

## WESTQUAY WATERMARK SOUTHAMPTON

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BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement

### Project overview

We worked with various members of the WestQuay Watermark project team to **completely redevelop the local St. John's Primary School garden and playground.** The project re-used many site materials to create interesting environments and helped raise awareness of biodiversity as an issue among the pupils, their parents, the school staff and the wider community. Through increasing the biodiversity, wildlife is expected to return to the garden.

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

The Year R garden and playground had become overgrown and uninteresting, with some plants unwieldy and showing signs of dying off. Biodiversity was limited, with minimal wildlife present.

### Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

The project came about through ongoing engagement activities between the project team and the school. The school Eco Club visited the site to help with the establishment of the Site Garden and were shown around the project.

The school then asked us if we could help with a revamp of its Year R garden which had become difficult to manage, and provided limited learning opportunities for the pupils.

The programme was to carry out the refurbishment within the February 2016 half term holiday.



*The Year R garden before the project. Biodiversity was limited and it attracted minimal wildlife.*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The plan was to carry out the clearance of old planted beds and introduce the new design within the February 2016 half term holiday. Our Sustainability Manager led a team of seven labourers and one carpenter on the project, with all time and materials donated free of charge.

The design aimed to provide the children with a place to explore and learn through the items provided and the tactile nature of the materials used. One of the key objectives was to be **as sustainable as possible, with an emphasis on 'upcycling'** and using unwanted materials from the construction site in innovative ways.

Features of the school garden:

- Drainage pipes were used for planters and tunnels.
- Scaffold planks were used for seats, storage areas and simple see-saw.
- A sensory garden area was created and a free planting area for the children to plant their own seeds including nasturtiums, vegetables and sunflowers.
- Bamboo from the existing garden was split down and put in planters to avoid further spreading and a tunnel was created for a further fun experience.
- Sleepers that had been used for a retaining wall were upcycled to create a stage for performing.
- The soil was replaced in part with bark chips from a local tree surgeon, and for the **'mud garden' play grade top soil was provided. Shingle from site was used for** a sensory experience around the area of rosemary, lavender, and herbs.
- A boot/welly rack was constructed adjacent to the kitchen area.



*Upcycled 'welly rack'*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken? (contd.)

The biodiversity gain will be achieved through the plants used: herbs, lavender, rosemary, saxifrage providing pollination opportunities to passing bees. The seasonal benefits of the vegetable patch will provide additional opportunities.

Key to safeguarding the biodiversity benefit provided by the project was ensuring that the long-term maintenance of the garden was manageable so that it did not become overgrown and unsafe to use as a learning experience for the pupils.

### How would you best describe the project?

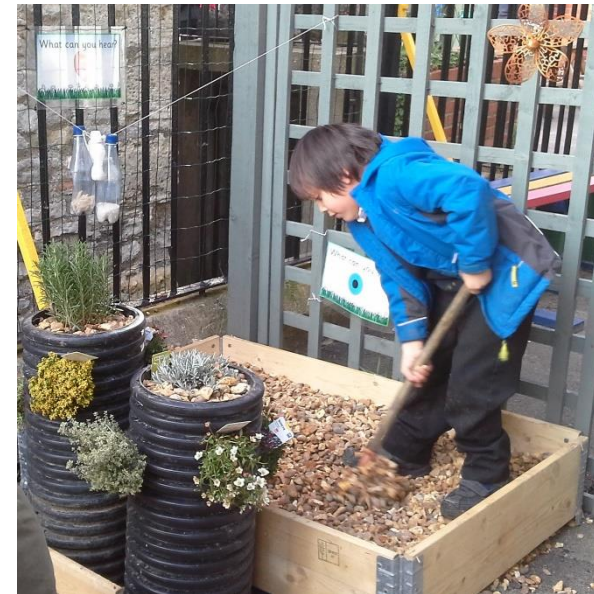
A showcase for upcycling and the reuse of excess site materials, this initiative has enhanced a previously uninspiring playground into a biodiverse and fun environment for pupils to enjoy. The project also raised awareness and understanding of the issue of biodiversity among the children their parents and school staff.

### Further information

There were constraints due to the site being in a local conservation area and the presence of listed buildings above and below ground. Following consultation with Kevin White, Southampton City Council Conservation Officer, the main constraint was for no excavations as there are vaults beneath the school and playground.

### Tips for other schemes:

- Agree the budget, timescales, design and layout with all parties ahead of work commencing, with some scope for innovation and change as works progress.
- Utilise the input from teachers and remember who will ultimately be using the garden.
- Ensure that the future maintenance team are engaged so that the garden can be sustained.
- Develop task and contacts list for materials delivery and removal.
- Identify hours of working and access and security (including access to any welfare).
- Determine need for DBS checks.
- The labour team must be keen and interested – often the best ideas came from those working on site.
- Plan a photo opportunity with agreement of parents so the activity can be suitably recorded.



*Pupils exploring their new garden*

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

As part of our ongoing engagement with the local school, we wanted to provide pupils with a more suitable and exciting outdoor space which increased biodiversity, attracting more wildlife to the garden, and provided additional interest and learning opportunities.