

**WHATRIGGS PRIMARY SCHOOL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE  
KILMARNOCK, EAST AYRSHIRE  
MORRISON CONSTRUCTION & EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Community Engagement**

### **Project overview**

Whatriggs Primary School and Early Childhood Centre merges the primary schools of Kirkstyle and Bellfield into a new campus, providing sustainable modern facilities for local schoolchildren. Key aspects of biodiversity and community included a natural landscaping strategy, pupil engagement throughout construction and a legacy project with the John Muir Award.

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

The site of the new school was previously used as a public park and primarily consisted of a low diversity amenity grassland. Directly adjacent to the school lies the Bellfield estate, a historic park that used to belong to three wealthy Buchanan sisters and was later donated to the local council in 1875. This historic park has been neglected and run down since the 1950s. Morrison Construction project team identified Bellfield estate as an opportunity to help local community better access and make use of this fantastic greenspace which in its heyday even used to include a walled garden.

### **What were the reasons behind this project?**

This Design and Build project allowed Morrison Construction to identify key opportunities to add value and optimise design without compromising quality. Our approach of going far beyond contracted requirements in social, economic and environmental contributions was not an obligation, it was simply a case of 'doing the right thing'. Even after the school handover, the project team continues their involvement through a legacy project at the Bellfield estate, bringing together pupils of the new school and the wider community. This project was not subject to BREEAM and did not have any specific planning conditions related to biodiversity.



*External play area with felled logs and native planting.*



*Pupils on a site visit checking for the activity at the bug hotel.*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Pupils from both Bellfield and Kirkstyle primary schools took part in monthly Whatriggs Community Press Pack site visits throughout the construction phase, reporting findings in joint newsletters. This was used by Morrison Construction to bring pupils together prior to integrating two schools. Each visit included pupils interviewing the construction team on the progress of the building work and checking up on activity at the bug hotel in the dedicated viewing area. The pupils were also treated to a surprise visitor – a fox with a young cub, who were spotted on the site's CCTV by the construction team.

The entire landscaping strategy was reworked to incorporate modern thinking on external learning and play. Landscaping plans include wildflower meadows and natural felled logs as key playground furniture. The landscaping was selected to be sympathetic to local biodiversity, as well as enhancing pupil outdoor learning experience and providing an opportunity to connect with nature. Building the new school has created space for a community garden which includes large planters for use as growing space.

Morrison Construction continued a legacy project in the adjacent Bellfield estate after the school completion in June 2017. The team engaged with the John Muir Award, which is an inclusive environmental awards scheme encouraging people to connect and to care for wild places. Through discussions, the project for pupils was designed around the communication on the natural and historic importance of the Bellfield estate. QR codes were developed for siting along the woodland path to inform the park users about the local importance of this park. Three monkey puzzle trees were also donated to the park as a legacy by the project team and represent the three Buchanan sisters.



*Official opening ceremony of the woodland path with QR codes on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018 (Photo: Caitlin Quinn).*

### Further information

This project has been a true stakeholder and community engagement from design through to post-construction realising benefits for pupils to connect with nature and inspire imaginative learning. The natural landscaping strategy has greatly enhanced biodiversity opportunities in the local suburban area. Morrison Construction's obligation was to develop and conclude the design, building in efficiency and economy where possible. This was achieved by re-assessing stakeholder needs which not only touched on biodiversity, but also wider sustainability aspects. Key to this success was the willingness to work closely with the client, to discuss and consider any proposals that could improve and enhance the design for the benefit of the end user. Morrison Construction also wanted to create a landscape that the pupils would take ownership of. This was achieved by organising a pupil design competition, with the winning entry permanently embedded as the soft play surface. Ideas such as this competition and the Press Pack visits can easily be replicable on similar projects elsewhere. A John Muir Awards legacy project on Bellfield estate consisting of developing an informative woodland pathway with QR codes is an innovative way to engage and educate wider public on local heritage. Pupils have input by developing the codes and the information behind these codes. This idea could be used elsewhere in an environmental engagement project with very little costs associated with implementation. An additional legacy project for the community comprised a refurbished grass football pitch complete with new drainage in the heart of the Bellfield estate.

### Project Team

- Client - East Ayrshire Council
- Design team - Keppie Design, Ramboll UK & Hirst Landscaping

### What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The goal was set to exceed minimum contracted targets on community benefits and to establish a model of Best Practice in delivering social and economic benefits, as well as environmental benefits which would impact beyond construction and create a meaningful legacy for the wider community to enjoy.



*Pupils study the bug hotel with project manager David Wright.*



*Pathway from the new school leading to the Bellfield estate. Wall on the right is part of the historic walled garden.*