

NW Bicester Eco Town Exemplar – Phase 1 & 2

Bicester, Oxfordshire

Willmott Dixon Housing Ltd

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Small scale permanent

Project overview

The project includes the delivery of the first 91 houses and the infrastructure for the UK's first Eco Town.

The project was designed in line with the previous governments Planning Policy Statement 1, which means the finished development will be “Zero Carbon”, resilient to climate change and designed to lifetime homes standard with high energy efficiency.

Importantly, with regard this challenge, it has been designed to provide 50% green space and a net gain in biodiversity.

This will be achieved by creating new varied habitats which will include a variety of SUDS, green/biodiverse roofs, species rich grassland, woodland and orchard planting. Bird, bat and invertebrate accommodation will also be installed.

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

The site is a greenfield site. The fields were previously species-poor semi-improved neutral grassland.



Photo: Invertebrate house

There were no statutory or non-statutory designated sites within or adjacent to the site boundary. There is a seasonally dry stream, a number of trees and hedges and a badger sett.

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

As described above there are a number of biodiversity enhancements to be provided specifically to fulfil our contractual obligations & discharge planning conditions – however these are not the enhancements we are submitting for this challenge. As a company Willmott Dixon is always striving to do more than simply what is required.

Therefore the enhancements described have been done as extras over & above what is required by the design, so that every opportunity is taken to give wildlife a home during the construction period, not just when the project is complete.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

A couple of trees and branches on site had to be removed to allow the construction of a new road. Rather than have the logs that were produced taken offsite as a waste they were used to create 3 log piles and two areas of standing deadwood.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

These were all placed in varying degrees of dappled shade, in protected parts of the site where they would not be disturbed.

Two students on work experience from a nearby construction college helped with the placement of the piles and digging the standing wood in, they learnt about the types of species onsite that we are protecting & also simple measures they could take to encourage and protect wildlife.

Another item made from a material that would otherwise have become a waste was an invertebrate and solitary bee home. This was made out of a tree guard that was no longer required which was then stuffed with twigs, hollow stems and some dry grass and placed in a small tree in a hedgerow.

These actions could be easily replicated & I think the use of the no longer required tree-guard is an innovative way to re-use a potential waste.

To promote the actions we have taken to staff and the local community we had some signage made up with photos of the enhancements



Photo: Standing wood

on & these were placed in the main site compound and at the site entrance.

As a further ongoing project the site has also set up an incentive for site staff to record any wildlife they see on site on the “iRecord” website or “iRecord Ladybirds”/“iRecord Butterflies” apps.

The idea behind this is that the records will help build a picture of the local wildlife that can be left as a legacy to residents and continue to be built upon.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

Each of the enhancements made was from readily available materials, so the same or similar could be easily replicated on similar sites.

The log piles could provide habitat for invertebrates, perches or display points for birds as well as becoming a substrate for mosses, lichen & fungi for many years with very little if any maintenance required.

All of the deadwood could also provide much needed habitat for the declining BAP species the Stag Beetle. What I have taken away from this, is that if it is necessary to prune

branches or even remove trees entirely then every effort should be made to use the resulting logs to create some new area of habitat elsewhere on site. Removal as a waste, in most cases is unnecessary, as well as a missed opportunity.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

I am an environmentalist at heart, I hate waste and I am a staunch believer in protecting and improving the habitats already in situ on sites, as well as “building” new ones. I want the Bicester Eco Town project to be as good as it can be.



Photo: Log pile