

Millbrook Pond SOS ('Save Our Species')

King's Mill Hospital, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

Skanska UK

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement

Project overview

Millbrook pond is a small patch of urban green space located behind a public car park at King's Mill Hospital, adjacent to the Millbrook Mental Health Unit. Skanska have had a presence on-site for over a decade; having first re-developed this large acute hospital under PFI to offer state-of-the-art facilities serving the needs of local people, and now providing the site with a fully integrated estates management service. In 2016, Skanska and the Hospital Trust identified some external hospital areas for improvement, including re-laying the concrete slabs of the path leading to Millbrook. Skanska immediately saw an opportunity to give the area a much-needed overhaul. An 'SOS call' for volunteers was promptly answered by the Skanska site team, other hospital service providers, subcontractors, the Trust, and the local community. Skanska provided £1,000 to cover essential costs, with a further £1,100 donated in-kind by partners.

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

The area is publically accessible via paving leading down from the car park, but due to its location and lack of signage, it had remained inconspicuous. Its surroundings were overgrown and littered, with site users using it chiefly as a smoking spot. The area's main feature, the pond, is fed by a naturally occurring spring. Through neglect, the pond was choked with duckweed, and its fresh water supply was diverted by detritus. The adjacent areas were overgrown with dense brambles and unmanaged hedgerows.

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

The regeneration of the Millbrook pond area was not brought on by any contractual nor legislative mandate. Skanska and its collaborating partners were inspired by a collective vision to



Volunteers clearing duck weed from the overflowing and stagnant pond during 'Living Our Values' week.

regenerate the site for the benefit of both wildlife and people. Skanska's annual 'Living Our Values' week was held in April 2016. The biodiversity enhancement of Millbrook pond clearly fit with the Skanska 'Care for Life' value, and our team deemed it the perfect opportunity to kick-start these efforts. Skanska's ultimate purpose is 'We build for a better society', and this was one of the drivers to carry out the work. The project's scope expanded as more people got involved, with clear positive results.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Key features were installed to increase resources for the local ecology; these included bird boxes, hibernacula and raised planters integrating native flowers, and removal of bracken “**monoculture**” to liberate the natural seed bank. In addition, improvements to local hydrology led to the regeneration of the pond.

Skanska used the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric on the project. Due to the urban nature of the site, opportunities for the creation of new habitat are limited. Nevertheless, Skanska were able to demonstrate net gain through improvements to the condition of habitats present. This was done by clearing the pond and overgrowth to improve the flow of the natural spring and allow natural light to penetrate, creating heterogeneous habitat. Consequently, a greater variety of flowering plants and associated invertebrates are becoming re-established, the latter boosted by the progressive installation of hibernacula. Overall, our project was able to mirror the Nottinghamshire BAP goals by:

- Increasing habitat for pollinators
- Creating an island of connectivity to mitigate fragmentation
- Utilising natural and recycled materials in hibernacula and raised planters
- Engaging local communities, including school children, staff, and patients
- Bringing expert advice into decision making – an ecologist available to sense-check each decision
- Legal compliance – Skanska’s Environmental Advisor on hand throughout

This is an exemplar project for integrating biodiversity and community investment, and has already inspired our other contracts around the UK. Despite the **site’s** small size, this ongoing initiative will continue to reap benefits long into the future for hospital users and the wider community. Interest is so high in the project that formal maintenance management of the area is not necessary. There is a list of tasks to complete each month and there is never a shortage of volunteers. From duckweed removal to more creative utilisation of the space such as wildlife-themed poetry, local communities are taking true inspiration from the area.



A fantastic example of a ‘What does wildlife mean to you?’ poem from one of Dalestorth Primary School pupils.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The engagement we are most proud of to date is the visit by 29 pupils from Dalestorth Primary School. We provided them with an activity-packed day that was engaging, hands-on, and replicable in their own school setting. Activities included recycling old tyres into raised planters, wildlife spotting, and bug hunting. The day culminated in a competition for the best pupil-designed bird box, with all entries now installed around the pond.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

Skanska always aimed to go beyond our remit of facilities management, by providing **additional benefits for the site's service users from a health, wellbeing, and nature conservation perspective**. Through pro-active engagement with the Trust, supply chain, and the local community, together, we have produced a tangible outcome to be proud of. Utilising the varied skillset of 40 volunteers (who have donated over 140 hours of their time to date), this collective effort has led to our initial objectives being greatly exceeded. Craig Young, General Manager for Central Nottinghamshire Hospitals plc, said: **"we were delighted to support Skanska in this initiative and alongside colleagues from Medirest, Skanska Facilities Services, the Trust and some of Skanska's suppliers, the works were completed and the area much improved"**. Since our SOS call was first answered, footfall near the pond has increased, people have gained a sense of ownership, and littering has decreased. With more visitors to the area, reports of birds, insects, and amphibians are rising. Furthermore, staff from the neighbouring Mental Health Unit want to use the site to deliver eco-therapy sessions to complement their rehabilitation programmes.

The educational benefit of the site also continues to grow; Dalestorth Primary School are keen to return for curriculum enrichment, and local college students will soon be practicing their construction and joinery skills to build further hibernacula to act as habitat stepping stones. Skanska have also engaged the local Wildlife Trust to undertake surveys and install interpretation boards. All this will be enshrined in a Local Biodiversity Action Plan, with an aim to apply our Natural Capital Accounting Tool to quantify the social benefit of our good work. Key learnings for similar initiatives being rolled-out elsewhere are: **to get 'stuck in' as early as possible, recognise and seize opportunities, and never underestimate people's enthusiasm to add value to a project**. Starting early, starting strong, and tapping into the collective can-do in the community will definitely pay off!



The area before and after the first hibernaculum was built.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Initially, to turn a former 'grot spot' into a beautiful and biodiversity-rich space that contributes to the relaxation and recuperation of staff, patients and visitors whilst encouraging wildlife. Currently, to promote the working group of on-site champions to keep up conservation efforts. Long-term, to help site users and the wider public understand, appreciate, and respect the **site's** natural capital. And ultimately, to deliver to our purpose: we build for a better society.



The pond prior to any improvements taking place.



Volunteers from Skanska, the Hospital Trust and Dalestorth Primary School smiling together after a great day getting wet and wild!



Pupils planting 'Bleeding heart' dicentras in one of the recycled raised planters.



Pupils witnessing the marvels of pond ecology first-hand.



The bird boxes decorated by the pupils to attract feathered friends to Millbrook.



New bird homes installed around the pond.



The recycled raised planters going strong three months after they were installed.



*A common frog (*Rana temporaria*) spotted by the edge of the improved pond.*



*A fine specimen of violet ground beetle (*Carabus violaceus*), one of the hibernaculum's first residents.*



*A large red slug (*Arion rufus*) spotted in the hibernaculum.*



*A pair of mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) are now regular visitors to the pond.*