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1/03/2013

Horizon Community College - Possibilities for a Healthy Biodiversity

Dear Kieron,

Thank you for making us welcome at your lovely new school and thanks to the Zoological Group for a polite and interested response.

Having looked at this exciting, brand new environment I can make the following suggestions, some of which relate directly to the Barnsley Biodiversity Action Plan (those in bold print) and can be accessed on our website address - www.barnsleybiodiversity.org.uk

The college grounds are, in the main, embryonic in terms of plant and tree growth. Hundreds if not thousands of shrubs and trees (native to the UK) have been planted, many of which form potential species rich corridors/hedgerows. The presence of newly planted oak trees will, in future years, ensure a regular supply of insects and moth caterpillars, the main food for nesting birds. Newly planted Rowan, Hawthorn, Holly, Cotoneaster and Cherry will eventually ensure an Autumn/Winter supply of food for thrushes (including **Song Thrush**) and Wood Mice. This recently planted flora should be allowed to grow and develop for a season and then assessed in September for possible enhancement/thinning to be considered. Successful evolution needs time to adjust.

However, consideration could be given to the removal of much of the wood chip as this does not, in such large quantities, enhance soil health, plant growth and habitats for a variety of invertebrates, the bedrock of a healthy biodiversity. It may even be a fire risk in hot, dry conditions if not regularly turned over. Removing wood chip would help the endangered **Song Thrush**, three of which have been recently sighted at Shawlands Primary School barely 100 metres from Horizon's grounds. Grass and invasive wild flower growth can be minimised by the further close planting of pollinator friendly shrubs/plants (eg Lavender, Sage, Chives, Mint, Thyme, Hebes, Wild Rose, Ragusa Rose) in between the vast areas of Rosemary already planted at the College entrance. This would provide a visually pleasing, aromatic, and pollinator friendly welcoming area.

Along the perimeter there are a few mature trees and mature scrub which will provide bird species with food and nest sites in the immediate future and here we would recommend the placement of 13 **Tree Sparrow**, 1 **House Sparrow** colony box and 6 **Bat boxes**. These 'wild' Butterfly, Moth and **Hedgehog** friendly margins should be preserved in such a newly conceived area. The presence of ivy in one small area provides a haven for butterflies,

moths, **bees**, hoverflies, spiders, birds and small mammals. Consideration should be given to growing ivy and buddleia on other perimeter walls in the college grounds near the Year 10 Garden.

A bird feeding station towards the perimeter fence and bird watching hide sited on the 'mound' (similar to the ones at Shawlands Primary School) could be erected in this area.

2 **Hedgehog** boxes could be placed in the 'wooded' scrub area to the South West of the college as there is access under the perimeter fencing.

A **deadwood habitat**/insect 'hotel' could be developed and maintained by pupils in this area.

The college's fruit trees could be planted in or close to the year 10 garden and kept pruned to approximately 'head' height to maximise the harvest. A traditional orchard habitat would be beneficial for insects (including **Bees**) and birds. Some fruit left on the ground in Autumn would help thrushes to survive the Winter. The introduction of Gooseberry bushes would help to revive an English tradition and give a chance to the once common V Moth which has all but disappeared from our countryside.

8 **Solitary Bee** boxes could be placed in various places within the grounds.

The idea of having a **Honey Bee** hive on the college roof could be explored.

The car parking area is of particular importance as it is the first visual impression for college visitors.

On the Eastern side of the parking area there are several potential hedgerows. In between them could be a flowering Cherry Tree with a circular, un-mowed surround of Snowdrops, Daffodils, Crocus, natural **English Bluebells** and other wild flowers. The rest of the grass could be mowed around it to make it look neat. Existing Silver Birch trees could have 3 of the **Tree Sparrow** nest boxes could be installed.

On the western side of the parking area there are more mature trees on which we could put 6 **Tree sparrow** and 6 **Bat** boxes. Again around the base of the trees Snowdrops, Daffodils, Crocuses, natural **English Bluebells** and other wild flowers could be planted in un-mowed areas. Again, grass cutting around these areas will make them look acceptably neat.

The proposed new grass cutting regimes to increase biodiversity should be explored (contact Trevor Mayne, Barnsley's Biodiversity Officer at TrevorMayne@barnsley.gov.uk). Spraying with herbicide around the base of trees and the school perimeter should be avoided at all costs and garden maintenance contractors should be made aware of this.

The Year 11 garden area is an ideal area to grow vegetables, herbs and wild flowers (both dry meadow and marshland varieties) to be transferred to other parts of the College grounds. Consideration could also be given to growing Sunflowers, Quinoa and Michaelmas Daisies which will provide seeds for a variety of finches.

At the Eastern end of the Year 11 garden is a fenced area for a small pond. Having constructed three ponds in Primary schools so far we would be able to do the same in this area free of charge subject to a successful HLF bid. A rockery and wood pile would provide hibernation areas for amphibians and marsh plants would provide food (insects) and cover. However, the area outside of the college grounds near to this pond area is also suitable for frog and newt hibernation.

The aim of all these suggestions is to involve pupils in planning, researching as well as practical activity so that they can take ownership of projects related to the maintenance of a healthy biodiversity.

All nest boxes will be free of charge and presented to pupils at assemblies. They will be placed, numbered and put on the College Grounds Map by pupils. Regular monitoring and data collection by pupils would provide records for analysis. With the help of the Trust the contents of the nest boxes would be analysed and recorded in the Autumn.

The pond would be constructed free of charge bearing in mind that, financially, we can only build two ponds each year and they would be on a 'first come first served' basis.

I can offer a talk on Biodiversity Issues and Work in Schools to parents/staff/Year 12/13.

I can offer bird watching sessions with pupils and parents.

Our aim would be to regularly relate to the college. Our input should not just be a 'one off'.

Please share this report with pupils, appropriate teaching staff and governors if necessary. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Colin Graham, Trustee
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