Beauty and the beast: Confronting contrasting perceptions of nature through design

– *Siân Moxon*

Nature elicits potent, contrasting emotions in us, from love and awe to fear and loss of control. As we become increasingly urbanised, we are distancing ourselves from wildness: 83% of UK children cannot identify a bumblebee and most adults no longer notice plants. When we encounter less of the wild world in our daily lives, we can forget its joys and fixate on its threats, from pests to untidiness. But renouncing nature is the real danger when it is proven to be good for us, boosting our well-being through both its restorative effects and its stresses.

Urban gardens should be spaces to reconnect with nature, but residents are replacing greenery with hard surfaces to suppress the natural. There is an urgency to rewild domestic gardens to make space for wildlife, which is facing alarming decline from rural pressures, and enable city dwellers to experience nature's benefits. However, problems identified with rural rewilding, such as challenging aesthetics and fear of wild animals, are heightened in urban contexts with their greater population density, and expectations of tidiness and safety.

What solutions can design offer to make rewilding attractive to urban residents? This is explored through a practice-based case study, Rewild My Street, a campaign to persuade suburban Londoners to adapt their gardens for wildlife. An architectural design process was used to develop presentation techniques to help residents visualise the advantages of rewilding their streetscape, select contextual wildlife products for a suburban setting and propose design solutions to address residents' concerns.

The resulting imagery deliberately paints an idealised, tamed vision of nature in suburbia that is neat, aesthetically pleasing and unthreatening. This arguably deceptive use of design is deemed necessary to serve a worthy aim for city residents to immerse themselves as much in nature's frisson of danger as in its tranquillity.

Image 1. Vision drawing: aerial view. Source: Rewild My Street, Viktoria Fenyes.

Introduction: unhelpful perceptions of nature for suburban rewilding

Nature elicits potent, contrasting emotions in us, from love and awe, or biophilia, to fear and loss of control, or biophobia[1]. As we become increasingly urbanised, we are becoming disconnected from nature[2] and subjecting ourselves to 'nature-deficit disorder'[3]. A recent study of 1000 British children by application Hoop found 83% cannot identify a bumblebee, 65% did not recognise a blue tit and 82% could not name an oak leaf[4]. Most adults fare little better, not noticing or valuing plants, in a phenomenon known as 'plant blindness'[5].

When we encounter less of the wild world in our daily lives, we are less inclined to care for it[6], forgetting its joys and fixating on its threats, from pests to untidiness. But renouncing nature is the real danger when it is known to be good for us, boosting our health and wellbeing through its restorative effects[7,8] and even, as George Monbiot argues in his book 'Feral', its thrill of danger[9].

City gardens should be spaces to reconnect with nature, but residents are replacing greenery with hard surfaces[10], suppressing the natural. There is an urgency to rewild domestic gardens to make space for wildlife, which is facing alarming decline from rural pressures, with the latest State of Nature survey by UK conservation organisations showing 41% of species in strong or moderate decline and 15% extinct or threatened with extinction[11]. In parallel, rewilding residential areas would enable city dwellers to experience nature's benefits[12]. However, problems identified with rural rewilding, such as challenging aesthetics and fear of wild animals[13], are likely to be heightened in suburban contexts with their greater population density, and residents' high expectations of tidiness, privacy[14] and safety[15].

With a view to overcoming negative attitudes to rewilding in cities and promoting positive ones to allow residents to reconnect with nature, the paper asks, 'What solutions can design offer to make rewilding attractive to suburban residents?'

Background: The rewilding movement and case study

The term 'rewilding' was coined by US conservationist Dave Foreman in the early 1990s[16]. The concept was developed by Michael Soule and Reed Noss in a 1998 paper highlighting the importance of 'cores, corridors and carnivores' to restore 'big wilderness'[17]. This ideal has underpinned a movement to reinstate self-regulating ecosystems in rural landscapes worldwide, championed by organisations such as Rewilding Earth in North America[18], Rewilding Europe[19] and Rewilding Britain[20]. In the 2010s, Oostvaardersplassen, a high-profile rewilding experiment in the Netherlands caused public outrage on account of its prevalence of dying and starving animals in harsh winters[21].

More recently, 'urban rewilding' has been called for[22] and defined as incorporating 'native plants and animals into urban infrastructure'[23]. In this study, rewilding is understood in its plastic sense, as the principle of making places wilder again by bringing back greater diversity of life[24]. There is limited policy to support urban rewilding, particularly within existing spaces and residential streets. National UK policy, such as the biodiversity chapter of the 'Strategy for Sustainable Construction', focuses on new developments[25]. Regional policy for London includes the Mayor of London's 'Environment Strategy', which prioritises

new buildings and public greenspaces, but also recognises a need for guidance for homeowners[26].

The research question is explored through a case study that combines academic research and practice: Rewild My Street, an advocacy campaign to persuade city dwellers to adapt their gardens for wildlife to help realise the goal of urban rewilding[27]. Rewild My Street is based in London and associated with the wider London National Park City campaign, having begun as a winning entry for the National Park City Foundation's international design-ideas competition in 2017 and participated in key events as a recognised 'National Park City Maker'[28,29]. Rewild My Street published its open-access website in 2018, a toolkit to help urban residents carry out rewilding, which uses architectural drawings of a typical London street adapted for wildlife to organise guidance[30]. London became the world's first National Park City in 2019, with the launch of its charter aiming to make the capital 'greener, healthier and wilder' by the Mayor of London[31]. The charter echoes the Mayor's commitment to make half the city greenspace and increase tree cover by 10% by 2050[32]. Rewild My Street's team were motivated by a desire to promote urban rewilding to address loss of greenspace in residential gardens[33] and loss of biodiversity generally[34], in support of the broader vision of London National Park City and the Mayor.

Methods: Understanding perceptions of rewilding & design's potential to address them in suburbia

The case study project was chosen because it is typical of all conservation campaigns in its motivation to promote its agenda to the broader public through appealing marketing material; in addition, unlike many initiatives in the field, it attempts to use urban design thinking and representation techniques to achieve this. The project used an architectural design process to develop presentation techniques to help residents visualise the advantages of rewilding their streetscape, select contextual wildlife products for a suburban setting and propose design solutions to address residents' potential concerns. The design team was led by an architect-academic based at a London university, who is also the lead researcher. The team also included a local practising architect and ecologist, both experienced in working within London. The drawing process was undertaken in collaboration with architecture and illustration students from the same London university.

The overarching research question prompts the following sub-questions:
- What aspects of rewilding are attractive and unattractive to suburban residents?
- Can design solutions for a suburban setting reconcile these opposing perceptions without undermining the aims of rewilding?
- Should design proposal drawings aimed at suburban residents highlight the positive and mask the negative aspects of rewilding? If so, what role does supporting guidance for residents have in addressing the hidden realities of rewilding?

The following methodology was developed to interrogate these sub-questions:
    1. The case study project was presented digitally to a range of audiences, through talks, conference papers, an exhibition, emails and social media posts, to obtain qualitative feedback on people's reactions to suburban rewilding proposals. The feedback received through audience questions, email responses and social media comments was recorded and classified as negative or positive. The comments were

further categorised under common themes to establish the key concerns and their counter-arguments.
A parallel literature review was carried out on perceptions of urban nature to establish whether similar attitudes to the same themes were evidenced in larger-scale studies.

2. The researcher considered whether designers should attempt to resolve each category of perceived problem, or whether it was inherent to the aims of rewilding, making encouraging acceptance more appropriate.
The case study project's design approach was reviewed to assess to what extent the problems meriting resolution could be addressed through design solutions, or should be addressed by other means to suit the campaign's goal of promoting rewilding.

3. The case study's use of imagery was reviewed to assess whether presentation methods could discourage unresolvable negative perceptions and highlight their positive counterpoints to facilitate rewilding.
Further, its use of supporting information was reviewed to consider its role in addressing the limitations of the project's design scope and imagery by explaining hidden realities and encouraging acceptance of these.

To answer the overarching research question, the lead researcher evaluated how the case study combines design with imagery and supporting information to make rewilding attractive to suburban residents and whether this is successful in reconciling contrasting perceptions of rewilding.

Findings: Using design solutions, imagery and supporting information to address perceptions of urban rewilding

Identifying attractive and unattractive aspects of rewilding

The feedback from the presentations did reveal contrasting perceptions of suburban rewilding, with comments usually definitively positive or negative, rather than neutral. There were more positive than negative comments, perhaps explained by many of the audience having chosen to engage with the project because of prior support of the topic. However, most presentations did elicit at least one negative response. These negative responses followed recurring themes that can be categorised as:
    a. Irrelevance of nature in the city
    b. Unwanted species
    c. Health and safety fears
    d. Undesirable aesthetics

These categories are defined, as follows:
    a. 'Irrelevance of nature in the city' covered practical concerns, such as lack of space for wildlife measures in compact gardens and difficulty for city residents to find time to engage in rewilding. More fundamental questions of nature looking out of place in a city context are considered under aesthetics, where there is some crossover. Interestingly, this category stands out by being motivated by indifference

to nature, whereas other categories had more passionate responses. Examples included, 'I plan to replace my lawn with artificial grass because I'm lazy'.

> b. 'Unwanted species' grouped prejudices against animals or plants that were regarded as pests, vermin, alien or simply uncharismatic. This category attracts the most passionate responses, seemingly motivated by hatred or fear. There is some overlap with the health and safety fears category here and a species might be disliked because its presence results in undesirable aesthetics. A typical example was, 'I think we'd only get crows and gulls...'

> c. 'Health and safety fears' covered worries about danger from wildlife features, or bites and stings from plants or animals. This category includes comments about species only where risk of danger is cited as the reason for their dislike of a particular species. Comments included, 'I don't want to plant flowers in my garden, in case my children get stung by a bee.'

> d. 'Undesirable aesthetics' includes reflections on both the visual appearance of nature, such as mess and decay, and the experience of nature, such as exposure to death and killing. Comments about species are included only where aesthetics are inferred as the reason for their dislike. Examples included, 'I don't want pigeon sh*t on my balcony' and 'This is...hard to do with two cats'.

The positive feedback on rewilding can be grouped under the same themes to form a counter-argument:
> a. Irrelevance of nature in the city can be countered by the imperative of nature in the city to temper the ecological and climate crisis. This is exemplified by a desire to make space and time for nature in the city, and reimagining our cities as wilder places. Examples included, 'This is a fantastic idea, so needed to help people know what they can do towards helping in their own communities!' and 'This is my dream too'.

> b. Unwanted species is juxtaposed by an appreciation of charismatic or popular species. One example was, 'We love getting bats in our garden at dusk'. Sometimes the same species can be divisive, with foxes mentioned in both positive and negative terms.

> c. Health and safety fears are offset by awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature. Comments included, 'My entire garden is for wildlife. People walking by think it's for them'.

> d. Undesirable aesthetics are opposed by the attractive appearance of increased greenery, and the enhanced experience of seasonal change and wildlife sightings. Examples were, 'How great that looks' and 'This looks amazing!'

The literature review indicated that the themes were replicated elsewhere, as summarised below. It should be noted that these studies were undertaken in other countries and looked

at green infrastructure generally, rather than private gardens and wildlife habitat specifically.

a. Relevance of nature
Residents value urban greenspace, but are better informed of some of its benefits than others. The benefits residents attribute to green spaces vary with location. A Hong Kong study found city residents had little appreciation of the merit of urban greenspace for wildlife, community identity, property prices or social interaction, but understood its role in air purification, shading, temperature reduction and carbon sequestration[35]. Conversely, in a similar study in Helsinki, residents valued greenspace for social benefits, such as recreation, more than environmental ones[36]. The difference is perhaps explained by Hong Kong being especially built up and affected by environmental problems[37].

b. Species
Residents do appear to favour certain species over others. A survey in the city of Trondheim in Norway found residents disliked bats, mice, rats, invertebrates and snails; liked small birds, squirrels, butterflies, hedgehogs and ducks; and responded neutrally to birds of prey, foxes, bumblebees, magpies, pigeons, gulls, grasshoppers and crows[38]. Although the popular and unpopular species are likely to differ with location, residents are keen on having greater diversity of species in their gardens[39].

c. Health and safety
Residents tend to see advantages rather than disadvantages in terms of health, albeit safety is perhaps of greater concern in private gardens than in urban greenspace generally, as young children are more likely to be outdoors unsupervised. Hong Kong residents valued greenspace for health and wellbeing[40] and Helsinki inhabitants appreciated contact with nature and stress reduction[41].

d. Aesthetics
City residents see the aesthetics of urban greenery as positive. Both Helsinki and Hong Kong residents rated urban greenspace highly for aesthetic enhancement. Moreover, Helsinki residents appreciated the quality of naturalness and encounters with wild animals[42,43]. US studies suggest wildlife habitat is considered attractive is suburbia providing it looks well cared for and is not deemed excessive[44]. Most negative accounts come from studies of rural rewilding projects. Examples in Scotland and the Netherlands have caused controversy when the 'terrible beauty' of nature[45] does not conform to picturesque expectations of the countryside[46]. These expectations change in a more urban setting, where the desire for tidiness and cleanliness is exaggerated, requiring an 'aesthetic of care' as much as a scenic aesthetic[47]. However, as we have seen, urban contexts also demand a looser interpretation of what rewilding entails, giving greater aesthetic flexibility. In urban settings rewilding can be as straightforward as adding more plants, water and purpose-built features to benefit wildlife, such as habitat boxes and feeding stations.

Considering design solutions to reconcile opposing perceptions

The research found that it was not always appropriate to seek design solutions to the negative aspects of rewilding, as this might undermine the aims of rewilding. Where intervention was relevant, design was found to offer some useful solutions. Where not,

design could still be of value in enhancing the positive aspects of rewilding associated with the same category. This is discussed under each of the categories identified above.

a. Relevance of nature

It is imperative to address this concern to achieve the aims of urban rewilding. Nature needs to be made relevant to people and the city to realise its potential to mitigate the ecological crisis, benefit city dwellers' health and wellbeing, and improve the functioning of the urban environment to ensure its resilience to the effects of climate change.

Thankfully, design can go a long way towards assimilating nature in the city, solving spatial and practical issues through clever planning and contextual specification. Design should be worked out at the scales of the wildlife feature, the property and the street, resolved through multiple drawing projections, to create a workable solution. Rewild My Street uses a combination of street-scale vision drawings, house- and balcony-scale sectional perspective drawings, and feature-scale pattern drawings to do this.

The street scale is explored through all common projections: plan, section, elevation and aerial view. The property scale is focused on through only one projection and the feature scale shown through one or two projections, so there is scope to expand here. Designing at street scale enables the case study to make proposals across garden boundaries, making these irrelevant to wildlife through fence gaps, permeable hedges, aerial treetop routes and continuous habitat zones that traverse boundaries, while retaining privacy and security.

At the property scale, the designs make efficient use all available surfaces and space. This is especially evident in the balcony proposal, which fits multiple wildlife features into a small balcony, comprising balustrade planters, hanging baskets, window-mounted feeders, wall-mounted insect hotels and pocket planters. Similarly, the house and garden proposals maximise wildlife habitat in a restricted space. They incorporate existing features, adding green roofs to sheds, bin stores and house extensions, bat roosts in rooftops and chimneys, and planters on window sills. This extends to vertical surfaces, siting bird boxes on house walls, insect hotels on sheds and pocket planters on fences. Compact versions of habitats are advocated, including a mini meadow, mini pond and fruit trees.

Image 2. Balcony drawing. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân & Jon Moxon (with altered photos courtesy of JGade/Shutterstock, Alexander/Shutterstock, Piotr Siedlecki, Super.lukas).

Products can be chosen with size, materials and appearance suitable for a suburban context. For example, Rewild My Street suggests container ponds suitable for placing on a small patio. They can also target species that are urban specialists, as do the project's nest boxes for swifts, for example.

The project's designs show how the proposals will work for people as well as wildlife. The streetscape includes a play park, bicycle parking, seating and electric car bays. The gardens retain patio spaces for entertaining and lawns for play. Street habitats, such as hedges, trees and swales are intended to alleviate urban problems of air pollution, overheating and flood risk, as much as benefiting wildlife. Products, such as the cycle lock planter and the green-roofed bin store, combine solutions for nature with practical storage.

Image 3. Pattern drawing: green-roof bin store. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân Moxon & Viktoria Fenyes.

b. Species
Encouraging species diversity is a fundamental principle of rewilding, so designers should not seek to eliminate unpopular species. In any case, one cannot control which species the rewilding process will encourage. Nevertheless, urban greening should bring more balance, allowing species beyond the most adaptable opportunists to thrive.

Designers can suggest products and habitats that target popular species, although other species might take advantage. Rewild My Street's product suggestions include habitat boxes

for robins, swifts, sparrows, bats and bees, and hedgehog gaps, allowing people to target a favoured species, although these could be used by other animals. Conversely, there are no habitat boxes for pigeons, crows or gulls, although some polarising species are catered for, with provision for foxes under the shed. Planting is easier to control, and the project makes much use of popular species such as lavender, jasmine and poppies. However, these are combined with more divisive species, such as ivy. Nevertheless, nettles, dandelions and other plants considered weeds are absent to avoid alienating residents.

Image 4. Pattern drawing: wildlife gap. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân Moxon & Viktoria Fenyes.

c. Health and safety

Some level of health and safety risk is inherent in the natural world and should therefore be considered an inevitable part of making cities wilder. Unless there is a genuine risk of serious injury or death, this requires a common-sense approach, accepting a small level of risk to gain the benefits of being around nature. A sense of perspective is also useful: after all, there are no large predators roaming the UK.

Nevertheless, design can reduce some risks. Ponds can be designed with mesh covers or a restricted size to protect children from accidental drowning and Rewild My Street could be strengthened by adding design guidance on this. Wildlife can be deterred from entering the house. For example, the project's drawings show spaces for wildlife within the house, including an owl loft and bat tiles, separated from living spaces by solid construction; and wilder habitat areas, such as meadows, are generally located away from the house. The campaign's 'Wild Makeover Guide' shows wildlife gaps at limited sizes to prevent pet dogs escaping from owners' gardens and maintain the integrity of garden boundaries for security reasons. Products are included that keep pets safe, such as a timed cat-flap to keep cats in at night when they are more inclined to come into conflict with both wildlife and cars.

Image 5. Pattern drawing: bat loft. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân Moxon & Viktoria Fenyes.

d. Aesthetics

This is a difficult category to resolve: on the one hand, rewilding necessitates an imperfect aesthetic[48]; on the other, people's experience of nature is a key factor in making rewilding work in the city. For suburban rewilding to be a success it is vital to both be reasonable about the expectations put on residents and to sell them an aspirational vision. Some untidiness and seasonal decline is essential to achieve the aims of rewilding, from leaving decaying seed heads and log piles for hibernators to avoiding hedge cutting during the nesting season.

Design has a major role to play in balancing the realities of rewilding with residents' expectations of how their streets should look and feel, because the two cannot be fully reconciled. The unruly appearance of nature can be offset to an extent through contrast and containment. This approach is recommended in landscape architect Joan Nassauer's essay 'Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames', which advocates placing undesirable elements for ecology within neat frames to make them look intentional and hence be acceptable in a residential context. To achieve this, she suggests the inclusion of mown lawns, habitat boxes, bright flowers, trees, trimmed shrubs, rows of plants, architectural elements and low-level planting as a framework for suburban ecology[49]. Following these principles, Rewild My Street juxtaposes and defines wilder habitat areas like meadows with neat edging, such as a mown path, metal hoops or a clipped hedge at the street scale. At the property scale, a mown lawn is retained, habitat boxes feature strongly and architectural elements in the landscape – including fences, compost bins and sheds – have a strong geometry of straight lines. This approach is also applied at the scale of individual ecological features, for example a bee hotel where bamboo canes are tidied into a geometric cylinder. Care can also be taken in specifying attractive products: for instance, Rewild My Street includes Green + Blue's bee hotel and the Urbalive wormery, both contemporary in appearance. In terms of habitat, the project's proposals of green roofs, window boxes, hedges and trees could be said to improve the appearance of a street.

Image 6. Pattern drawing: meadow. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân & Jon Moxon.

As for the experience of nature, killing and death are integral to a healthy ecosystem, but unnecessary killing by pets should be restricted for the benefit of both wildlife and pet owners. To this end, Rewild My Street's 'pattern drawings' show wildlife features, such as nest boxes and feeders, located out of reach of cats to limit kills.

Image 7. Pattern drawing: cat kills. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân Moxon & Viktoria Fenyes.

In summary, design for suburban rewilding has much to offer on the themes of relevance and aesthetics, but can contribute little to those of health and safety or species without undermining its fundamental aims.

Using imagery to present an attractive vision

Given that the problem-solving stage of the design process cannot offer a full solution,

there is scope for drawings and other imagery to exaggerate positive and downplay negative associations with nature. Drawing is an integral part of the design process and architects have long used visual aids as a tool of persuasion, whether to win a design competition or secure planning approval. This service can usefully be extended to help conservation bodies enhance their message. Computer visuals, drawings and photographs commonly used to showcase architects' work all show a contrived version of reality to achieve their aim. Visualisation techniques are an effective way to engage city residents in design issues[50] and architectural drawings are a powerful tool for promoting the ideal of a biodiverse city[51]. Given that an architect's duty to 'consider the wider impact of [their] work'[52] would include the ecological crisis, it is imperative that architects capitalise on this to help residents visualise the benefits of rewilding.

An earlier paper by the author on the Rewild My Street project showed how engaging drawing methods – combining hand drawing, colour and simple annotation – were used to create vision drawings at a street scale[53]. New drawings have since been developed that zoom in to show design interventions at a larger scale. These include pattern drawings setting out principles for wildlife measures. These use similar techniques, but avoid any photo-realistic elements, instead using a more abstracted drawing style and pastel colours. The drawings are therefore becoming more idealised as they focus on greater detail, perhaps to avoid confronting reality.

Image 8. Vision drawings. Source: Rewild My Street, Siân & Jon Moxon & Victoria Fenyes (with altered photos courtesy of Charles J Sharp, Pau.artigas, Super.lukas, Didier Descouens, Ninjatacoshell, George Hodan, Piotr Siedlecki, Peter Mulligan, Potapov Alexander/Shutterstock).

a. Relevance of nature
The role of the vision drawings here is simply to show the design measures taken to address this theme by dealing with spatial constraints, integration with buildings and contextualisation[54]. There is no need for any dishonesty in the drawings, where the design

work has solved the issues. Both the vision and pattern drawings therefore show nature can be physically incorporated in the city. Both also strive to make it look suited to an urban context, which we discuss under aesthetics. Some enhancement is necessary in this regard, on the grounds of enabling nature to enrich the city and society. The pattern drawings help to break rewilding down into manageable tasks, while the vision drawings make clear how these small actions from individuals can accumulate across a street.

Supporting material, comprising monthly 'Wild Makeover' tips and the quick-start Wild Makeover Guide, echo this focus on simple actions. Some of the activities featured therein are intended to give instant results, such as planting a window box, or require minimal maintenance, such as making a log pile.

b. Species
The vision drawings were found to highlight a diversity of species, including polarising species but avoiding unpopular ones[55], which we have seen is likely to appeal to residents. The pattern drawings continue this approach, although particular bird species are hard to determine due to deliberate abstraction. The portrayal of the animals through drawing rather than photography enables them to be made cartoonish, cute and anthropomorphic to appeal to people. This is of course misleading, but residents will be aware that the animals are not intended to look real and the drawings are designed to be fun.

To supplement these drawings, the project has started to issue tips on topics such as living in harmony with foxes to help residents understand and accommodate animals that they might regard as a nuisance. There is certainly scope for the project to use more of this type of guidance, as we have seen that residents' concerns about species will not be solved by design.

c. Health and safety
The aerial-view vision drawing was found to imply health and wellbeing benefits by showing people playing, cycling, socialising and gardening outdoors, but the limitations of drawings to communicate this more clearly was noted[56]. Similarly, the pattern drawings have little to add in this area and do not include people, although their friendly portrayal of creatures such as bees and foxes might help convince people that they pose little threat. However, it could be said that the look of both drawing types, discussed further below, suggests a more sanitised and unthreatening environment than is in fact achievable.

Given this deception, and that we know design cannot make nature entirely safe, additional materials are needed to educate residents. The project largely relies on external guidance, accessed through its tips and website, to educate people on wildlife species, including those they might consider dangerous. However, its Wild Makeover Guide included a bee hotel for solitary bees, which it pointed out do not sting, and a 'New Year's Resolution' tip stressed the importance of contact with nature for one's own wellbeing.

d. Aesthetics
It was noted that the vision drawings depict rewilding as neat and attractive, using simple outlines, greenery and colour for planting and landscape features[57]. Drawn lines are used to emphasize the orderly structural elements of the garden – such as buildings, fences, habitat boxes and clipped hedges – while looser planting and trees are typically shown with only colour photomontage to soften the untidy edges. The pattern drawings give a

slightly more organic appearance, using undulating drawn outlines for both plants and architecture, and muted colours. Both drawing types are careful not to show too much unruly planting in proportion to the built context.

Such rationalism reflects the design approach of using orderly elements to frame and contrast with wilder areas, so is achievable to a degree. However, while built elements will consistently provide this structure, planted hedges, cannot realistically do so all year round without preventing flowering for pollinators, or disturbing nest sites and limiting berries for birds. Besides, even the wild areas this structure frames do not appear particularly naturalistic. Long grass and meadows, which would in reality collapse in the rain, stand upright. Similarly, trees, meadows and other plants are always shown in full bloom or fruit, although these occurrences might not actually coincide. In short, the drawings show all planting at its peak for artistic effect. This is of course misleading, but arguably justified by their purpose to promote the idea of rewilding and showcase its potential based on its optimum appearance. Residents can reasonably be expected to know that the appearance and qualities of plants change throughout the year.

The photography used in the project's monthly tips continues this misdirection, having changed from using amateur to mainly professional photographs for the sake of appearance. However, the tips have included a suggestion to 'do nothing' at appropriate times of the year and use Blue Campaign's blue heart symbol to signpost rewilded areas when they are not looking their best. This is a useful strategy to indicate to neighbours that wild areas are intentional and cared for when design fails to do so.

Discussion: holistic solutions for urban rewilding

Rewild My Street's approach shows that design can offer solutions to making rewilding attractive to suburban residents by taking account of residents' contrasting attitudes to the key themes identified. Clearly, design has much to offer in making nature relevant to the city and moderating the aesthetics of rewilding. However, it should not and cannot do much to address either unwanted species or health and safety fears, which are a necessary consequence of rewilding. Moreover, there is an inherent tension between the aesthetics of rewilding and expectations of suburbia, which cannot be fully overcome by design.

Rewild My Street shows that drawings can help to downplay residents' concerns and highlight their counter-arguments to promote rewilding. The project imagery deliberately paints an idealised, tamed vision of nature in suburbia that is neat, aesthetically pleasing and unthreatening. This arguably deceptive use of design skills is deemed necessary to serve a worthy aim for city residents to immerse themselves as much in nature's frisson of danger as in its tranquillity. Besides, it merely strengthens a marketing tradition that all conservation organisations must deploy to advocate their cause.

So, in the interests of both completeness and ethics, design measures and promotional drawings need to be supported by guidance. This eases a conflict between the visionary and educational motives of the project, which simultaneously seeks to inspire residents to act and to help them understand the consequences. This supporting information should be honest and offer full disclosure to avoid misleading and ultimately disappointing residents, and help them navigate the conflicts nature brings. Advice should include signposting wild areas in acceptance that they will not always meet aesthetic expectations.

In summary, a holistic approach is called for, combining design, presentation drawings and supporting guidance. Design should attempt to solve perceived problems, but its limitations should be acknowledged, particularly where these might undermine the rewilding process itself. Designers should use drawings to highlight helpful design solutions and should be unashamed to use them to show rewilding in its best light. Drawings are critical to convince suburban residents of the value of rewilding, but supporting educational information is needed to provide further detail on these and clarify the realities of rewilding. Since its full launch in summer 2018, Rewild My Street has attracted 800 website subscribers and over 2000 social media followers (despite its academic basis meaning it lacks a dedicated marketing budget or resources), demonstrating this approach can be effective.

Conclusion: Making rewilding happen in the city

Admittedly, resident perceptions of rewilding cannot be entirely reconciled in suburban settings. Yet the many benefits rewilding would bring for people and wildlife override the need to agonise over this, and designers can feel entitled to choreograph perceptions to enable the transformation. Once rewilding is implemented, it is hoped city residents would appreciate reconnecting with nature and the contradictory reactions it provokes. In the meantime, design that takes account of reasonable resident concerns will make the transition more palatable.

Notes

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