

Waitrose Malmesbury Reserve

Malmesbury, Wiltshire

Waitrose

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Large scale permanent

Project overview

The project is a new Waitrose store on the edge of a small town close to the River Avon. The site area is 2.34 ha and comprised a single arable field with some boundary hedges and trees.

The development at completion comprises a new store and service yard, a car park and vehicular, pedestrian and cycle access with landscaped grounds.

The location of the store is in a visually sensitive location and the stored was screened by earth bunds with naturalistic planting and wildflower planting.

Waitrose through its Responsible Development Framework sought to further enhance the biodiversity value of the site beyond that required by the planning consent.

The development has created approx 0.5 ha of wildflower and tree and shrub planting, with the inclusion of bat boxes, house sparrow boxes, and a bespoke swift tower.

The cost of the additional biodiversity enhancements are estimated to be no more



WAITROSE MALMESBURY WILDLIFE AREA

This area is being managed for the benefit of wildlife and is not open to the public.

We have planted the area with a tussocky grass and wildflower mix and are providing habitats for insects and birds through the planting of shrubs and trees.

The majority of the plants are native species and have been chosen for their benefits to insects, birds and small mammals.

We have also installed a swift tower. Swifts are a declining species of bird, which is partly due to lack of suitable nesting sites. In the breeding season audio speakers on the tower will play swift calls for a short period in the morning and evening to attract swifts into the nests. Once they have successfully nested they are likely to return each year.

Around the site are also a number of bird boxes for species such as sparrows, robins and owls. Bat boxes have also been installed in some of the mature trees around the site.

The wildlife area is being managed on behalf of Waitrose by volunteers from the Malmesbury Valley Rivers Trust (MVRT).

If you have any questions regarding the wildlife area please contact the Branch Manager or MVRT.

Waitrose

Photo: Interpretation board

than £5,000. The team that made this happen comprised the Waitrose Construction Project Manger, John Lewis Partnership Sustainable Development Manager, a consultant ecologist, the building contractor, Dr Mark Avey the former Director of Conservation at RSPB who provided challenge and independently commented on the scheme, and the involvement of local conservation group the Malmesbury River Valley Trust.

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

Prior to development the site comprised a single large arable field of maize.

A small clump of scrub was present in the centre of the field and it was fringed by mixed tree and shrub planting and hedgerows.

It was considered by independent ecologists and conservationists to be of low biodiversity value.

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

The main driver for enhancement was the John Lewis Partnership's Responsible Development Framework (RDF).

All efforts are made to achieve the highest sustainability ratings, in this case the development achieved BREEAM Excellent. One element of the RDF is to minimise biodiversity loss and maximise gain such that Waitrose achieves no-net-loss of Biodiversity as a result of its actions.

This is part of Waitrose's commitment to delivering sustainable development. Note that the developer, Simons, was responsible for meeting all planning criteria, Waitrose went over and above but worked with the developer.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

It was established through ecology surveys and independent commentators that the original site, as an intensely farmed monoculture arable plot, had little biodiversity value.

Therefore the objective was create a more diverse habitat that was in-keeping with the surrounding landscape and would complement two existing and nearby nature reserves under the management of the Malmesbury River Valley Trust.

A workshop of consultants, developers, ecologists, conservationists and local



Photo: Volunteers

representatives was held to a plan that resulted in: the creation of a mixed habitat that included native scrub and woodland, native wildflower grassland area, native long grass and tall herb habitat and the provision of wildlife installations including house sparrow and bat boxes and a swift tower.

The approved landscape planting plans were scrutinised by the consultant ecologist and where possible non-native species were replaced with native and non-native species known to be invasive or to have the potential to become invasive were removed.

Waitrose then engaged with and involved the Malmesbury River Valley

Trust (MRVT) and asked them to work with the branch team to look after the on-going management of the site and provide local knowledge to help develop it further as it matures.

Waitrose also employed a landscape designer to help create a management plan and guide for the volunteers of the MRVT to use and provides an annual budget for additional planting and/or further wildlife installations as required.

The bund screening the store has been constructed from excavated material on site. This has allowed subsoils from on-site to be retained and used as a low nutrient planting medium for the wildflower meadow areas. This also meant that no soil left the site as a result of the development.

The process is repeatable and has been applied by Waitrose at a number of new stores. It is innovative in that it seeks to go one step beyond the minimum agreed through the planning process.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The landscaping and planting of the site were completed in early 2015 and have already started to mature. The swift tower was installed in 2014 and the in-built swift call speakers have been in use this spring, where swifts have been seen flying around the tower but not yet using it for nesting.

An objective assessment of the change in biodiversity value has not yet been completed (the project is only 6 mths on following completion), but initial benefits include significant increase in wildflowers on site, a subsequent increase in invertebrate and bird activity compared to the original state of the site.

The MRVT volunteers provide regular updates and there is a plan to carry out a 'bioblitz' of the site in 2016. Outside scrutiny from recognised wildlife expert, Dr Mark Avery



Photo: Tree planting on bund

demonstrated that Waitrose is not prepared to sit in a comfortable zone talking to itself. By engaging Dr Avery Waitrose ensured the personnel and consultants working on the project were challenged and pushed to achieve better results at all times.

An interpretation board was erected for the community to understand how the site was being managed and the biodiversity objectives. Lesson learnt Early engagement between Waitrose and the main developer makes it easier to achieve biodiversity gain at little extra cost to the overall development.

Waitrose are aware of the value of early engagement and are working internally to ensure land procurement teams understand the importance of thinking about biodiversity as early in the

planning stage Engagement with local communities and groups is low cost but can result in significant benefits beyond habitat creation. Standard landscape schemes can be significantly amended to improve them for wildlife and reduce risks from invasive plants

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Waitrose has an established Responsible Development Framework programme and is committed at all levels to achieving the highest standard of sustainable development.

This includes everything from energy reduction, to greater levels of recycling, to enhancing biodiversity and pro-active community engagement. It's the Waitrose Way of working.