



**DORSET**  
Local Enterprise Partnership

# **New Green Classroom (Hengistbury Head)**

## **End of Project Report**

**March 2021**

## PROJECT SUMMARY

With the announcement of the climate crisis, protection of the natural environment is becoming more and more essential. However, with technological advances it is becoming harder to engage both adults and children in the natural world. With new psychological understanding of the significance of nature to the wellbeing of children, which has long-term impacts on their mental health through into their adulthood, there has been an exponential increase in the number of nature focused learning groups for children such as 'Nature tots', 'forest schools', and 'scouts/guides'. Approximately 10% of children aged 5-16 are diagnosed with mental health issues, with 50% of adult mental health issues being established before the age of 14 (Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

Hengistbury Head Local Nature Reserve and SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) hosts an average of over 1,000 children per year in addition to accumulating over 1,000 volunteer hours with both regular volunteers and corporate groups. Annually an average of 30 student work placements are hosted from colleges and universities across the south coast of England. In order to provide a suitable and safe learning environment, designed as a base for natural exploration and quiet reflection for the unique nature-focused bereavement group, the Hengistbury Head Green Classroom was developed.

This construction provides 20sqm<sup>2</sup> of indoor, partially covered, and completely exposed space for activities, to complement our outdoor ecological exploration area with wildflower meadow and wildlife pond. The project aims to unify the immersing experience of nature with technology to advance children's learning. Projectors, virtual reality headsets, and a range of ecological monitoring equipment are set up to aid schools in delivering the national curriculum and engaging them fully in the mental and physical benefits of being in the countryside.

The technological aspect, in addition to the location (close proximity to the main town of Bournemouth and multiple schools in low socio-economic areas), has many advantages. It provides a greater level of accessibility to schools that often cannot afford to travel to green spaces with appropriate facilities. It also allows accessibility to children with limited mobility who would otherwise be restricted in their ability to join their classmates in these remote environments, but this facility overcomes this with easily accessible outdoor space, outdoor sensory opportunities and virtual reality headsets full of videos from around the site and other international areas of great ecological significance.

This is a joint project between Kingston Maurward College and BCP council, helping the ecology and conservation students put their theoretical learning into practice on a nature reserve where they can contribute towards the management of the habitats.

Project start date	5 <sup>th</sup> June 2020
Project completion date	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021

## OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES:

### Outputs

The infrastructure of the building spans 20sqm<sup>2</sup>. These facilities allow for activities to be conducted within an indoor space, semi-enclosed, and completely outdoors. The construction is made of 2 cladded shipping containers meaning the ground beneath was not breached but is stabilised by wooden sleepers. The outdoor working space, sowed with native wildflowers

to create a small meadow during the summer months, is still in construction, with delays due to COVID19 restrictions.

Carved signs have been created to indicate the location of the classroom and there are plans to convert the totem pole into a bird feeder in the garden area of the classroom so children can watch and learn bird species and behaviours.

A range of ecological equipment has also been purchased. This includes virtual reality headsets with a 360 camera and computer for processing videos made onsite. A range of creative, art equipment with nature themes can be used for the younger age groups for creative expression and learning. The wildlife monitoring equipment will enable 11yrs-18yrs to learn how to survey and identify different species and how to record them.

The classroom will have an official opening ceremony in September/October 2021 in which students and lecturers from Kingston Maurward college and BCP countryside staff will attend.

### Outcomes

The desired outcomes are detailed in the table below. It is believed this building will facilitate employment positions. So far it has provided a working base for a Hengistbury Head Dog Project Officer, along with storage of required equipment, allowing her to be in close proximity to the most heavily used areas of the site by dog walkers. The second position may be delayed, as a result of both uncertainty of COVID restrictions and the delayed BCP restructure.

The facility, once fully operational, will increase the capacity of work experience and trainee ranger placements, creating a learning base for them to deploy from.

The intended outcomes of the project are as follows:

INDICATORS	OUTCOMES FORECAST							Variance
	ORIGINAL AGREED OUTCOMES	FY 20/21	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 23/24	FY 24/25	TOTAL	
<b>New jobs</b>	<b>2</b>	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Retained jobs</b>	<b>2</b>	1	1	0	0	0	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Floor space created</b>	<b>20sqm</b>	20	0	0	0	0	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>No. of new business start-ups</b>	<b>1</b>	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Volunteer positions</b>	<b>2</b>	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>No. of new trainees/apprentices/work placements</b>	<b>2</b>	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>No. of visitors/tourists</b>	<b>15000</b>	0	3500	3500	3500	3500	<b>14000</b>	<b>-1000</b>
<b>Commercial sessions delivered</b>	<b>75</b>	0	18	18	18	18	<b>72</b>	<b>-3</b>
<b>KMC based group sessions delivered</b>	<b>5</b>	0	1	1	1	2	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Outdoor learning sessions delivered to 150-300 people p.a.</b>	<b>1500</b>	0	350	350	350	350	<b>1400</b>	<b>-1000</b>

Outcomes achieved to date for the 2021/22 financial year include 1 new job which is able to use the classroom as a working base, 1 retained job, 1 volunteer position to aid the new employee, 2 additional trainee wardens, and 1 commercial session delivered. Discussions are in progress to identify a business start-up that could utilise the space.



## **BENEFITS REALISED TO DATE**

There has been an unexpected positive response from both the local community and educational professionals from the wider teaching sector.

Feedback from visitors has been fully positive once they have discovered it is for educational uses, and can also be utilised by local community groups. There was some concern about the number of trees that were removed to allow placement of the containers, however everyone was in favour of the removal of the invasive white poplar species, and repopulation by planting of more ecologically beneficial species in the area once construction is complete.

There have already been enquiries into use of the building by two forest school companies, one of which is a new start up and has not used any existing facilities previously. They have both submitted classroom use proposals which are currently under review. Other enquiries of use have been for cadet training, yoga and wellbeing clubs, local community committee meetings, and home school education groups.

## **FINANCES**

The funding awarded value was £69,711, with actual spend meeting the target value. No other funding was awarded, however contributions have been made by BCP council to an estimated initial cost of £5,000. The original grant covered the costs of the building construction, along with the majority of the ecological monitoring equipment. Additional funds were used by BCP to fit the interior wall hangings and supply fence, soil and seed materials. Staff time and volunteer time was and is still contributing towards the external construction of the outdoor area. Long-term investment will be funded through BCP council in partnership with KMC for the upkeep of the building and resource replenishment as required.

## **LESSONS LEARNT**

The project has so far been a success and no significant changes could be recommended. Due to changes in staff and the merging and restructure of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Councils, the planning stages of the project were severely impacted, causing a delay to the construction and purchasing of equipment. On reflection earlier initiation of planned spending would have allowed for greater feedback on required equipment.

The project has coincided with a restructure of BCP council, so members of staff appointed as the reporting body has changed multiple times through the project which has caused some delays in the development. In order to mitigate these impacts, members of staff based on the site have been kept up to date with the project development and have been included in project progression meetings to ensure information is passed along.

One major risk during the construction of the building was disturbing the old tip land beneath the structure. Thorough pre-planning and communication with the construction company meant that breaching of the ground was minimised, and any unearthed debris was safely collected and disposed of.

## **SUCCESS STORY**

Whilst the Green Classroom has not officially been opened, several groups have been in contact enquiring about the availability in booking the space; this clearly demonstrates the interest and support for the facility and its placement.

The constructed outdoors area will allow for traditional habitat management with a wildflower meadow growing through the warmer months, followed by rare breed Cotswold sheep grazing the area in the latter part of the year. The surrounding habitats are also grazed by rare breed Shetland cattle. The facility also provides an opportunity for all students to learn about traditional reserve management practises. Over the next 5 years, it is expected that the building will support a range of activities and nature exploration, providing an accessible facility available to everybody in order to bring people closer to nature and experience all its benefits.

The convenient placement of the building has facilitated the development of collaborations between a range of organisations, including between BCP Council and Kingston Maurward College, where conservation and agriculture students can be regularly hosted for their practical learning. Any profits from hiring out the building can be invested back into its upkeep, for the replenishment of craft materials, or contributed towards supporting the local wildlife, e.g. with nest box installation.

This will also help strengthen relationships with the local community by being a clean and relaxing space for societies and various organisation committee meetings, or team building exercises with supporting businesses with whom we have an existing relationship.

## **CONCLUDING SUMMARY**

This classroom will be a long-standing investment into the continuation of conservation efforts of the Dorset area. It is important, now more than ever, to instil environmental awareness in the younger generation, not only for the protection of the few pockets of green open spaces left, but also for the welfare and mental enrichment of children and teenagers.

Acknowledgements must be given to the incredible dedication of Brian Heppenstall as the previous senior ranger of Hengistbury Head Nature Reserve who planned and applied for the funding of this classroom project, and now is the Kingston Maurward Wildlife and Conservation lecturer and representative for the classroom development.

Thanks must also be given to the amazing hard work of the volunteers who are working restlessly to complete the external foundations of the building.



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