

BRENTWOOD SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SCHOOL SALE, MANCHESTER, UK

Kier Construction Northern – Client Trafford Council

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Small scale permanent award

Project overview

This project was a Special Educational Needs School, in Sale, Trafford, the area is suburban and the site was located within a small housing estate on a brownfield site. The project value was £9million, and the build was to provide new school facilities for 150 pupils with varying learning and physical disabilities on a site footprint of 3,500m² over a period of 16months.

The environmental project was to create a nature garden within the grounds for the children to benefit from outdoor learning. The construction of the garden took place over a week, and time was volunteered from 4 Kier Staff, 2 Groundworkers and 2 Joiners. The cost of the project was minimal as we used waste materials from the site construction and items such as birdhouses were handmade by members of the project team.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The school had an old football pitch at the back of the site boundary which was being used as a playing field, there were two small clusters of cherry trees and as part of the site works we created two sensory gardens, one with a water feature.

Were there any specific reasons that led to this project?

The headmistress had mentioned that the school were thinking of using a few trees located within the site boundary as an outdoor learning area for the children. During the construction of the school we recognised an opportunity to make use of waste materials. We used these to create the features of the Garden, to leave a lasting legacy for the new school and the pupils of Brentwood.



'Bug hotel' made using recycled pallets and waste materials e.g. bricks, pipes and surplus carpet tiles

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

This project could easily be replicated on another construction site as all the materials we used are found on every project and the costs were very low. Maintenance of the garden is minimal, however we installed a gravel path to prevent the area from becoming overgrown and we used durable materials to prevent deterioration over time. Bug hotels and bird boxes may not be considered innovative, but we created the area with the intention of the school using it for outdoor learning, and the headmistress commented that she was now going to train staff for this purpose.

A new habitat has been created for bugs and beetles, bird boxes will attract nesting birds to the area and planted areas will attract bees and other pollinators, creating a net gain in biodiversity. The local Biodiversity Action Plan for Manchester aims to 'be teaching all our schoolchildren about the value of nature in the city' and we believe this project will contribute towards this and Objectives 3 and 4 of the plan regarding ownership of the environment and biodiversity. A toolbox talk was given to supervisors on the benefit of enhancing biodiversity and our intended benefits of the project were discussed with the school teachers. We reused pallets, waste timber, cable drums, and left over plants and gravel to create the garden, different trades volunteered to make bird boxes and planters, to install the new stoned up path and to paint the different components.



'Toadstool' seating and planter created by painting waste cable drums

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancement

Further information

Throughout the project we collected any waste or leftover materials which we thought would be of use for the garden, these included : cable drums, timber, pallets, plants, stones, bricks, cable off cuts, spare carpet tiles, pipework, plant pots and plastic ductwork. Over a week we weeded the area chosen for the garden, assembled the bug hotel with all the materials we collected, built several bird boxes, painted the cable drums to resemble toadstools and arranged them as table and chairs, built planters on top of the bug hotel and the larger cable drum and added foliage finally we laid a stoned up path to ensure the children could safely access and exit the area.

The long term benefits with this scheme will be increased biodiversity, the knowledge gained from the pupils when learning in the garden and an awareness of the environment gained from those involved and the rest of the site team. In the future we could consider using pupils to help us create the garden, however this was not possible on this project as it was a live construction site and the nature of the children at the school would have incurred health and safety risks.

The project team and sub-contractors were all proactive in bringing materials and ideas for the garden, we felt that the creation of the garden was a real collaborative effort and everyone was extremely proud of the finished product.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

I was aware the school had to apply for grants to fund the construction project and that they would appreciate all the voluntary work we had done, and I know the enjoyment that nature can bring to children. I thoroughly enjoyed this challenge and wouldn't hesitate to do it again.



Stoned entrance leading to nature garden, creating a safe and low maintenance pathway