

Greenside allotment Overview

Designed 2008, implemented 2008, evaluated 2010

History

We have been working towards an outdoor growing space for children at Greenside to learn plant and land skills.

In 2004 I worked on a school transport plan with the school, this started as a maths project covering data collection and handling. This led to a successful funding bid which bought us bike racks and a rain shelter for parents. It also opened the doors of the school to further work.

In 2005 there was a competition for a school allotment, which the school asked me to get involved with. I worked with a group of children to produce a design over 3 hour long sessions, taking them through the process from site survey to design. We didn't win the competition, but raised the profile of gardening in the school.

This led to setting up a gardening club 2005/06. We worked with the teacher in charge of healthy schools to get seeds and organise children. We used a sunny enclosed part of the playground to develop a pot garden.

This had lots of problems – watering the pots over the holidays, lack of cash for the school for compost; it wasn't integrated at all into the school or curriculum.

It did inspire a school governor and local business man to buy a little piece of woodland and donate it to the school. It is a 5 minute walk from the school. A new teacher took over the support of the group and her husband got 2 hours a week from work as part of their staff volunteering scheme and joined me in running the group.

We spent 2006/7 academic year working with the group to develop the woodland as an outdoor classroom. Ground works built us some raised beds, Yorkshire water ran a volunteer day clearing rubbish and making some paths. A group from the PDC we ran in 2007 produced a design for the outdoor classroom which was presented to the school. The woodland will make a fantastic outdoor classroom, but doesn't work as a space to grow vegetables.

It is being used as an outdoor class room with increasingly creative use being made of it. The design is on the back burner while we work on a new allotment site for the school.

January 2008

In 2007/08 we were given a space on the school grounds to develop an allotment which can be used by all teachers to develop growing skills according to curriculum requirements. The gardening club is working to design the space and will continue to be a focus for children interested in developing their growing skills.

Once the group had been selected we met to measure our space and work up a PASE sheet. We have a new teacher attending sessions and wanting to be involved.

Resources:

2 teachers involved and supporting the group.

Tools and equipment from a successful funding bid – hand tools, wheel barrows, gloves, kneeling mats, a weather station.

Children who are keen and committed – it is the most oversubscribed after school club

A large bare canvas

2 governors actively supporting the project with money and equipment – including a shed.

Parents with useful skills to draw on

Yorkshire water volunteer program

An offer to fence the area, we need to pay for the wood, the company will come and put it

up.
Edging for the beds

Boundaries:

Head teachers health a safety concerns.

I have a maximum of 4 more years to give as a parent for this school and the whole thing needs to be integrated into school life by then.

Gardening club meets term time once a week for an hour.

We rely on funding and have yet to integrate into the school fund raising group FROGS – we were not allowed to sell hanging baskets at the summer fair nor apply to them for money for seeds and compost – we need to build a relationship with them.

We are developing an outdoor classroom and allotment area, many of the same people are involved in both projects, it could split our attention and energy.

The school has no kitchen to use the vegetables in

The head has said she doesn't like trees, the cleaners get very upset with any mess made in the school, and working with mud and worms is really quite alien to mainstream culture here.

We have been given a patch, rather than the whole school grounds to develop.

Low soil fertility and really heavy clay

Analysis:

We have a large open space at the top of the school field

It is on a slight South facing slope

It needs a fence to ensure that balls and games of tig don't break the garden

The whole school needs to be involved, but there is some resistance and lots of ignorance, a session in basic gardening with all the teachers should help

We can close a loop by making a compost bin and developing a rotter's club to collect all the compost

We need to develop outlets for the produce, or produce raw food and a harvesters group who can come and collect salad before lunch to add to the school dinners.

Each class will be invited to take on a bed and see what they can grow.

The soil is very heavy and poor, we will need to spend time this year in raising the soil fertility.

Raised / edged beds mean that children will be more likely to keep to the paths

Design:

I have taken a group of children through the design process, undertaking a site survey, and putting together a PASE sheet.

I then drew up the base map and got my selection of cut out options for the children to work with to create a design. These were photographed and discussed before a final design was agreed.

I drew the physical design up and have discussed other issues with the team.

The gardening club has been given a notice board in the school reception area to raise the profile of the project.

Implement:

We arranged a work day inviting parents to come and get involved.

FROGs were also invited, but declined; I need to make some positive contact with them.

During the day 24 people came and did some work

Another work evening is being planned to develop the site further

Maintain:

Weekly gardening group sessions are moving the project forward.
We have sown mustard seed as a green manure.

Evaluated 2010

The school received funding for equipment and a greenhouse, which helped to integrate it into the school – it had higher status as a project.

The school allotment has been taken on by the year 3 / 4 teacher and each year group has nominally taken on care for a bed, it has times of good use and other times when it is neglected. The other volunteer and I are no longer running a after school gardening club, we both felt undervalued by the school and saw the completion of the garden infrastructure and willingness of a teacher to take it on as a natural time to step out.

The greenhouse was vandalised and had to be removed after 1 year.

I have since used the space to run adult gardening classes and will do so again this year.

The whole relationship with the school has been valuable and frustrating at times.

Sustainability is undervalued by the head and the caretaker has complained about mess even before we made any. Coming from such a different mind sets has made communication difficult, although I have been seeing the value as local people now often tell me in passing what they are growing and eating. The infrastructure is there and ready to be used, when the school is ready to use it. The school has a woodland and local children have had an opportunity to see values, other than consumerism, in action – volunteering, enjoyment of nature, education through experience.

This project has been about visibly walking my talk and supporting change in my local community.