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14/05/2013

School Site Survey.

Wilthorpe Children's Centre, Key Stage 1(Moon Site) and Key Stage 2(Star Site).

Barnsley Biodiversity Trust Members/Trustees present:

Colin Graham, Monica Ward, Linda Graham.

Having been invited to make a contribution to the school by The Children's Centre we were made most welcome by all staff during this morning from 9.30am to 12 noon. The school has three stages: Nursery, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Each stage has a garden or field area with mature trees and shrubs leading downhill towards Wilthorpe Marsh, a nature reserve of significance in the Barnsley area. There is also a Local Authority parkland next to the school. The possibilities for species and habitat protection and development are many and we look forward to working with the school on a long term basis.

Wilthorpe Children's Centre

The garden/nature area already has several possibilities and we would recommend that:

1. The purpose built wormery/insect observation unit is utilised. Children could be involved with filling it with damp soil/leaves etc and then observing it on a daily basis noticing any changes. Adults could make records.
2. The purpose built plant growing observation unit is utilised. It should be filled with peat free compost and planted with a variety of seeds, including root vegetables. Again daily observations would be useful.
3. That the Hedgehog box be filled with dry leaves and grasses and replaced behind the shed.
4. That the garden boxes be moved to the middle of the area so that more children can observe and work in them. One of the boxes could be devoted to a herb/sensory area

with Rosemary, Lavender, Thyme etc while the other box could be devoted to vegetables.

5. The starling's nest in the corner of the building could be regularly observed as the birds feed young.

6. The children could help to build an insect 'hotel' with several palettes as a base.

7. Parent volunteers could be invited to help with the project.

We will provide **1 Tree Sparrow box, 1 bat box and 1 solitary bee box** which will be presented to the children on **Wednesday 5th June at 2pm**. This session will also involve natural artefacts and puppets. After this we will place the nest boxes with the children.

8. The Willow Garden:

a. The Daffodils could be transferred to the far banking where Snow Drops and natural English Bluebells could be added. The raised box gardens could be then used as sensory herb and vegetable gardens.

b. The Willows on the banking could be used as a bird feeding station and the wooden structure could be used as a hide. The Wren's nest in this structure could be observed from within the school to see if it is active or not.

c. The Willow structure in the middle of the area needs to be managed and Dodworth St John's Primary School could be contacted regarding appropriate advice as they have a similar structure.

Key Stage 1

The Key Stage 1 field is surrounded by a number of native deciduous trees and shrubs including Ash, Elderberry, Blackthorn and Hazel. There are opportunities to **place 2 Tree Sparrow boxes, 2 Solitary Bee boxes and 3 Bat boxes**. English Bluebells could be introduced below the trees near the road.

The children could be involved in building an insect 'hotel'. Invertebrates are the bedrock of Biodiversity.

However, before this takes place we should give a class sized group of children and willing adult volunteers a presentation on The Work of The Barnsley Biodiversity Trust. This will include first hand experience of natural artefacts, puppets and soft toys. Please contact me to make arrangements.

The nest boxes should then be presented in a whole school assembly and then placed with the help of volunteers. Observation and recording data on a regular basis would follow and we will help to start this process.

Key Stage 2

The large school field has a wonderful, wide and natural hedgerow on two sides. This is a wildlife corridor that should be preserved at all costs. It would be advantageous to leave a 3 metre edge uncut so that wild plants could grow and provide birds, Hedgehogs and Bees with much needed food.

A **wild flower meadow** could be created on the field. This would involve the removal of grass and topsoil which could be used to edge a pond. Wild flowers grow best in poor soil.

The mixed deciduous woodland area is excellent for wildlife having piles of deadwood to encourage invertebrates. Bullfinches, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were establishing territories during our visit. The trees in front of the outside classroom area could be used as a bird feeding station.

Two hedgehog boxes would be provided and there is a strong possibility that this area could be used to release a pair of Hedgehogs. Janet Mason, Hedgehog Protection Society, is also willing to give a short talk prior to any release.

A **pond area** to encourage amphibious species could be created in the 'snake area' behind the benches. We would do this free of charge at the same time as the wild flower meadow to maximise the time with a small digger.

There are numbers of House Sparrows in the area and we would suggest **2 colony nest boxes** to encourage them as they are red listed by the RSPB. They would be fitted to the school building.

We would place **8 Tree Sparrow nest boxes**, some in the playground trees and others in the 'wild' woodland away from the feeders.

6 Solitary Bee boxes could be provided and placed in the garden area, the new meadow area and the woodland.

6 Bat boxes could also be placed in suitable places around the school grounds.

With regard to the boxed garden areas vegetables and herbs (sensory area) would be appropriate for the learning process.

It is important that, prior to any provision of nest boxes or work done, we are able to give a presentation on The Work of The Barnsley Biodiversity Trust to a class sized group of children and adults (including volunteer parents) who could begin to take ownership of the school's natural environment. We would also be willing to give a presentation to parent/community groups. This has proved to be most successful at Hoylandswaine Primary School. Maintaining a group of volunteers, whom we would train, would be an advantage to hard worked teachers. However, Biodiversity has many links to the National Curriculum which we will outline in an advice booklet yet to be published.

Please contact me if you wish to put these events in the diary.

If this report/survey is agreed by children, staff and governors then the proposed nest boxes would be presented in a whole school assembly. They would then be placed and recorded on a map with the help of children and volunteers. The process of observing, recording and data collection would then begin with our initial help. They could then be sent to the central Barnsley Wildlife Record Centre.

Ongoing support will be given to the school including nest box cleaning in the Autumn, always an exciting activity for children and adults alike.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Colin Graham

Biodiversity in Schools