

Skip Gardens

Winchester, Hampshire, England (United Kingdom.)

Kier Group – Kier Highways

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Pollinator Award

Project overview:

Two skip gardens (Figure 1) were created in a motorway depot on the M3 at junction 9. The depot is within a busy junction on the edge of Winchester between the M3 and A34 (Figure 2).

The skip gardens were organised by the Contract Sustainability Group as a way to improve provision for pollinators, creating small habitats within a busy highways depot, an otherwise poor habitat for wildlife.

Our Easton Lane Depot was chosen for this project and the skips were planted by seven staff volunteers during the Kier Environment Week on Biodiversity Day (9th June 2016).

Two 6 yard skips with drainage and soil were donated by supply chain partner, Waltet, and plants were sourced from a local independent nursery at a cost of £200 with some additional donations of plants by Kier staff. Each skip occupies a single parking space and can be moved if necessary.

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

Easton Lane is a working Motorway Service Depot at Junction 9 of the M3 with negligible natural space for grassland or wild-flowers on site. The depot consists of hard surfacing with buildings for offices, garages, salt barns and equipment stores and there is a large car park. There is mature native shrub species planting around the depot.

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

Our Client, Highways England, is promoting improvements to support the National Pollinator Strategy. The skip garden concept was identified by the Contracts Sustainability Group, driven by the corporate Sustainability Strategy, the One Planet Action Plan, which has objectives to to develop opportunities for increasing green space within the depots,



Figure 1: The Easton Lane Skip Garden

provision of wildlife facilities and delivering biodiversity schemes within our contract. Due to limited space and busy nature of working depots, this project addressed these constraints by developing a small mobile garden, replicable at other depots or site compounds.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The scheme comprised planting up two skips with pollinator species to improve biodiversity in a busy depot car park. There was virtually no suitable wildlife habitat provision at the depot chosen for this project.

Small gardens can act as important stepping stones between nature reserves and other natural habitats by offering abundant supplies of nectar. Pollinators will visit any garden, however small, if they can feed from suitable nectar plants.

The planting of the skips and subsequent barrel planters involved staff volunteers who were allowed work time to undertake the planting (Figure 3). A volunteer at each depot has been nominated to maintain the plants.

The **project directly supports Highways England's Biodiversity Plan objective** to enhance biodiversity value of their estate, providing wildflower areas, supporting a range of pollinator species. There is no other known occurrence of skip garden such as this within other Highways contracts. This innovation has allowed for a new habitat of diverse species for pollinators, many of which are now considered to be in decline nationally, within an otherwise unsuitable habitat. The new habitat created has already been shown to be ecologically valuable; within a week of planting bees were seen frequenting the plants (Figure 4 and 5).

Materials for the project utilised re-useable skips, broken hard-core from construction site to allow free draining, and a suitable topsoil for planting. Plants were sourced from Worthy Plants, a local independent nursery whose proprietor, a garden designer and horticulturalist, advised on suitable species. The enhancement has proven replicable (for other sites and compounds) and mobile, should the skips need to be reallocated within the depot. Following the installation of the skip gardens another of the **contract's depots** have taken the initiative to recycle empty plastic barrels into planters for pollinators (Figure 6).



Figure 2: Aerial image of the Easton Lane Depot where the Skip Gardens were located (Google Maps)



Figure 3: Volunteer employees helping to plant wild flowers in the Skip Gardens at Easton Lane.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

Further information

The scheme supports our One Planet Action Plan and Highways England's Biodiversity Objectives of enhancing wildlife habitats; whilst improving the working surroundings for colleagues. The skips are located within a busy highways depot and close to the entrance highly visible to staff and visitors to the depot, providing additional aesthetic value.

The skips were made ready for the plants by drilling holes into the base to provide adequate drainage before being filled with soil. They were planted up by volunteers directed by the member of the Sustainability Group responsible for wildlife.

Species were selected for their suitability for pollinators and to provide seasonal coverage so that the longest period possible was available for pollinators to be supported. Species used in the planting scheme include; Purple and White Petunia, Geranium, Salvia, Thyme, Oregano, Lavender, Sunflowers, Sage, Rosemary. All plants were bought locally to support a local business. In addition wildflower seed was sown to further diversify the species mix.

The objectives of the enhancement have been met, the skips are now supporting pollinators, with butterflies, bees and moths (Figure 7), not normally present in the depot being observed regularly by members of staff (Figure 8).

Lessons:

- **Earlier** planting to allow further establishment to allow better root development before the summer.

The project can be replicated across all Kier depots, providing a long term biodiversity habitat for pollinators. Another skip garden has been planned, to be planted up by school children on during our Children's Day at the Heath, Safety and Environment week in October 2016.



Figure 4: A bee using the wildflowers

Additional Photos:



Figure 5: Bee – Sunflower – Easton Lane Skip Gardens



Figure 6: Park Gate Depot – Barrel Gardens



Figure 7:
Moth (left): Shaded Broad-bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*) – Park Gate Barrel Gardens

Moth (Right): Easton Lane Skip Gardens

Additional Photos:



Figure 8: Employee photo collage of Skip and Barrel Wildflower Gardens