



SCHOOL GROUNDS

1. INTRODUCTION

School grounds can provide a valuable habitat for many native plants and animals, especially where green space may be limited. Sympathetic maintenance regimes can maximise the benefit of boundary features, such as hedgerows and tree belts. Unused corners of recreational areas can be managed to increase the growth of wildflowers and therefore the sites value as invertebrate and bird habitat.



Oak Cottage Primary School, Solihull

School grounds also have great potential for developing young people's awareness of the environment around them. Having school nature areas, which have been set aside or created especially for environmental education should be valued as it allows children to experience and interact with biodiversity on a daily basis. Such nature areas enable local children to take part in enjoyable activities that benefit nature conservation.

The recording, investigation and creation of wildlife habitats and species within school grounds can be used in conjunction with almost all the National Curriculum core subjects and themes. There is also evidence that natural surroundings have a calming effect on people, including children.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

	Target
A. To protect, enhance and promote the biodiversity within school grounds.	2003-2015
B. To promote maintenance / improvement of condition and habitat expansion within school grounds.	2003-2015
C. To develop a database of school grounds undertaking positive habitat management including wildlife records.	by 2004
D. To promote school grounds as an outdoor classroom through linking biodiversity with the National Curriculum.	by 2005

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Parks & Public Open Spaces
- Gardens
- Scrub & Carr
- Lowland Neutral Grassland
- Hedgerows
- The Built Environment

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Song Thrush
- Great Crested Newt
- Bats

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

There are no national objective and targets for school grounds. This habitat falls under the UK BAP broad habitat type of urban habitat.

The conservation direction for this habitat types is stated as follows in the UK BAP:

“Maintain the existing diversity and extent of wildlife in all urban areas, expanding the range and distribution of rare and common species and enabling this resource to be utilised as an educational tool.”

4. CURRENT STATUS

There are currently 68 primary, 13 secondary and 5 special schools in the borough of Solihull. In Warwickshire there are 199 primary, 37 Secondary, 10 special , 17 independent schools and 5 private schools. In Coventry there are 13 secondary, 89 primary and 11 special schools in the Local Education Authority control.

All these school grounds have potential for biodiversity enhancement and use for environmental education.

Warwickshire County Council through the School Grounds Alliance manage several ecosites on school grounds on behalf of Grounds Maintenance. This is currently undertaken by Middlemarch Environmental Limited.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

The Biodiversity Strategy for England (DEFRA, 2002) has School Grounds as a Priority Policy Issue stating: “*Realisation of the potential for biodiversity improvements in school grounds.*” The desired outcomes are “*schools to be encouraged to develop their grounds to include wildlife areas/gardens and/or natural features where appropriate. Schools are also encouraged to make use of their school grounds as an ‘outdoor classroom’ for all subjects*”

and for all children of all ages. Schools are encouraged to involve pupils in all aspects of school life, including management of school wildlife area where they exist.”

There is the potential for school grounds to be designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) by the Local Authority. A few school grounds already contain land which is designated as SINC land e.g. Tile Hill Lane and Lower Stoke Disused Railway in Coventry. Future SINC designation may involve further schools.

In those cases where planning permission is required, normal planning regulations offer some form of protection from development or land use change.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Development encroachment-** loss of school grounds to school building extensions
- **Lack of, or inappropriate management** -clearing of shrubs, filling in ponds and levelling land with hillocks and hollows making them less attractive to wildlife.
- **Lack of funding and manpower for on-going maintenance of wildlife areas.** Grants for school grounds enhancements have tended to overlook on-going maintenance requirements. A keen member of staff may keep on top of the work for a number of years but staff changes often mean that maintenance becomes neglected. Specific management of wildlife areas is rarely part of the ground maintenance contract.
- **Recreational and development pressure and land use change-** the New Opportunities Fund initiative promotes sport facilities which threatens land take for these activities.
- **OFSTED promotes the use of school grounds for biodiversity education** both for foundation outdoor curriculum areas and for whole school development.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Warwickshire County Council have been actively involved in school grounds since 1995. Since that date a couple of Videos have been prepared for schools, together with Action Guidelines, which outline how school communities can help themselves, work with others, source funding and so on (principles taken from 'Learning through Landscapes').
- The Warwickshire School Grounds Alliance [WSGA] has been formed to ensure that those agencies working on school grounds - WCC Departments [Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy, Grounds Maintenance, Property Services, Libraries and Heritage and Education] Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Middlemarch and BTCV], work together to common goals and procedures to provide a seamless service for all schools across the county.
- Schools are encouraged to take an holistic approach to developing their school grounds. This is best achieved by involving the whole school community [not just an individual teacher] in looking at the opportunities that

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

their grounds can offer through working in partnership with the WSGA. The outcome is the preparation of a 'Master Plan' that sets out key objectives, phasing, funding streams and timing. One aim being to ensure that each phase is completed within a school year.

- The WSGA is also promoting pilot studies through six schools [linked primary/secondary schools] to help minimise waste and move to zero green waste to landfill on grounds maintenance through composting and chipping together with broader education on the purpose and need for such initiatives.
- Schools in Coventry have been actively engaged in developing school grounds. This is happening in the context of advice from the DfES (Schools Grounds Of The Future) and feedback from OFSTED both for foundation outdoor curriculum areas and for whole school development. They have used external and matched funding sources to finance the initiatives. 70 primary schools (out of a possible 89), 7 secondary (out of a possible 19) and 5 special schools (out of a possible 11) are actively engaged in school grounds development. A steering group has been formed which supports this development and acts as a broker to share advice and good practice. There are representatives from City Services, Services for Schools and Communities, Groundwork, Ryton Organic Gardens, External Funding, Agenda 21, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and headteachers. The group also has a role in monitoring and evaluating the outcomes. The development of school grounds forms a strand of the Coventry Education Sustainable Development Strategy and has challenging targets for the next 10 years.
- Many partners have educational officers work with and in schools throughout the region. These can be Local Authority staff as well as through partnerships with external funding e.g. Landfill Tax credit schemes.
- In Solihull School Grounds Development is supported by the provision of advice and assistance by the Council's Green Scheme, Ecologist and Local Nature Reserve Officer. There is also a resource 'bank' for the development of Outdoor Classrooms and Wildlife Areas existing of tools and habitat creation guides. Support is also given to encourage the use of Wildlife Areas and in particular linking them to curriculum areas. This is achieved through advice, demonstrations, leading activities and Teach Training Days. An Education for Sustainable Development Group exists which at present promotes and co-ordinates energy conservation in schools, but has the potential to expand its remit to cover biodiversity.
- Small scale sponsorship is available for funds to help deliver BAP targets e.g. Notcutts and Birmingham International Airport have community funds.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended – Core Steering Group – Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Survey, designate and record all qualifying school grounds as SINCs.	WSP	HBA WM LAs	2008	A
PL2. Actively encourage the inclusion of a biodiversity statement in all LEA and school's strategies.	LBAPSG	WWT LEAs	2010	A,B,D
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. To encourage the approach taken by the School Grounds Alliance to be adopted by Coventry and Solihull.	WSGA	SMBC CCC LEAs	2005	B
SM2. To develop and implement 10 new School Ground 'Master Plans' in Warwickshire.	WCC	WWT WSGA	2008	A,B
SM3. Develop a database of Warwickshire schools with 'Master Plans'.	WSGA	WWT LEAs	2006	A,B,C
Advisory				
A1. Produce and circulate newsletter covering promotion, advice & funding opportunities through existing channels.	WSGA	WWT LEAs	2005	B,D
A2. Promote existing environmental organisations that can help produce 'Master Plans' and deliver environmental education.	WSGA	LEAs WWT	2005	A,B,D
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Develop an easy to use biodiversity survey form and circulate to schools for pupils to complete themselves.	WWT	LEAs WSGA	2005	C,D
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Organise and deliver Teacher Training Days for outdoor classrooms.	WWT	LEAs	2006	D
CP2. Promote / Produce Wildlife 'After School Clubs'.	WWT	LEAs	2005	C,D
CP3. Encourage sponsorship to promote WSGA and 'After School' Groups.	WCC	WWT	2003- 2015	B,C,D

Abbreviations: CCC – Coventry City Council, HBA - Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LAs - Local Authorities, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LEA – Local Education Authority, SMBC – Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, WM - Warwickshire Museum, WSGA - Warwickshire School Grounds Alliance, WSP - Wildlife Sites Project, WWT - Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES

DEFRA (2002) '*Working with the Grain of Nature*'. A Biodiversity Strategy for England.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate **Links** web page for links to web sites)

UK Urban Biodiversity Action Plan no.754

Learning through Landscapes
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Flora Locale – the Knowledge Zone

Warwickshire County Council Eco Schools Officer: Tel.01926 418065/491665

Warwickshire County Council (PTES Department) *Developing School Grounds*:
Two videos, 1998 and 2000.

Buglife (2004) Information on the habitat-management requirements of key invertebrates. CD-Rom £34.99, from Beverley Doyle by email at:
beverley.doyle@buglife.org.uk

Natural England – 'Nature for Schools' lesson plans linked to National Curriculum and ideas for environmental activities. Tel. 01733 455000 or email:
enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Web page: www.naturalengland.org.uk/science/nature_for_schools

Field Studies Council – 'Science Learning Centres' network offers professional development courses for teachers.

Web site: www.field-studies-council.org/outdoorscience/

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust – Education Team: Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry, CV3 3GW. Tel. 02476 302912 or email: enquiries@wkw.org.uk

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers BTCV. Email: L.Hawker@btcv.org.uk

The Mammal Society. Tel. 0208 498 5262 or email: enquiries@mtuk.org.uk

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551 Website: www.rspb.org.uk

The Woodland Trust 's "Enlisting the Nature Detectives of the Future" project helps schools to provide outdoor experiences and improve environmental literacy.
Website: www.nature_detectives.org.uk

Dept. for Education & Skills (2007) The Action Plan for Sustainable Schools in England: '*Sustainable Schools for pupils, community and the environment*' includes a new section on the importance of biodiversity.
See: www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools/news/news_detail.cfm?id=144

9. CONTACT