

SuDS in Somerset



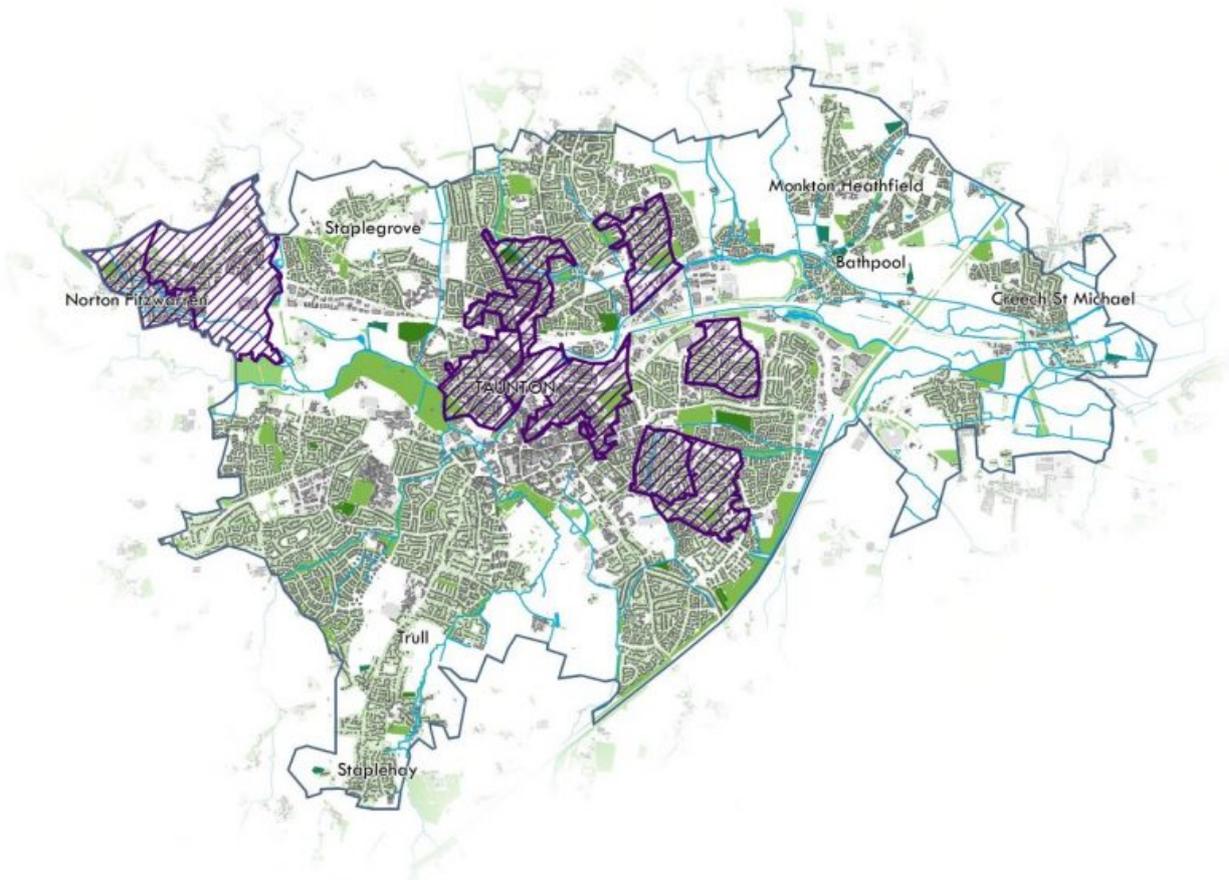
The Somerset Pilot of SPONGE 2020 is creating a network of community co-created Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) across Somerset's largest town, Taunton. These SuDS features will reduce the risk of surface water flooding while delivering multiple other benefits, including reduced risk of water pollution, habitats for wildlife and green spaces for people to enjoy. Each of the features is co-designed and co-created with the local people, with each one tailored to meet the needs and values of the community. The pilot is led by Somerset County Council and Westcountry Rivers Trust.

Where are we working?

Taunton has a population of 65,000 and is growing rapidly. It has been awarded Garden Town status, meaning that the growth of the town over the next few years should be complimented by an enhanced network of green infrastructure. In addition, the impact of development on flood risk is a concern for communities across Somerset, including Taunton, following severe and prolonged flooding in 2012 and 2013/14.

Unlike some of the other pilots in SPONGE2020, Somerset did not have a single pilot site identified at the start of the project. This allowed the project team to undertake a strategic assessment, including [reviewing existing SuDS provision across Somerset](#) and [identifying opportunities](#) for the installation of multi-benefit SuDS in Taunton.

By assessing data including availability of green space, flooding, aesthetics, habitats and air quality, we have identified a number of target areas that have the highest need or biggest opportunities for improvement.



What

Working with a range of different stakeholders across Taunton, the Somerset Pilot team is now working to install a network of small-scale co-created SuDS solutions across Taunton. We are working with schools, residential areas and car parks to store rainwater and greenify

Delivered projects:

Demonstration Raingardens: This was the first project to deliver interventions under the Somerset SPONGE pilot. Funded by Wessex Water and the Somerset Rivers Authority, 4 raingarden planters were delivered with residents in two residential areas, disconnecting rainwater from downpipes and creating mini gardens.



Community Raingardens: This project is working to install interventions on 4 different sites, including a nature reserve, schools and residential area, supported by educational events, co-creation workshops and engagement activities.



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Ingenious – 5W: Working with a group of engineers, we organised educational visits and activities in two primary schools to engage young people, especially girls, with engineering as a way of solving environmental problems. The activities focused on understanding the urban water cycle and the pupils and their parents helped to design and plant SuDS features in the school grounds.



County Hall Car Park: We are in the starting phase of the implementation of an exemplary SuDS on a parking lot. The parking lot will be redeveloped with a sustainable water drainage system, like swales, retention ponds and raingardens. Momentarily questionnaires are being held and designs made. Those should help foster discussion with important stakeholders.



Who are we working with?

The Somerset Pilot is being led by Somerset County Council, the regional government, and Westcountry Rivers Trust, a non-governmental organisation and charity.

Throughout the pilot we have worked with a wide range of stakeholders.

Local stakeholders are key to implementing small-scale solutions. It is important to involve local people with choosing the location, style, purpose and maintenance requirements, as this will ensure the project is able to go ahead smoothly and will be looked after in the longer term. Collaboration with local people can also ensure that the schemes provide multiple benefits which are important for local people, such as attracting wildlife, providing space for children to play, and bringing colour into an urban area.

In the Somerset pilot we have worked with local volunteer groups, residents' associations, local authorities, environmental charities and schools to collaborate on implementing sustainable drainage solutions with multiple benefits for the community.

Collaborative efforts were made with professional stakeholders to secure funding for the activities. The work supports and complements the priorities of the regional water company, Wessex Water, and the Somerset Rivers Authority, a regional authority focusing on preventing flooding in Somerset. Work was also done together with researchers at local universities to help increasing efficiency and to support educational activities with local schools and communities.

Approach

In the Somerset pilot, we work with stakeholders throughout the development and construction of each SuDS system. We take the following approach:

1. We work with stakeholders at a professional and local level to identify candidate sites in and around our target areas which will provide benefits for both flood prevention and other issues important to local

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people. This stage may include meetings, workshops, site visits, reviewing existing data & evidence and collaborative mapping.

2. The early stages of the project are often complemented by educational activities. Many people are not aware of how urban water is managed, and the issues associated with surface water runoff. School visits, talks, and attending community meetings or events can be a good way to share these messages and gain a greater support of the work.

3. We then hold co-creation events to gather ideas, thoughts and opinions to feed into the design of the SuDS features. Often, stakeholders will have thoughts on the materials used, the types of plants included, the accessibility and the maintenance requirements. At this stage we use engagement techniques such as design workshops, visiting the site, attending existing community meetings and events, school visits, demonstrations of possible design elements, and creating visualisations of different options.



4. We then use professional consultants and contractors to create the technical design and build the structure of the SuDS system. We keep stakeholders informed of progress

5. The formal construction phase is followed up by action days and celebration events with local people to complete planting and other design features. By involving people in the creation of the SuDS system.



6. Throughout the process, we use social media, engagement videos and the [project website](#) to keep stakeholders up-to-date on the project.