

**North West Cambridge Development – Site Wide Infrastructure Contract
Cambridge
Skanska UK PLC**

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Pollinator

Project overview

The North West Cambridge Development is a large mixed-use development on the outskirts of Cambridge city being built for the University of Cambridge (UofC). The vision is to create a new district and extension to the city, centred around a mixed academic and urban community. Located two miles to the north west of the city on a 150 hectare site, development works have been split into several phases. The first phase of the development will see the delivery of housing and community facilities completed in Spring 2017.

An intrinsic aspect of the development is the creation of 50 hectares of open, green space for the benefit of local residents. One of these areas includes the wildflower seeding of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the edge of the development.

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

The entire site was previously intensively managed farmland comprising both arable production (potatoes) and grazing pasture. This resulted in the area being relatively species poor in terms of flora and fauna as identified in the site Biodiversity Strategy. Existing grassland areas were either agriculturally improved grassland or amenity grassland with low species diversity.

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

The client always wanted to provide a series of green spaces throughout the site that had a high biodiversity value as well as providing a great visual interest for residents and visitors. Building a thriving community is an important aspect of the development and the creation of these green spaces helps to deliver this.



Existing conditions prior to enhancement

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

To the eastern boundary of the site is a 2.25ha Geological SSSI, designated due to its unique exposure of fossiliferous cold stage gravels, sands and silts. This area is known as Travellers Rest Pit with the pit itself being surrounded by grassland which covers the remains of the old quarry.

The pit and surrounding area within the SSSI designation is protected from built development, however the project were still keen to improve the biodiversity of the land and encourage local residents to understand and appreciate this unique space within their community.

The pit has been left completely untouched however the grass field directly around it is part of a series of green spaces that will be created around the site since creating species rich grassland is a priority for nature conservation in England. These have all been carefully planned by a collaborative team of designers, professors and soil specialists whom chose specific seed mixes that were selected according to the soil type, site conditions and local plant variety to maximise the diversity of grasses and plants across the entire project.

A mix of 16 different wildflower seeds were planted which included species such as Red Fescue, Field Scabious, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Foxtail and Meadow Buttercup.

The aim was to create a wildflower meadow of high biodiversity that compliments all the other green spaces across the project.



Ground preparation works

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

Further information

In June 2015 the existing vegetation was sprayed, striped and raked off. The soil was then lightly cultivated with a power harrow just to provide a level surface. The area was subsequently flagged out in 2 meter lanes and hand seeded in October 2015 with a specially selected wildflower mix. Finally a seed roller was passed over the soil to help bed the seeds in.

In Spring 2016 the seeds germinated and quickly grew up naturally with absolutely no artificial watering, cutting or maintenance undertaken. The plants may be topped once in Autumn 2016 with the cuttings left in-situ to self seed thus helping the area to thicken however no other future maintenance is anticipated.

To raise awareness amongst local residents and the public of the importance of the SSSI; once the whole development is complete an information board will be installed at its boundary to highlight the importance of this rare area.

A biodiversity study was conducted prior to the development which set a baseline of the existing site condition. An additional study will also be undertaken on project completion to establish the improvements that the landscaping, planting and habitat improvement measures have made.



Completed works