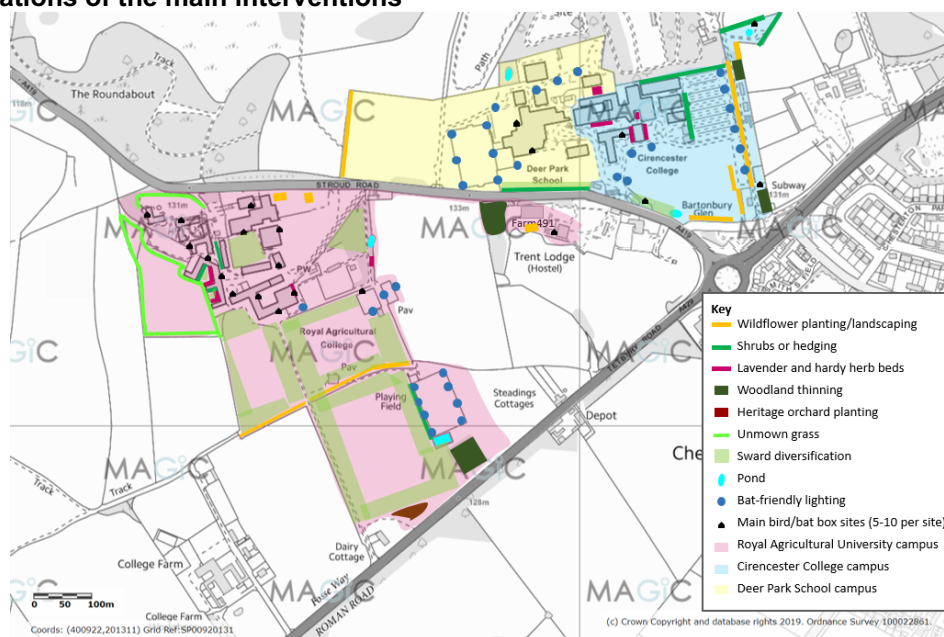
- 55,171m² (5.5 hectares) of rehabilitated land (C22 output)
- 249 hectares of habitats with improved conservation status (C23 output)

Appropriateness of the project: In the 2019 context, the project and the programme delivery model were appropriately designed to achieve overall objectives. The targets set for the project were also realistic and considered achievable. The forecasting approach for deliverables was based on advice received from independent ecologist, Dr Elizabeth Pimley. Dr Pimley is Principal Ecologist at Wild Service, and holds a Natural England licence for bats. She drew on a visit to the campus, a previous extended habitat survey carried out by BioCensus, and wildlife data searches by Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental Records. Dr Pimley was then able to provide a report recommending specific, appropriate interventions (amounting to 5.5 hectares) that, if fully implemented, would result in 249 hectares of habitats with improved conservation status.

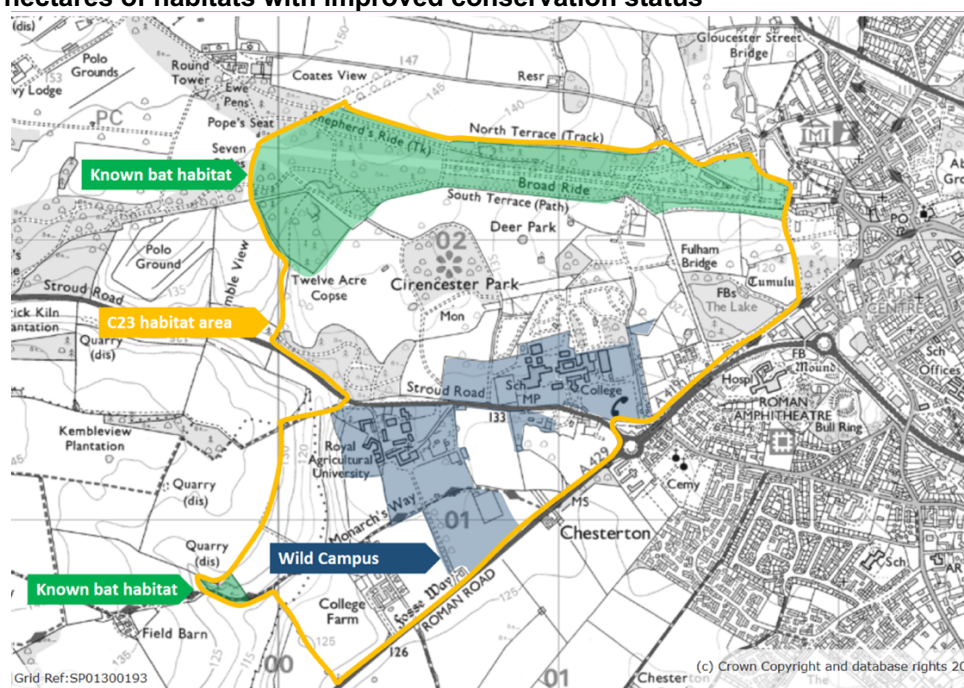
Map 3, overleaf, depicts the 249 hectares of habitats with improved conservation status that Dr Elizabeth Pimley stated will be achieved as a result of implementing the planned interventions at the locations depicted in map 2.



Map 2: Locations of the main interventions



Map 3: 249 hectares of habitats with improved conservation status



1.2 RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY

The Wild Campus Cirencester project experienced two key changes in global and national context:

1. **Covid-19 Pandemic** - First identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, a global pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020. As a result, the UK



government introduced public health and economic measures, including new laws, to mitigate its impact. The first national lockdown began on 23 March 2020 and lasted until May 2020. Further nationwide restrictions were introduced later in 2020 and into 2021. All restrictions were eventually lifted, in England, by March 2022. As a result, the UK experienced two years of uncertainty, with business-as-usual yet to fully resume for some by August 2022.

For the Wild Campus project, the Covid-19 pandemic meant:

- The project start date was moved, pre-funding agreement, from 2019 to 2020; due to the seasonal nature of some interventions, this resulted in some activity taking place later than expected.
- Site visits were initially no existent, and then infrequent, meaning there was a loss of communication between RAU and CC.
- Supply of hardy shrubs and herbs proved difficult and cost per m2 intervention output rose significantly, by two to three times in some instances. These cost increases were dealt with using the project change request process.

2. **Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023 for England** - Five years on from the publication of the [25 Year Environment Plan \(25YEP\)](#), which set out the UK Government's vision for a quarter-of-a-century of action to help the natural world regain and retain good health, the [EIP](#) is the first revision.

The EIP builds on the 25YEP vision with a new plan setting out how the Government will work with landowners, communities, and businesses to deliver each of the goals for improving the environment, matched with interim targets to measure progress. It is intended that in delivering the goals, nature will be restored, environmental pollution reduced, and the country's prosperity increased. The apex goal is to "*halt the decline in our biodiversity so we can achieve thriving plants and wildlife*".

For the Wild Campus project, continued Government focus on environmental improvements has meant:

- An increase in the demand for outreach and community engagement activities.

Overall, in March 2023 project activities continue to be as relevant, if not even more so, as they were in June 2019.

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROGRESS

2.1 SPEND AND OUTPUT PERFORMANCE

In early 2020, the Wild campus Cirencester project was awarded an ERDF allocation of £356,460; £119,027 towards eligible capital expenditure, and £237,433 towards eligible revenue expenditure. With public match funding of £356,460, the total project expenditure was determined in contracted budget version 1 as £712,920.

Managed by the Royal Agricultural University (RAU), with Cirencester College (CC) Cirencester Deer Park School (CDP) listed as project partners, the final timescale agreed for delivery of the project was 01 February 2020 to 30 May 2023. During the agreed 40-month project, the following outputs were contracted for delivery:

- C22: Total surface area of rehabilitated land = 55,171m² (5.5 hectares)
- C23: Surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status = 249 hectares



Over the course of the project (to March 2023), three project change requests (PCRs) were submitted reprofiling ERDF allocation, delivery timescales and delivery activities. These changes and the ultimate project delivery and outputs are detailed below.

2.2 EXPENDITURE

The full application, as attached to the grant funding agreement, requested £356,460 as match to £356,460 public funding from RAU for a total project expenditure of £712,920. The expenditure was split across the following categories:

- Other capital - £283,054
- Professional fees - £7,000
- Marketing - £13,500
- Salaries - £398,506
- Flat rate indirect costs - £59,776

To date, three project change requests (PCRs) have been submitted, reprofiling expenditure.

The first PCR requested the reallocation of funds, within the 'Other Capital' cost category, originally intended for lavender and hardy herb bed planting on the CC site. The rationale was that:

- the original estimates were done at pace and simply reflected RAU projections pro rata-ed
- CC had undertaken works before the delayed 'start' of the project, making expenditure ineligible
- there were better opportunities on the site for pollinator planting

Funds were reallocated, within the 'Other Capital' cost category to:

- enhanced wild/bulb/meadow planting
- tree planting - orchard trees and additional, larger, native trees
- hand tools and brush cutters
- bird and bat box price increases
- enhanced pond creation
- enhanced habitat creation for mammals, eg hedgehog hibernation homes
- enhanced hedge and shrub planting
- wood thinning price increases

The overall project expenditure did not fluctuate.

The second PCR, also sought to reallocate funds within the 'Other Capital' cost category. The original ERDF Wild Campus Project proposal included a funding allocation of £42,000 for site clearance and preparation work for creation of a wildflower meadow approximating 1400 m² at the RAU Alliston Centre Site. However, following a tendering process in 2020, repeated in 2021, it was established that to achieve successful delivery of this element it would cost £70,000. Funds were reallocated from the LED lighting replacement budget line. Again, the overall project expenditure did not fluctuate.

The third PCR was submitted because Covid-19 impacted the availability and cost of hardy shrubs and herbs. This PCR again sought to reallocate funds within the 'Other Capital' cost category; moving funding from the hardy herb and shrub budget line to instead cover over-seeding wildflower costs for the grassland areas of the RAU campus. Again, the overall project expenditure did not fluctuate.

Table 1 (overleaf), taken as a snapshot from EClaims following the submission of the project's most recent claim form (claim QO4 2022), shows the budget balance against the original cost categories.

At the time of the summative assessment being written, a very minor underspend (0.03%) is seen in the Other Capital cost category. Meanwhile, significant underspend is seen in all revenue cost categories; 100% underspend against the marketing cost category, 70% against professional fees, and 61% against



salaries and associated flat rate indirect costs. Overall, to date (at March 2023) there is a combined, total underspend (at the time of evaluation) of 42% (£295,956.89).

The Wild Campus project manager has, however, confirmed that a fourth project change request is being submitted to the managing authority in April 2023. This final PCR will reprofile final expenditure as follows:

- Other capital - £370,342.71
- Professional fees - £7,145.60
- Marketing - £2,000.00
- Salaries - £196,777.44
- Flat rate indirect costs - £29,516.77

The final, anticipated project expenditure total is: £605,782.52, £107,137.48 less than outlined in the original full application. The rationale being provided for these final adjustments is:

- Capital expenditure increased throughout the project lifetime because:
 - a. Brexit and Covid-19 reduced the availability of seeds and plants meaning there was a significant increase in costs.
 - b. The bat-friendly lighting improvement works incurred additional costs not identified at full application.
- Revenue expenditure decreased throughout the project lifetime because:
 - a. The internal maintenance staff left RAU and were replaced by an external contract maintenance company.
 - b. A higher number of students supported the project as volunteers, through the RAU conservation club and the CC Duke of Edinburgh scheme. This resulted in a lower salaries cost.

Table 1: Claim QO4 2022 – Most recent breakdown by cost category

Type	Category	Amount	Claimed to Date (excluding this Claim)	on this Claim	Expenditure to Date	Balance
Capital	(Cap) Other Capital	£238,054.00	£207,483.70	£30,489.61	£237,973.31	£80.69
Subtotal Capital		£238,054.00	£207,483.70	£30,489.61	£237,973.31	£80.69
Revenue	(Rev) Marketing	£13,500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£13,500.00
Revenue	(Rev) Salaries	£395,101.00	£137,740.96	£16,036.47	£153,777.43	£241,323.57
Revenue	(Rev) Professional Fees	£7,000.00	£2,145.60	£0.00	£2,145.60	£4,854.40
Revenue	(Rev) Flat Rate Indirect Costs	£59,265.00	£20,661.32	£2,405.45	£23,066.77	£36,198.23
Subtotal Revenue		£474,866.00	£160,547.88	£18,441.92	£178,989.80	£295,876.20
Total		£712,920.00	£368,031.58	£48,931.53	£416,963.11	£295,956.89



Considering the final, fourth PCR and reprofiled expenditure, at project closure there should not be any under- or overspend. Table 2 (below) provides an overview of the Wild Campus projects' anticipated financial performance, against the revised expenditure profile at the time of evaluation and as projected for project closure.

Table 2: Expenditure Table at March 2023

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation		Projected Performance at Project Closure		Overall Assessment
	Original	Adjusted (as per the proposed fourth PCR)	Expenditure to date	% of Adjusted Target	Projected expenditure	% of Adjusted Target	
ERDF Capital Expenditure (£)	£119,027	£370,342.71	£295,425.31	80%	£370,342.71	100%	As the fourth project change request will be submitted so close to project closure it is assumed that the adjusted targets and projected expenditure have been carefully and accurately calculated. Meeting expenditure targets is a positive result.
ERDF Revenue Expenditure (£)	£237,433	£235,439.81	£179,002.39	76%	£235,439.81	100%	

2.3 ACTIVITY

The Wild Campus Cirencester project aimed to deliver the following activities across three sites:

- **Plant wildlife-friendly species:**
 - Planting >1,000m² of wildlife-friendly native shrubs
 - Planting >3,000m² of wildflowers where insects can forage
 - Planting native species to enhance five existing ponds
 - Planting a small orchard with heritage fruit trees, further diversifying insect habitat and food sources
- **Install bat-friendly lighting:**
 - Replacing or improving outside lights in line with Bat Conservation Trust guidance
- **Manage existing lawns and woodland to improve wildlife habitat:**
 - Diversifying four hectares of lawn, currently managed to minimise broadleaf plants, and leaving long grass, providing further food sources and cover
 - Thinning woodland to provide better habitat for bats, enhance ground flora and create refugia for small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and bugs
 - Installing 150 bat boxes, swift boxes, owl boxes and house sparrow terraces to enhance roosting and nesting opportunities
 - Making five hedgehog shelters and five reptile hibernacula (piles of logs, rubble, soil and grass cuttings laid in excavated pits)



All three activities were successfully delivered, and the project team have a wealth of photographs capturing the site areas before and after the interventions were implemented. The following selection of photographs depict the projects **planting of wildlife-friendly species**:

Wildlife-friendly native shrubs

725 hardy shrubs were planted as part of the project, including lavender, rosemary, hebe, cotoneaster, sarcococca, escallonia, buxus, pyracantha, hazel, viburnum, and barberry.

Before...



After...



Wildflowers

Approximately 4250m² of wildflowers have been seeded in selected areas across the site. Species include: Ladies Bedstraw Galium verum, Doves-foot Cranesbill Geranium mole, Rough Hawkbit Leontodon hispidus, Oxeye Daisy Leucanthemum vulgare, Wild Majoram Origanum vulgare, Cowslip Primula veris, Meadow Buttercup Ranunculus acris, White Campion Silene latifolia, Yellow Oat-grass Trisetum flavescens.

Before...



After...





Ponds

Two existing ponds have been improved with landscaping and additional planting. In addition, a new pond is being created at the CC site. The area for this had been marked out at the time of the summative assessment site visits, and work is intended to have been completed by project close.

Before...



After...



Orchard

31 orchard trees have been planted. This includes six varieties of apple tree, two varieties of pear tree and two varieties of plum tree.

Before...



After...



The following photographs depict the projects **installation of bat friendly lighting**:

19 poles were erected or had their lights altered, in 5 different locations across the sites.

Before...



After...





The following photographs depict the projects **management of existing lawns and woodlands**:

Diversifying lawns

The current areas of no-mow cover over 4ha across the site.

Before...



After...



Thinning woodland

2691.8m² of woodland has been thinned. Predominately the wood taken out was Ash – Ash trees were selected as part of the Ash Die Back requirements for the site.

Before...

After...



Installing bat and bird boxes

150 bird and bat boxes have been installed across the site, these include specific boxes/nests for kestrel, owls, woodpeckers, house martin, sparrow, swift, b and two varieties of bat box.

Before...





After...



Hedgehog shelters and reptile hibernacula

Five hedgehog shelters and five hibernacula, suitable for species including insects, toads, frogs, lizards, snakes, bats, and rodents have been created across the site. The works enabled the RAU to join the Hedgehog Preservation Society with a bronze status.

Before...



After...



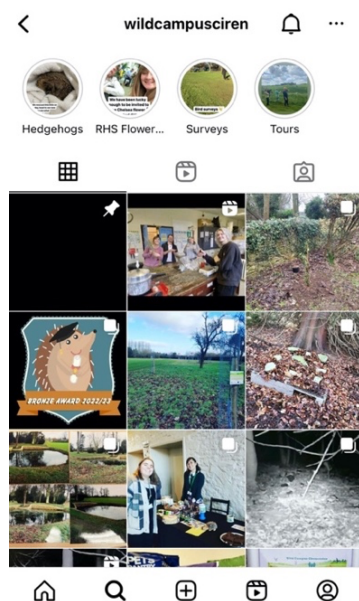
In addition, the Wild Campus Cirencester project carried out **marketing and promotional activities**.

The project team have installed a large variety of ERDF compliant **signage and interpretation** to communicate activities in progress and the intended impacts. In addition to signage adjacent to interventions, the project team have also placed information on student and staff information boards. CC also created a site tour trail as part of staff and student inductions.





The project's **dedicated website page** can be found here: www.rau.ac.uk/about-rau/sustainability/wild-campus. It includes an overview of the project as well as links to the projects **blog** and **social media** pages.



While none of the web or social media pages have been updated since late 2022, they collectively have c600 followers, and posts have received interest. The project team confirmed that project updates will be posted on all pages at the end of May 2023, after which the social media pages will be closed. The project team remain in discussion with the RAU outreach team about whether some form of web presence, with seasonal updates, could be continued post project closure.

The project has also had a **short film** created to promote and celebrate its activities. This film, which can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvF-O_CaXjo, was not funded by the ERDF project. It forms part of the European Planet Friendly Schools programme, for which the Wild Campus Cirencester project was featured.

The Wild Campus Cirencester project team also carried out a variety of **community outreach activities** to engage and share experiences with other academic institutions (in particular local primary schools) as well as local business owners. Activities included conducting school visits and providing on-site tours of the project interventions. In total, circa 10 visits and 20 tours have taken place since the start of the project.





While it is considered that all intended activities were carried out and completed during the project timeframe, the locations of the intended activities changed. As a result of changing personnel (see section 3.1 for more details), Cirencester Deer Park School decided not to participate in the project. The school withdrew from the project before any interventions were started on land under their ownership and/or management. The project team stated that the managing authority (when consulted in March 2022) did not require a project change request to cover this alteration as the team remained confident that all activity, and C22 outputs (as understood at full application), could be delivered across the remaining two sites: RAU and CC.

2.4 OUTPUT TARGETS

At the time of the summative assessment being written, the three project change requests (PCRs) submitted had not reprofiled project output targets and the project was still delivering to the targets outlined in the full application form.

Table 3 (below) highlights that C22 outputs were successfully delivered. The independent assessor viewed many 'before and after' images, saw interventions first hand during two site visits, and reviewed comprehensive management plans detailing how interventions will be cared for in the shorter and longer terms.

The independent ecologist's report tells us that successful delivery of C22 outputs, in turn, delivers a successful C23 output. However, during summative assessment discussions, the project team agreed that a small reduction should be made to the final C23 output. While the C22 output target was successfully delivered across the RAU and CC sites, the removal of the CDP site does have a small impact on the total hectareage of surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status.

The interventions implemented still provide clear connectivity between the two known bat populations indicated in map 1, page 5. The works along the Stroud Road and across the RAU site provide a north-south corridor to the west of CDP. While the activity completed across the CC site provide a north-south corridor to the east of CDP. As such, it is considered that the CDP site simply creates a break in the corridor rather than continues to present a barrier, precluding the rest of the C23 output area to be counted. Therefore, the project team suggest that the C23 output performance is reduced by the size of the CDP site. The hectareage of the CDP site is 9.39 hectares, which equates to less than 4% of the overall C23 target and is not considered significant.

Table 3: Output Table

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation		Projected Performance at Project Closure		Overall Assessment
	Original	Adjusted (if relevant)	No.	% of Target	No.	% of Target	
C22: Total surface area of rehabilitated land	5.5ha	n/a	6ha	109%	6ha	109%	Wild Campus Cirencester delivered 109% of the original target – this is considered a very successful result.
C23: Surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status	249ha	n/a	239.61ha	96%	239.61ha	96%	Wild Campus Cirencester delivered 96% of the original target – with a minor 4% underachievement, this is still considered a successful result.



However, the Wild Campus project manager has confirmed that a fourth project change request is being submitted to the managing authority in April 2023. This final PCR will reprofile outputs as follows:

- C22: Total surface area of rehabilitated land = 0
- C23: Surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status = 6 hectares

The rationale being provided for these final adjustments is that, whilst deemed appropriate at the time, the original outputs detailed in the full application, were calculated incorrectly. After the project started, revised guidance and clarification was issued by the managing authority for C22 and C23 outputs. Consequently, as they are no longer a requirement in the more developed region, this project will not be delivering any C22 outputs. In addition, the clarification for C23 outputs reduces the reliance on the ecologist report to determine a future, potential biodiversity improvement across a large, undefined area and instead focuses on improvements to a defined area of existing habitat(s). The project team have calculated the area on which interventions have been delivered as six hectares. A revised output table, table 4, is provided below.

Table 4: Revised Output Table

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation		Projected Performance at Project Closure		Overall Assessment
	Original	Adjusted (if relevant)	No.	% of Adjusted Target	No.	% of Adjusted Target	
C22: Total surface area of rehabilitated land	5.5ha	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
C23: Surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status	249ha	6ha	6ha	100%	6ha	100%	Wild Campus Cirencester delivered 100% of the adjusted target, this is considered a successful result.

In addition to the photographic evidence of activity undertaken, verification of adjusted C23 outputs also requires there to be an up-to-date management plan that includes a commitment to the ongoing management of the site. As noted on page 18, the independent assessor reviewed comprehensive management plans detailing how interventions will be cared for in the shorter and longer terms.

As separate organisations with separate budgets, both RAU and CC have written clear management plans outlining how interventions delivered with ERDF investment will be maintained for a minimum of 15 years post project closure. In both cases, the plans have been agreed by management committees (involving Teresa North, Director of commercial services and facilities, Wild Campus Project Sponsor, for RAU and Jim Grant, Principal, for CC). For both RAU and CC, clear structures and processes have been developed to ensure plans are not lost or overlooked with any changes in personnel. This includes adding maintenance of ERDF interventions to internal job descriptions and contracts with external maintenance contractors.

Both RAU and CC see that it is likely that, because of ERDF investment, more activities will be carried out in coming years, adding to the current six hectares rather than reducing it.

2.5 PROJECT FORECAST

This summative assessment has been conducted prior to the completion of the project. However, as all work relating to adjusted C23 outputs has been completed, or at least started with clear completion and end dates prior to project closure, the total number of outputs associated with project will not change.



The maintenance plans provide confidence that interventions contributing towards C23 outputs will be maintained, and enhanced, over the next 15 years.

SECTION 3: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

3.1 MANAGEMENT

Project management resource: Over the project lifetime there were a total of four project managers. While each manager started consecutively, handovers were limited or non-existent.

James Hargreaves, the initial project manager, was in place from the project start until June 2021. In his time, James set up many documentation systems and procedures intended to ensure that the project remained on track and ERDF compliant. When James left the project, these systems and procedures were not handed over or left with any instructions. As a result, the incoming, interim and high-level only, project managers (Sarah Morton and Mark Westbrook) found their time managing the project confusing and spent the period between June and November 2021 attempting to understand ERDF and the funding requirements and then start to simplify the multiple documents found on the central filing system. The team at CC agree that during this time, the project did not feel cohesive, with many of their procurements ending up ineligible for inclusion in project claims.

In November 2021, Deb Govier joined the project as project manager. Deb continued the work started by Sarah and Mark to reduce and simplify systems and procedures. She was supported by the project manager from the ERDF PA1 project, Inspiring Agri-technology Innovation, to better understand ERDF requirements and the E-Claims system. Deb also spent time working with project partners, CC, to build a solid relationship and ensure consistency of delivery. Deb remains in place and will see the project through to completion.

The Wild Campus Cirencester project manager believes that the consistency and passion for the project within the delivery team (particularly Teresa North, Wild Campus Project Sponsor, Rebecca Elton, Wild Campus Cirencester Technician, Jim Grant, Principal of Cirencester College, Jane Dowdeswell, Assistant Financial Accountant at Cirencester College, and Stuart Williams, Senior Outdoor Instructor at Cirencester College) ensured the project continued to deliver and stay on track throughout 2021.

Project management and governance structures: Management and governance structures were clearly defined from the project outset and, other than removing CDP, did not change much as the project progressed. See figure 1 (overleaf) for the project organogram.

Initially the project had steering group meetings, attended by the project sponsor as well as representatives from Gfirst LEP, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, other local ERDF environmental projects (e.g. Wild Towns), and the Bathurst Estate (located to the north of the project site). The purpose of these meetings was to discuss and ensure continuing strategic fit of the project. However, after the first couple of meetings it was agreed only to reconvene if there was a major change to project activity required. As there were no major changes, the steering group did not meet again.

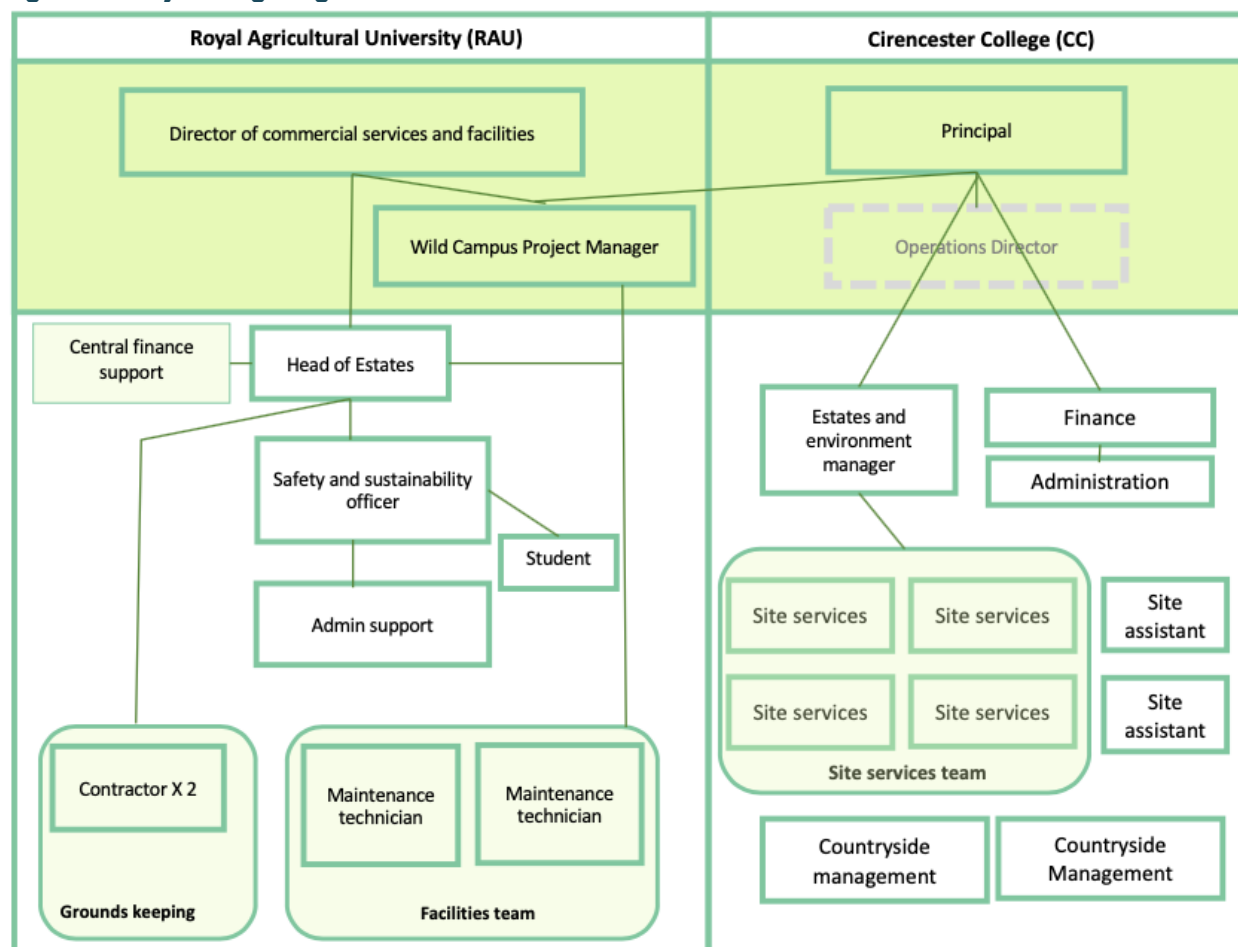
The project sponsor (Teresa North) and project manager (Deb Govier) had, and continue to have, regular project progress meetings throughout the project, for which minutes are available, inviting relevant project delivery team members as appropriate. Personnel at both RAU and CC agree that academic schedules did not allow for many all-team meetings – this is something they feel should have been better scheduled and given greater priority from the project outset.

Personnel at both RAU and CC also agree that the role of student volunteers was greatly underestimated at the project development / full application stage. Volunteers took on much of the facilities team, site services team, and countryside management activities. This led to more detailed and hands-on



coordination work than anticipated for the project manager (Deb Govier), project technician (Rebecca Elton) and Stuart Williams, Senior Outdoor Instructor at Cirencester College.

Figure 1: Project Organogram



3.2 DELIVERY

As noted in section 2.3, the key delivery activities, as described in the contract and associated full application, have been successfully delivered. It is also considered that activities have been delivered to a good standard.

Still, the project team felt that the delivery of the project could have been further improved, providing five key ideas:

1. **ERDF-focused recruitment** - Recruiting a project manager with relevant funding experience, rather than subject specialisms, to ensure streamlined project processes and disciplined evidence collecting is set up correctly and efficiently from the project outset.
2. **Documented handovers** - Ensuring a clear, and documented handover, from those writing the full application to those delivering the project in the first instance. Then ensuring any handovers between project managers are, ideally carried out in person but are also, documented.



3. **Less ERDF paperwork** - The Wild Campus Cirencester project team noted that the amount of form filling needed to satisfy ERDF requirements was often overwhelming and made the project feel more about completing paper processes than being able to deliver project activities.
4. **E-Claims log-in for project partners** - There was much concern from project partners regarding GDPR and the need to provide salary information. CC would have liked their own log-in for the E-Claims system so they could provide defrayal evidence directly and only provide total figures to the lead project partner.
5. **Clear project team inclusions** - Ensuring the involvement of finance personnel is recognised as key to project delivery and salaried positions included in the project team; the flat rate indirect costs did not adequately cover the additional staff costs associated with delivering ERDF.

It is also felt that if the above had been addressed for the Wild Campus Cirencester project that CDP may not have left the project.

3.3 BENEFICIARIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

The intervention logic for this project is that habitat rehabilitation drives improvements in conservation status, which in turn benefits the wellbeing and prosperity of the local community. The end beneficiaries are indirect and no wide-ranging beneficiary data was collected for this summative assessment.

Still, the third-party assessor sought input from three key project volunteers. Their main feedback was very positive. The benefits of the project, for them, are summarised below:

- **Skills development:** The project provided opportunities, not found elsewhere at the university/college, for developing practical skills and in working in cross-curricular teams.
- **Employment readiness:** The hours spent volunteering on the project will be beneficial when applying for ecology jobs and positions requiring similar skills within the environmental sector.
 - As a result of their involvement in the Wild Campus project, two volunteers have already gone on to be employed by RAU
- **Inspirational practices:** The current leadership has been inspiring, keeping all volunteers focussed and making it fun. It is also seen that the current Wild Campus project team will leave a legacy that will be up-held and further developed over the coming years.

The second year of the volunteering saw an increase in volunteer numbers; the assumption being that whatever was done in the first year was done right!

- **Positive reputational impact:** The Wild Campus project helps portray the RAU and CC as bodies which see value in supporting wildlife in the British countryside.

SECTION 4: PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

4.1 DIRECT PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The Wild Campus Cirencester project has delivered as outlined in table 4 (overleaf) against the intended outcomes, as set out in the logic model.



Table 4: Progress against intended project outcomes

Outcome	Measurement	Achieved	Direct / Indirect	Evidence
Supporting bat populations across 249ha on and around the site	Delivery of interventions in line with advice from an independent ecologist	Yes, across 240ha	Direct	The independent ecologist's report tells us that successful delivery of intended interventions (outputs), in turn, supports areas of habitat to attain better conservation status. Before and after photos and site visits confirm the implementation of recommended interventions, therefore it is assumed that the area of habitat outlined by the ecologist to attain a better conservation status, as it relates to local bat populations, has been achieved. To note: during summative assessment discussions the project team agreed, because of the removal of the CDP site, that a small reduction should be made to the final hectareage of area improved to support bat populations. The reduction is less than 4% of the intended outcome, therefore this outcome is still considered to have been achieved.

The Wild Campus Cirencester project has delivered, as outlined in table 5 (below), against intended impacts, as set out in the logic model.

Table 5: Progress against intended project impact

Outcome	Measurement	Achieved	Direct / Indirect	Evidence
Thriving bat populations	Delivery of interventions in line with advice from an independent ecologist	Yes	Direct	The independent ecologist's report tells us that successful delivery of intended interventions (outputs), in turn, supports areas of habitat to attain better conservation status. Before and after photos and site visits confirm the implementation of recommended interventions, therefore it is assumed that the area of habitat outlined by the ecologist to attain a better conservation status, as it relates to local bat populations, has been achieved.
Thriving local populations of rare and protected species	Delivery of interventions in line with advice from an independent ecologist	Yes	Direct	The independent ecologist's report tells us that successful delivery of intended interventions (outputs), in turn, supports areas of habitat to attain better conservation status. Before and after photos and site visits confirm the implementation of recommended interventions, therefore it is assumed that the area of habitat outlined by the ecologist to attain a better conservation status, as it relates to local bat populations, has been achieved.
Enhanced wellbeing for local people	Engagement with, and feedback from, local people	TBC	Indirect	Site interventions have not been in place for sufficient time to enable robust measurement of wellbeing impacts. However, the project has been recognised for its contributions to improving the environment of Cirencester for wildlife and residents: - The project has been featured on the European platform for planet friendly schools (https://www.planetfriendlyschools.eu/projects/wild-campus-cirencester) - The project won the 'environmental project of the year' award at the 2022 Cirencester Business and Community awards, judged by Cirencester Town Council's Climate Change Advisory Group (https://www.cirencesterchamber.org.uk/business-awards-winners-2022/) - CC received a Building with Nature 'design level' award for campus enhancement for biodiversity and wellbeing



				https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/project-list-blog/2022/9/6/cirencester-college-green-campus-strategy?rq=cirencester
Local prosperity through enhanced natural and capital and ecosystem services	GVA	TBC	Indirect	<p>Site interventions have not been in place for sufficient time to enable robust measurement of enhanced prosperity.</p> <p>However, Teresa North (Director of commercial services and facilities and Wild Campus Project Sponsor) and Roger Mortlock (CEO, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust) both noted that the Wild Campus Cirencester project strongly supports the values of the Cirencester Innovation Village, for which the intended benefits include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New businesses – doubling the current outputs of Farm491 and Growth Hub within first five years of operation, representing additional £35M of investment, 120 jobs created, and support for 200 start-ups and SMEs - Provision of skills, training, employment, and affordable housing, targeted towards improving retention of 16-24 year olds - Research funding – attracting annual research income of £10M p.a. by 2030, growing from current baseline of £2M p.a. - High-value job creation – new Academic and R&D opportunities estimated at 50FTE - Increase in conferencing business and associated revenue growth – estimated value of £5M p.a.

4.3 ERDF PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

The Wild Campus Cirencester project has contributed to the achievement of the following ERDF programme result indicators, as defined in ESIF-GN-002 ERDF Output Indicators Guidance, version 9:

- **C23: Hectares of habitats with improved conservation status** = 6 hectares

4.4 ADDED STRATEGIC VALUE

The GFirst Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) sets out an ambition to “*capitalise on Gloucestershire’s natural assets and rural environment to make the county the greenest place to live and work in England*” and an aspiration to “*protect, restore and promote our green assets and natural environment*”. It is considered that the Wild Campus Cirencester project supports this ambition and aspiration and that county-wide and site specific strategic added value have been created in the following ways:

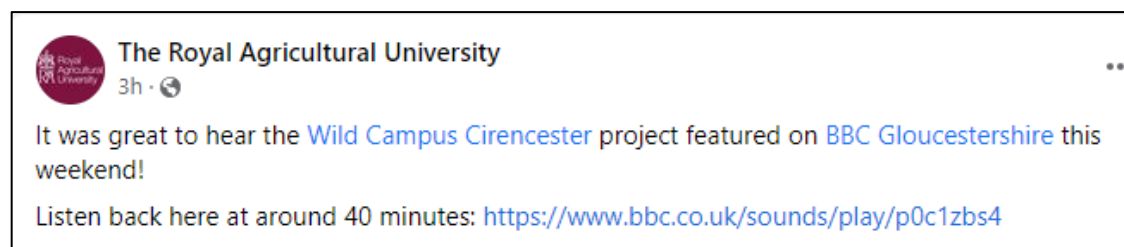
1. **Supporting the Cirencester Innovation Village:** Teresa North (Director of commercial services and facilities and Wild Campus Project Sponsor) and Roger Mortlock (CEO, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust) both noted that the Wild Campus Cirencester project strongly supports the values of the Cirencester Innovation Village, for which the intended benefits include:
 - New businesses – doubling the current outputs of Farm491 and Growth Hub within first five years of operation, representing additional £35M of investment, 120 jobs created, and support for 200 start-ups and SMEs
 - Provision of skills, training, employment, and affordable housing, targeted towards improving retention of 16-24-year-olds
 - Research funding – attracting annual research income of £10M p.a. by 2030, growing from current baseline of £2M p.a.
 - High-value job creation – new Academic and R&D opportunities estimated at 50FTE
 - Increased conferencing business and associated revenue growth-estimated value of £5Mp.a.
2. **Supporting academic research and publications:** RAU have overlaid a research programme with the Wild Campus Cirencester project; a ‘no-mow’ project looking at the impact of leaving



areas of previously manicured lawn/amenity grassland to grow wild, enhanced with wildflower seeding, on nectar resource for pollinators. The 2021 no-mow pilot research was submitted to the British Ecological Society Journal. The article was accepted, subject to revisions - *Hemmings, K., Elton, R., & Grange, I. No-mow amenity grassland case study: phenology of floral abundance and nectar resource.*

It is hoped that the findings from the wider 2022 study, which included additional locations in Cirencester (two churches and Watermoor Park, managed by Cirencester Town Council) will result in a second publication. The pilot and 2022 studies have also led to an ongoing, long-term no-mow study which will result in even more publications.

The research aspect led to the Wild Campus Cirencester project being featured on BBC Radio Gloucestershire.



3. **Supporting existing and developing new strategies:** Teresa North (Director of commercial services and facilities and Wild Campus Project Sponsor) stated that, for RAU, the project has had a positive impact on the development of the universities next steps and strategies for sustainability, and food and farming; ensuring that the university takes greater steps to enhance and promote the natural environment.
4. **Supporting recruitment and staff retention:** Jim Grant (Principal, Cirencester College) noted that 'greenness is an attractive quality' and that the project has been a draw when seeking new staff, particularly when recruiting for two new horticulturist roles. Jim also stated that new staff are provided a tour of the ERDF activity sites as part of their induction, and that existing staff have created a 'mindfulness' walk following a similar route.

Kelly Hemmings (Senior Lecturer in Eco Systems, RAU) and Ian Grange (Senior Lecturer in Environment and Countryside Management, RAU) highlighted that the Wild Campus Cirencester project had directly led to paid student positions, including a research placement student who collaborated on the 2022 no-mow research.

5. **Supporting the next generation:** Jim Grant (Principal, Cirencester College) and Jane Dowdeswell (Assistant Financial Accountant, Cirencester College) noted that the project has supported changes to the college's curriculum and will help develop environment managers of the future. Specifically, the college has launched two new, T-Level courses; horticulture, which includes a module on biodiversity, and wildlife conservation and habitat management. The project legacy, and elements of ongoing intervention maintenance, will act as practical teaching tools for these courses.

Ian Grange (Senior Lecturer in Environment and Countryside Management, RAU) agrees that the project has provided an invaluable practical teaching tool, particularly for the wildlife conservation module, where students have been able to get involved in building and monitoring hibernacula.



SECTION 5: PROJECT VALUE FOR MONEY

5.1 COST PER OUTPUT ANALYSIS

With most habitat enhancement activity, there is inevitably a lag between the time of project delivery and when positive economic results, local prosperity, and/or Gross Value Added (GVA) can be successfully

measured. Even then, given the reference period for implementation being 15 years, it would be difficult to successfully attribute results directly to the Wild Campus Cirencester ERDF project.

Given the large variations in project locations, ambitions, and activities, it is also not deemed appropriate to carry out value for money comparisons between different ERDF PA6 projects.

In place of a review looking at additional turnover, GVA or project to project comparisons in more detail, a crude cost per output analysis, like that carried out by the managing authority as part of initial project selection, has been undertaken and is presented in the table 6, below.

Table 6: Cost per Output Analysis

Output	Total hectares	Cost per hectare, based on total project cost: £605,782.52	Cost per hectare based on ERDF intervention: £302,891.26
C23: Surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status	6	£100,963.75	£150,481.88

At appointment of contract the managing authority and GFirst considered that the project offered satisfactory value for money in terms of number of outputs being delivered for the total project cost and level of ERDF intervention. Considering the clarified outputs (removal of C22 and change to C23), the increase from 5.5ha to 6ha of site-specific habitat enhancement activity, and the £107,137.48 decrease in overall project expenditure, it could be concluded that the project will offer better value for money at project closure than when being contracted.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

6.1 PROJECT STRENGTHS

The following are the Wild Campus Cirencester projects main strengths and achievements:

- The project activities have been delivered predominantly as planned at full application
- A passionate and dedicated delivery team remained in place for most of the project timeframe, allowing for continued successful delivery of project activities
- The project provided c25 volunteering opportunities, leading to some paid positions.
- The project has nurtured a better relationship between RAU and CC.
- The project allowed RAU and CC to see across the fence line and learn, or 'copy' successful initiatives to incorporate into future habitat enhancement plans.



- The project delivered a variety of community outreach activities to engage and share experiences with other academic institutions (in particular local primary schools) as well as local business owners. Activities included conducting school visits and providing on-site tours of the project interventions. In total, circa 10 visits and 20 tours have taken place since the start of the project.
- The project has been featured on the European platform for planet friendly schools (<https://www.planetfriendlyschools.eu/projects/wild-campus-cirencester>)
- The project won the 'environmental project of the year' award at the 2022 Cirencester Business and Community awards, judged by Cirencester Town Council's Climate Change Advisory Group (<https://www.cirencesterchamber.org.uk/business-awards-winners-2022/>)
- CC received a Building with Nature 'design level' award for campus enhancement for biodiversity and wellbeing (<https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/project-list-blog/2022/9/6/cirencester-college-green-campus-strategy?rq=cirencester>). Building with Nature is a set of nationally recognised standards that provide planners and developers with evidence-based, how-to, guidance on delivering high quality green infrastructure.
- The project created momentum and opportunities for research activities.
- The 2021 no-mow pilot research was submitted to the British Ecological Society Journal. The article was accepted, subject to revisions - *Hemmings, K., Elton, R., & Grange, I. No-mow amenity grassland case study: phenology of floral abundance and nectar resource.*
- The research conducted provides scientific evidence that the project has been successful for improving nectar resource and increasing pollinators.

6.2 PROJECT WEAKNESSES

The following are the Wild Campus Cirencester projects main weaknesses:

- Lack of clear handover from those writing the full application to the delivery team, at both RAU and CC, meant that initially there was too much guess work and work overload in the first six months.
- Lack of continuity with project management; having poor, or absent, handovers between project managers resulting in project team members often feeling confused and spending unnecessary time trying to understand ERDF requirements and re-work filing systems.
- The above two points meant that CDP withdrew from the project, requiring the remaining partners to absorb outputs intended for delivery on CDP land.
- Lack of site visits during the Covid-19 pandemic meant communication between RAU and CC "fell apart" for a while.
- Before and after photographic evidence not being taken from the exact same vantage point making it more difficult to see direct comparisons and observe current project impact.

6.3 LESSONS LEARNT

Lessons learnt for the grant recipient / project delivery body:

- The project team suggested that for future projects **those involved in project delivery need to play an active role in developing the application.** If this is not possible, then it will be crucial to have a clear, and documented, handover from those writing the application to those delivering the



project. This is to ensure the delivery team, and both partner organisations, understand minimum expectations in terms of documents and evidence.

- The project team noted that for future projects it would be pertinent to **recruit a project manager with relevant funding experience**, rather than subject specialisms, to ensure streamlined project processes and disciplined evidence collecting is set up correctly and efficiently from the project outset.
- The project team highlighted that, for future projects, the **project management needs to be consistent**. The project manager should maintain a log or set of file notes detailing project progress and activities which can form the basis for a handover pack, if needed.
- Teresa North (Director of commercial services and facilities and Wild Campus Project Sponsor) noted that for future projects requiring the same level of evidence of defrayal it will be important to **recognise financial personnel as key to project delivery** and include them as salaried positions in the project team.

Lessons learnt for those designing and implementing similar interventions:

- Jim Grant (Principal, Cirencester College) noted that “*you don’t do ERDF to make or even save money*”... Jim highlighted that it is good for academic institutions to have access to match funding to carry out projects that would otherwise not happen or take longer to become a top priority. However, he noted that for ERDF environmental projects the organisation invests a lot of time, resource, and funds and **in reality, ERDF match funding doesn’t cover costs at the advertised/intended 50% intervention rate**.

Lessons learnt for policy makers / funders:

- The project team suggested that **the managing authority contract managers should take greater responsibility for ensuring fund** requirements are understood, particularly in terms of documentation and evidence, and when there are changes in project managers.
- The project team suggested that the amount of **form filling should be reduced** to enable better use of time to deliver project activities.
- All **project partners should have their own log-ins for E-Claims** so they could provide defrayal evidence directly and only provide total figures to the lead project partner.
- Teresa North (Director of commercial services and facilities and Wild Campus Project Sponsor) felt that the exclusions of agricultural land or land in receipt of countryside stewardship reduced the scope and therefore potential impact of the Wild Campus Cirencester project. So long as the specific activities are not being double funded, she suggests **future grants should offer better opportunities for synergy and complementary activities between funding streams**.
- Kelly Hemming (Senior Lecturer in Eco Systems, RAU) and Ian Grange (Senior Lecturer in Environment and Countryside Management, RAU) agree that future grant **opportunities that acknowledge the lag time involved in developing new habitats** would be welcome. The ideal scenario would be funding that is available for multiple stages of project delivery over 10 plus years, or funding available to use towards ongoing maintenance.



6.4 CONCLUSIONS

While there were challenges highlighted relating to the consistency of project management, overall, the project has delivered well:

- The project showcased a strategic approach to nature's recovery by RAU and CC working in partnership and considering habitat connectivity across their combined sites and beyond.
- The project delivered anticipated activities: wildlife-friendly species have been planted, bat-friendly lighting has been installed in line with Bat Conservation Trust guidance, and existing lawns and woodland have been managed to improve wildlife habitat.
- The project engaged campus communities, and wider Cirencester communities, schools and businesses, in wildlife-rich learning, research, and volunteering opportunities.
- The project will likely, as it strongly supports the values of the Cirencester Innovation Village, have an indirect impact on local natural capital, wellbeing, and prosperity.
- The project is anticipated to spend to (adjusted) target by project closure.
- The project is delivering to (adjusted) output targets; six hectares of surface area of habitats supported to attain better conservation status will be delivered.
- The project offers added strategic value by delivering against Local Industrial Strategy objectives.
- Project outputs will offer better value for money at project closure than at contract.
- The project created momentum and opportunities for research activities. The 2021 no-mow pilot research was submitted to the British Ecological Society Journal. The article was accepted, subject to revisions - *Hemmings, K., Elton, R., & Grange, I. No-mow amenity grassland case study: phenology of floral abundance and nectar resource.*
- The project stimulated ideas about what to do next with future developments, including more biodiverse planting.
- The research conducted provides scientific evidence that the project has been successful for improving nectar resource and increasing pollinators.