

St Mary's Fields Infant School Wildflower Meadow Leicester - Leicestershire Willmott Dixon

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Pollinator

Project overview

In 2015 Willmott Dixon's Midland office completed the construction of an extension at St Mary's Primary School in Leicestershire. The additional space was a response to a fast growing population in the area and the school requiring additional space and resources.

The team working on the project had the opportunity to go above and beyond customer expectations by helping create a wildflower meadow in the neighbouring public playing field. This large open space owned by the school but accessible to the public was previously just grassland with some brambles which limited the public's use.

The team voluntarily planted a wildflower meadow and cleared brambles, opening up the space for one additional under seven's football pitch. Now two years after completion the meadow has established with a variety of plant species, including Red Campion and Daises. This project is an example of how construction operations help improve the public's access to nature.



St Mary's Fields Primary School Playing Field

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

The school's large publicly accessible playing field was previously a mixture of grassland and brambles and lacked species variety. It also lacked the opportunity to provide outdoor environmental learning for the pupils of St Mary's School.

Were there any specific reasons that led to this project?

It has been reported that Leicester had the highest population growth in ten years after London, Manchester and Milton Keynes. St Mary's School and its surrounding areas reflect this population change; therefore, there is a clear demand for additional teaching facilities in this fast growing area.

The project was contracted to only build within the parameters of the school grounds, however, the Willmott Dixon team voluntarily extended their efforts to the public playing field. Their involvement and creation of a wildflower meadow was intended to provide additional space for outdoor learning and sports for the school children.



St Mary's Fields Primary School and Bug Hotel

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The Willmott Dixon team working on the St Mary's School project voluntarily created bunds, a natural mound of earth 60m long and 2.5m wide, in the school's neighbouring public playing field. These were positioned around the field's borders and sown with wildflower seed by the school's teachers and pupils and Willmott Dixon team on a Saturday 'Community Day'. The bunds themselves were filled with spare soils from the foundations of school's extension as a cut and fill process. This approach diverts groundwork's material from landfill, giving spare soils a new purpose.

The team also trimmed back existing bramble, increasing the use of the playing field to accommodate an additional under-sevens football pitch. The team also voluntarily created bug hotels for the school's playground using cut-off wood material. These combined efforts have helped create a public area where pollinators, school children and members of the public can use one space harmoniously while partaking in exercise and learning outdoors.

Two years after seeds were sown atop the bunds and the wildflower meadow has begun to establish itself with species such as Red Campion and Daises, attracting both pollinators and people alike. The blooming meadow also looks visually pleasing, brightening up the field with new colours and shapes.

St Mary's school actively participates in environmental practices and even have an eco-committee, a group of children from Key Stage 2, who focus on reducing electricity, water and waste. The biodiversity enhancements at this school was just one small way Willmott Dixon could voluntarily contribute to the school's environmental efforts, hopefully encouraging increased outdoor learning, exercise as well as inspiring the next generation to consider biodiversity in the built environment.



Bund created out of spare soils and planted with wildflower



60m Long Wildflower Bund

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancement

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The project lead from Willmott Dixon working on the project has a personal motivation to ensure projects are more than just a building. They were inspired by the school's active involvement in the environment; therefore, saw where Willmott Dixon's involvement could benefit the school's on-going efforts while being personally proud of leaving a legacy.