

Tovil Footbridge Community Garden Tovil, Kent

Costain Kent Multi-functional Framework Team and Network Rail

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Small Scale Permanent

Project overview

The overall project comprised replacing an old, heritage listed footbridge with a modern, 'access for all', pedestrian footbridge. Upon completing the works, the site team recognised the importance of not just leaving a beneficial piece of rail infrastructure for local residents, but also having a positive environmental legacy with active involvement from the community.

The site team, consisting of foremen, senior managers, engineers, sub-contractors, support staff and apprentices, recognised the ecological and educational value the site could deliver to the local community and stakeholders. The site Foreman and his team actively engaged with a local primary school (St Michaels C of E) to help transform a previously disused corner of the site into a 1800 m² biodiversity haven packed saplings and hedgerows, bird, bee, insect, hedgehog and bat houses, wildflower seed and hibernacula's. The total cost of materials was £1500 and a lot of hard work from the team and primary school!

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

Prior to construction commencing, the area was in a neglected state containing nettle, bramble and a dense strand of the noxious weed, Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glanulifera*). Previous rubbish dumping and litter was also evident.

Were there any specific reasons that led to this project?

No planning or client conditions required the rehabilitation work to be undertaken. The initiative to transform this space came from the site team and their drive to create a space which local residents, and school children could use and enjoy. The opportunity to leave the site with net positive gains was identified in the early stages of the project and in partnership with our sub-contractors and support staff.



St Michaels C of E Primary School sitting in the temporary classroom receiving a lesson on health, safety and environment on the railway.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Following the completion of main project works, permission was sought from our client, Network Rail, to utilise the site as a community garden. The Foreman and his team worked closely with the project's Environmental Team to ensure the site would positively contribute to the Framework's Environmental Management and Biodiversity Action Plan. The Kent Wildlife Trust were consulted before any plants or materials were purchased to ensure the plants and artificial habitat tied in with the surrounding area.

The majority of rehabilitation works took place over a day, with 30 children from St Michaels C of E Primary School assisting with the tasks at hand! The main tasks included:

- Creating a temporary classroom (made from recycled materials from site) at one end of the site, so that the children could be educated about health, safety and environmental issues on the railway line. The Kent Wildlife Trust also presented a talk to the site team and children on local plant species and wildlife of Kent and how we can positively contribute to local biodiversity.
- The planting of 20 saplings onsite, comprising Crab Apple, Oak and Hazel. The trees were selected to tie in with local species of the area.
- The planting of a 40 m hedgerow along the southern boundary of the site, to reconnect adjacent vegetation immediately east and west of the site.
- A chainsaw art demonstration from Fen Contracting (our vegetation management subcontractor) and transforming onsite logs into decorative mushrooms and Costain logo's!
- The installation of four hibernacula's using recycled material (wooden pallets, terracotta pot fragments, pipework and vegetative material) from site.
- Building two hedgehog houses and one winter bee house using recycled materials from site.



Making hibernacula's and planting trees with the school children!

- Erection of five bat boxes and bird houses on nearby trees.
- Sowing of the entire site with wildflower seed mix.

The school children also designed a poster on 'what the environment means to them'. This was printed on foam backing and now forms a permanent structure within the community garden.

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancement

Further information

The planting of saplings within the disturbance area will provide numerous natural services including protection of the nearby watercourse (River Medway), soil stabilisation and protection.

The new hedgerow on site will re-connect two previously broken strips of vegetation either end of the site. This will ensure the wildlife in this area have a well-connected corridor to move through.

Wildflower seed will help to repopulate the UK's threatened bee population.

The landscaping works is a great example of biodiversity enhancements which meets the Kent MFF biodiversity offsetting and enhancement targets and positively contributes to the regional Kent Biodiversity Action Plan.

Having the local Primary School help with the day's events assisted in promoting the works undertaken by Costain and Network Rail, in turn bridging the gap between construction and the local community. The event also actively promoted construction as a future career for the Primary school children.

Our key message is that with minimal expenditure, initiative and a positive attitude even the most forgotten and degraded areas can be transformed into inspiring environmental areas for the community to enjoy. We received excellent feedback from the local residents and community on the importance of ecological considerations in the installation of the new footbridge and surrounding landscape.



The finished product!

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Our main motivation behind rehabilitation of the degraded area was to give back to the local community; leaving a green space which local wildlife could utilise.

We also wanted to be able to educate the next generation and leave a positive legacy that the local community would value and appreciate.