JESSOP PRIMARY SCHOOL WILD RAIN GARDENS
HERNE HILL, LONDON, UK
LONDON WILDLIFE TRUST

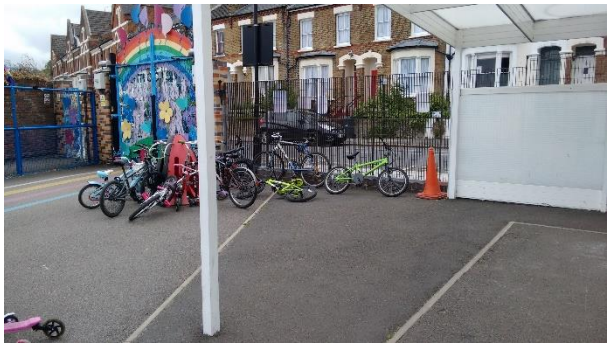
BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: Small scale

Project overview

Two raised bed rain gardens in the playground of Jessop primary school in Herne Hill, a high flood risk area on the route of the underground River Effra. Both beds contain rainwater-fed ponds and are planted to improve biodiversity. The beds are fed with runoff from shelters in the playground.

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

Prior to installing the raised beds, the playground contained no green space or permeable surface. It was a tarmac playground with two shelters. When it rained, the water would run off the shelters in a stream across the playground and entered the combined sewer. There was no planting or ponds.



The site of one of the beds before installation

What were the reasons behind this project ?

This was a part of London Wildlife Trust's Lost Effra project, which installs biodiverse SuDS measures along the route of the underground River Effra which causes increased flood risk where it used to flow. The intention behind the rain gardens were to create gardens and ponds to engage children with nature, local history and heritage (the Effra) and reduce flood risk in the area. The school would like to be able to pond dip in the summer, and children have been involved with the planting and design of interpretation.

The two raised bed rain gardens

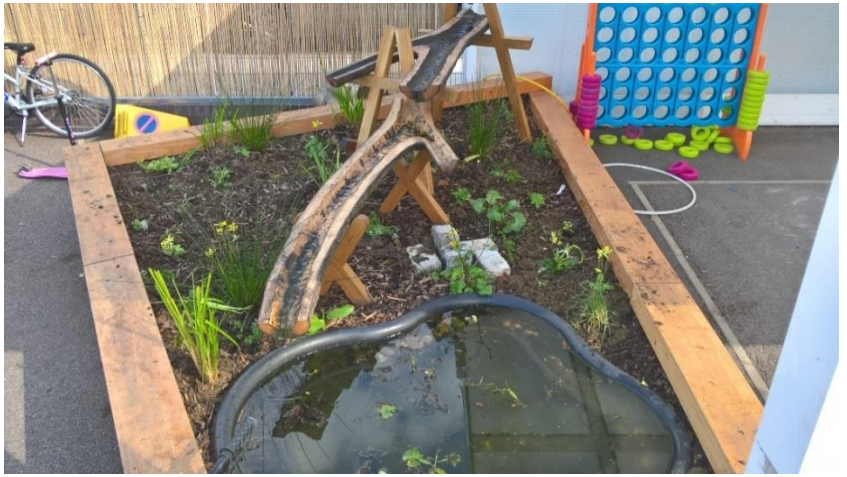
What were the biodiversity measures taken?

This project was intended to not only increase biodiversity on site, but also to encourage an interest in nature and ways of improving biodiversity in pupils at the primary school, hopefully increasing biodiversity long-term by creating new champions for nature in the future. We engaged with the school from the outset by meeting with teachers to discuss the designs and holding an assembly for the whole school to explain what the gardens were and how they reduce flood risk while making homes for nature.

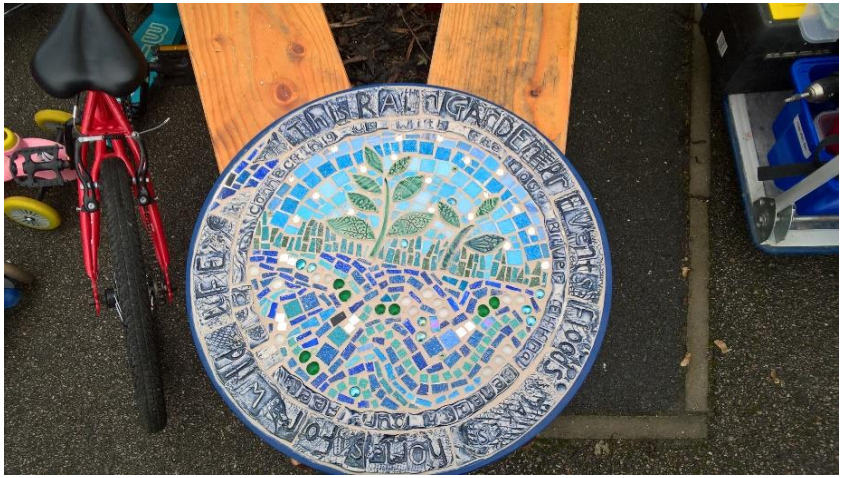
A local green carpenter installed the raised beds, and designed each one to contain a moulded plastic pond, fed by rainwater running down a wooden channel created from wood coppiced on London Wildlife Trust nature reserves. The beds are at a height that is accessible to children in wheelchairs, so everyone can be involved with pond dipping and gardening. They also have a child-safe log pile at one end to act as a frog-ladder, so that hopefully frogs will use the pond for breeding.

The planting plan only uses native plants which are good for wildlife, either through providing habitat or being good for pollinators. The plants were planted by pupils from the school and their parents at two planting days in Autumn and Spring, and included pond plants to encourage wildlife.

We also ran two art workshops based on the gardens, one with the early years children (as one planter is outside the early years classroom) and one with the school council. These explored the importance of the planters for water and wildlife, and resulted in mosaic signs and ceramic plaques to decorate the beds and give the children a sense of ownership.



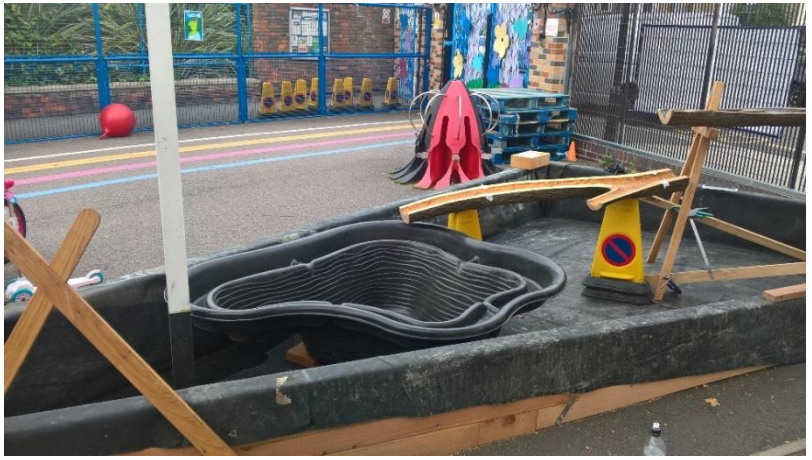
The bed, showing the pond, water channel and native plants



The mosaic sign designed and created by pupils with a local artist

Further information

The beds were installed on-site by the contractor over the summer holidays. Installation took longer than expected as the topography of the site was more complex than anticipated. The outflow levels also required adjusting after initial installation as the beds started to waterlog, an adjustment fixed this issue. The sand content of the soil (necessary for effective drainage) also caused some of the plants to die, requiring a second planting and some soil enrichment. The planting days were very successful with lots of positive comments from parents and pupils, and some families bringing their own plants to contribute. Azolla – an invasive pond weed, started to establish in one of the ponds, but due to the design of the ponds resulting in frequent over-topping, it did not establish. Working with the school council on the art workshops was particularly effective in getting the message out to the rest of the school, as it is the role of the school council to pass on knowledge to the rest of the pupils.



The planter during installation

Project Team

- Led by Rachel Dowse of London Wildlife Trust (Lost Effra project)
- Funded by Tesco Bags of Help, Thames Water and Royal Bank of Canada
- Designed by Michael Tye
- Art workshops by Hannah Littlejones
- Planted by pupils and parents from Jessop Primary School

Children get involved with planting

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

While London Wildlife Trust is committed to enhancing biodiversity, this project added several features which had not been trialled before in previous Lost Effra SuDS measures, such as the ponds, frog ladder and green roof, as well as the accessibility measures. The motivation for this was the primary school, which encouraged us to make the planters as biodiverse as possible so the pupils could gain an appreciation for nature from a young age.