

Prudential Grass Roots

Supporting communities to improve their local environment



"It's great for children to see things happening in front of their own eyes... it will help to bring the curriculum to life."

CHARLIE CLARE, HEAD TEACHER, GEOFFREY FIELD JUNIOR SCHOOL

CASE STUDY

Reading Schools and GreenPark

Learning through doing has been at the heart of the Prudential Grass Roots project in Reading. Nursery and primary school children, eager to learn more about their environment, have turned the grounds of their own schools into outdoor classrooms and created a nature trail at Prudential-owned GreenPark. The development of GreenPark has created a wide range of natural habitats, supporting a diverse variety of birds, animals and wildlife – perfect for BTCV conservation staff to create an environment that is both fun and educational.

The nature trail is open to the whole community and is a valuable resource for Reading schools and community groups who want to learn more about wildlife and the environment – all linked to the National Curriculum.

Prudential Grass Roots was launched in 2001. It is run by BTCV, the UK's leading practical conservation charity, and funded by Prudential plc.

The programme is helping to drive regeneration for people and wildlife in communities around shopping centres and business parks throughout the UK, owned by Prudential plc and managed by Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd.



PRUDENTIAL

Working in deprived areas

Grass Roots in Reading

Although it is generally considered an affluent town situated at a prime location along the busy M4 corridor, there are several areas within Reading suffering levels of deprivation which are above the national average.

Reading is one of the fastest growing business and leisure centres in the UK. Originally a deserted floodplain, GreenPark is now a 180-acre international business park. It has been thoughtfully landscaped to complement the environment and has an ecosystem which is designed to sustain natural wildlife. More than 50 bird species visit or live on the site, together with fish and invertebrates which thrive in its 1.2km man-made lake.

GreenPark staff are regularly contacted by schools wishing to visit the site but they have found it time-consuming and difficult to support visits without help from organisations like BTCV. GreenPark is situated directly next to the deprived area of Whitley in Reading, home to three schools which BTCV identified as having great potential for a creative environmental project fitting naturally into the National Curriculum.

Education through action

Working with teachers, pupils and their parents, BTCV and GreenPark staff have created a plan called "Education for Sustainable Development" – teaching children how to look after their environment for the future.

Whitley Park Junior School, Whitley Park Infant and Nursery School and Geoffrey Field Junior School are three local schools where staff and children, using a range of creative skills and hands-on practical guidance provided by BTCV, have benefited from transforming their grounds into havens for wildlife and pond life.



School statistics

WHITLEY PARK JUNIOR SCHOOL

Total number of pupils	320
No of registered special needs	155
Minority ethnic backgrounds	4 %

OFSTED Report 2002

WHITLEY PARK INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Total number of Infant pupils	204
Part-time nursery children	138
No. of registered special needs	83
No. of special needs in nursery and Rising fives*	70
Minority ethnic backgrounds	10%

OFSTED Report 1990

GEOFFREY FIELD JUNIOR SCHOOL

Total no. of pupils	174
Part time nursery	52
No. of registered special needs	84

OFSTED Report 2004

* Rising fives are children who start school in the term before they reach their fifth birthday

Children & parents working together

Grass Roots in Reading



Creating opportunities for families to work together on projects which will enrich their lives is one of the best ways of getting people interested in their own environment. The Grass Roots project in Reading has reached out to school children who have also encouraged their parents to get involved, helping to raise awareness of the value of conservation to the wider community.

Whitley Park Junior School

Two days were spent working side by side with children planting wildflowers in their school grounds. For many children this was their first experience of planting and learning about wildflowers and wildlife.

Whitley Park Infant and Nursery School

As creative ideas evolved to become a practical reality, children and parents were inspired by this project. The nursery garden has been divided into two areas: the 'natural environment' and the 'urban environment'. Colourfully painted stepping-stones now provide a path to a wildflower meadow where special habitat piles have been built to attract insects and the planting of Buddleia bushes is tempting butterflies back into the area. Parents created the designs for a pond mosaic, featuring Nemo the fish, so that children can enjoy a virtual underwater experience at break times.



Geoffrey Field Junior School

A large, previously unused wooded area in the school grounds now has a fenced off pond which has been transformed into an aquatic haven for frogs, toads and newts. BTCV staff worked with parents and children to create the pond and also built a raised vegetable bed for a gardening club. Wildflowers have been planted and the wood already existing in the area was used to create habitat piles for insects, amphibians and small mammals. The children are now allowed to play in the wooded area and it is used as an outdoor classroom during the summer months.

"We wanted to involve children, parents and teachers in creating a valuable learning tool for their school. It's fantastic to see them so enthusiastic and it's been such a fun project for them. They've learned so much without even realising it."

KATRINA PENNELLY, BTCV PROJECT OFFICER.

Planting seeds for the future

Grass Roots in Reading

The GreenPark Nature Trail has a host of natural features and is home to a variety of plants, insects and wildlife. The creation of a nature trail has provided benefits to the wider community, and schools can now use it to learn more about the abundance of wildlife in an area close to their homes. Specially produced leaflets and an educational activity pack provide teachers with a ready-made lesson plan which fits effortlessly into the National Curriculum.

Achievements

- Three school grounds significantly improved in educational and conservation value
- 100 children directly involved in the projects
- Nearly 1,000 children benefiting from an enhanced school environment
- 20 parents involved in activities
- 2,000 nature trail leaflets produced
- 50 educational activity packs produced
- Opportunity for a minimum of 450,000 people to read about the Grass Roots programme through local media coverage
- Press coverage equivalent to £7,185 in advertising value
- £4,650 worth of volunteer time contributed

Project Costs

Like most Grass Roots projects, BTCV Reading was able to attract additional funding through its wide range of community and national contacts. In addition to the £10,000 contribution from Prudential plc, a further £1,400 was donated by Prudential plc, Reading for the creation of the educational materials and £1,600 from Reading Borough Council for project activities. Local company, Just Tiles, donated materials for the children's mosaic.

"Nature is such an important part of GreenPark, and we are delighted to be able to share our environment and our wildlife, while at the same time helping to educate and inform local schoolchildren. We hope that they will enjoy watching GreenPark mature and evolve."

SHAUN COLLINS, BUSINESS PARK MANAGER, GREENPARK

Project Partners

BTCV • Prudential plc • GreenPark • Reading Borough Council • Just Tiles, Woodley, Reading

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