



CASE STUDY

WONDERFUL NATURE GARDEN

Community volunteers install new Nature and Curiosity Garden at Knaphill Lower School

JUNE 2026

OVERVIEW

In 2026, our Eco and Sustainability lead Vikki started exploring options to renovate the Trim Trail at the Knaphill Lower School. This play area has been a firm favourite of the children since it was installed in 2001 but unfortunately time had taken its toll on the whole area and the school needed to look at options .

Local Councillor, **Saj Hussain** was supportive of the school's vision to deliver a community led project to renovate the area into a Nature and Curiosity Garden and backed us to be awarded a grant under the Surrey County Council Your Fund Surrey Small Community Projects Fund .

NATURE GARDEN PROJECT

After being awarded the grant the Knaphill Lower School set about planning our new nature garden. The task ahead of us was a huge one. The area had been closed off to the children as it was in need of repair and maintenance. The area itself was overgrown and presented difficult growing conditions given its shady location.

Our first job was to decide what to do in the space. Fortunately, while exhibiting a school display at the Hampton Court Garden Festival we met with a wonderful garden designer, who happened to be located close to our school. Here is where we received our second success, Victoria Stanton, a Garden designer spent time with our Eco Lead Vikki talking about the vision for the space. Victoria's knowledge of creating gardens and understanding of the Early Year's environment was incredible and she worked with our original plans to create an enhanced design that played to the strength of the space

Using this design, Vikki set about planning the work and recruiting volunteers to help. After seven months of hard work the project was completed and officially opened in June 2026.

BENEFITS

The new garden provides our children with a rich outdoor environment that supports learning, wellbeing and curiosity through hands-on experiences in nature. The garden encourages exploration and discovery and helps children develop an understanding of plants, animals and ecosystems. Sensory play areas with water, herbs, music and tactile activities promote early sensory development, creativity and communication, while spaces such as the seating circle and secret garden offer opportunities for reflection, emotional regulation and mindfulness. There are spaces for imaginative play that support physical development, coordination and cooperative play. Children are also encouraged to consider their environmental responsibility and develop a lasting appreciation for the natural world.

**YOUR
FUND
SURREY**


SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Surrey County Council helped to fund this project via the Your Fund Surrey Small Community Projects fund

OVER 700 VOLUNTEER HOURS COUNTED

We started work on the garden in October 2025 and week after week our volunteers returned in the wet, wind, sleet and eventually the sunshine to work on the project.

This really has been a local area community initiative, completed by a very small but dedicated team of volunteers. This included the amazing volunteers from The GoodGym Woking – in particular Kirsty, Julie, Anne, Stephanie, Wayne and Orle (as well as a number of others along the way), two continual parent helpers from the school - Alex and Katie and a couple of former school pupils - Oscar and Juliet.

It is hard to convey in words the sheer amount of hard work, knowledge and expertise that our volunteers have put into this project and words are not enough to express the gratitude the school feels for their dedication.

This project has required hundreds of hours of planning, negotiating purchases, donations and logistics, trips to pick up items and of course the physical hard work that goes into landscaping a garden. Our new nature garden has transformed the space into a completely zoned nature and curiosity garden for our children.

We have truly made our budget go as far as it possibly can and we are eternally grateful to the local businesses who have supported us.

- Wickes – donating cement and sand
- Challenge Fencing Ltd – donating wooden poles
- TVC – donating hawthorn hedgerows
- Surrey County Council Tree Team – donating hedgerows
- Squires, Woking – donating grasses and ferns
- Sainsburys, Brookwood – donating seeds
- Longacres, Bagshot – donating seeds
- Redwood Tree Services – cutting up and donating logs
- Topps Tiles, Woking – donating tiles to make our stepping stones
- Juile, Ellie, Stephanie, Donna and Kelly – thank you for the plants and seeds that you kindly donated!



THE NEW GARDEN IN FOCUS



ENTRANCE & FLOWER BEDS

As you enter the garden through the wooden wishbone entrance, there are two new flower beds. The plants here have been selected for the shady and partial shade location and are a mix of pollinators and hardy shaded plants. In the right flower bed we have also created a fungi growing project, where the children will be able to observe mushrooms growing on logs.



SENSORY PLAY ZONE

Here the children will be able to play with water, stimulate their senses with a sensory play touch trough and music stand, surrounded by sensory planting of strawberries, mint and herbs. They will be able to observe how worms aerate and tunnel in our wormery as well as get their hands dirty growing potatoes in our new potato planters.



SENSORY SEATING CIRCLE

Our seating circle provides a space for reflection. It is surrounded by rustling grasses to enable the children to relax and centre themselves amongst nature. It provides a cosy space where little learners can explore texture, colour and communicate together



JUNGLE WALKWAY

This small curved path allows the children to walk through a range of grasses and ferns. They can watch the ferns unroll in the spring providing a fascinating, hands-on lesson in plant growth. As this area grows, we hope it will encourage the children to use their imagination like pretending they are dinosaurs wandering through a jungle.



TEEPEES AND WILDFLOWER MEADOW

This pathway leads to our giant teepees – two wooden structures large enough to take small groups of children. Behind our teepees is the wildflower meadow, where we have sown a range of seeds, which we hope will create a beautiful, native wildflower area that local insects will love.

NATURE GARDEN ZONES



BIG BUG HOTEL

Next to our teepees is our wildlife habitat area and herb garden. Our newly created bug hotel is inspired by the GoodGym logo to honour our helpers. It is surrounded by wildflowers and herbs that will smell amazing!



BIRD WATCHING GARDEN

Beyond this, you will be welcomed by the gate to our secret garden.. Inside there is a seating circle where the children can listen to and observe the wide variety of birds that live in our garden - including our large group of very friendly and curious robins in this area. Within this space, new hedges have been planted and our wonderful volunteer Julie taught us amazing skills in building beautiful habitat hedges - which the children will be encouraged to 'fill up' each year.



CREATIVE PLAY BASES

Down the centre of the garden, we have created play bases and seating areas around the trees including:

- A pirate ship
- Seating circle and finally
- Mini stage and performance areas



TRIM TRAIL

Our trim trail has been restored – we have scrubbed the dirt and slime away, repaired the area and given everything a new coat of paint.



MINI HABITATS AND BIRDBOX TRAIL

Dotted around the garden are mini habitats to teach the children about the needs of different insects and creatures – including a mini meadow, sandy habitat, deadwood habitat and a mini pond. Finally, take a look up into the trees around the nature garden (and other areas of the school) and you will find our bird box trail. Twenty bird boxes that have been painted by our volunteers and their children as well as some PTA children.

OUR GRAND OPENING



On Monday 8th June, we welcomed a very special guest to officially open the garden - **Charlotte Hawkins**.

Charlotte is one of the regular anchors on ITV's Good Morning Britain. She is a well-known television and radio presenter, who has covered major national stories and conducted high-profile interviews. Alongside her work on Good Morning Britain, Charlotte has presented across ITV News and Classic FM, and has also appeared on Strictly Come Dancing.

She very kindly braved the rain to meet with the volunteer team that had worked on the garden and took a tour with Vikki who explained all the different areas. She listened intently and asked many questions about the process. She then officially opened the garden, before welcoming a group of Reception children to experience the space for the first time.

She spent time playing and talking with the children and was a great sport, posing for an incredible number of photos.

She then joined a whole school assembly where she talked to the children about their new garden and answered a series of questions from our year two children.

We learnt that her favourite flowers were peonies and roses, that her favourite book as a child was the Magical Faraway Tree (which was met with lots of excited gasps from the children). She also told the children about the various people that she had interviewed including very famous sports stars and movie legends...although she couldn't pick a favourite.

We cannot thank Charlotte enough for being so generous with her time and being such a kind and friendly guest to our school. She certainly displayed the Knaphill values!

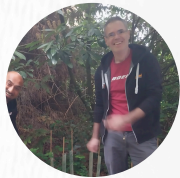




OUR VOLUNTEERS



Vikki – The project leader and the woman who planned and created the entire project. Vikki has been at school leading the project every single week – coordinating the volunteers and digging in with every aspect of the garden. She has put in hundreds of hours planning, doing and even watering the plants in the evenings after work



Mark – Vikki’s long-suffering husband, who has been the project’s construction lead – if it has needed building, then Mark is behind it all!



Victoria – Our amazing garden designer, who enhanced our plans and gave us an outline design for this wonderful space – even providing plant advice for our growing conditions.



Kirsty – Our GoodGym champion and ultimate project cheerleader. She has rallied the troops and kept us all entertained and energized along the way.



She is our superstar tree trimmer and planter and has turned her hand to every job.



Julie – Our planting goddess – bringing a huge amount of knowledge and expertise in everything gardening, she has taught us how to make habitat hedges, educated us all about the plants and nature in our garden and has been our shining star in planning the planted areas in the garden



Alex – Our hard-working parent volunteer who has committed to MANY Saturday mornings for the duration of the project. She is an absolute powerhouse – digging trenches, painting, planting – she has had a hand in it all.



Stephanie – The amazing random job lady – she has dug holes, planted, painted and mixed concrete – she can do it all!



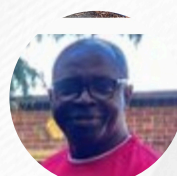
Anne – This wonderful lady scrubbed the entire trim trail of all the years of grime and gunge. She has painted and planted – and ran to and from every gardening session



Katie – Our GoodGymer (and parent), she has planted and painted and been a brilliant helping hand.



Wayne – Our powerhouse GoodGymer who has helped build our teepees, lifted logs and incredibly heavy Belfast sinks and helped shift, fix and build his way through the project



Olalekan - The most amazing leaf raker in Woking! Orle turned his hand to cleaning, raking, building and painting.



Oscar and Juliet – Our former school pupils who have painted the town green – including the fences and teepees. They also painted the trim trail Oscar has been to virtually every session helping out with all tasks.

Ellie, Ben, Luan, Zoe and Brian – Thank you to our other Good Gym helpers who have helped us out along the way

Kevin – Thank you to our parent helper, who helped us dig our jungle walkway trench

SOME WORDS FROM OUR SUPPORTERS



"We are incredibly proud of what has been achieved through this project. Our nature garden is a powerful reflection of our school values in action – particularly kindness, respect, responsibility and community."

This space has been created not just for our children, but with them in mind at every stage. It offers rich opportunities for learning, curiosity and wellbeing, while also nurturing a sense of kindness towards the natural world and each other.

The dedication and collaboration shown by our volunteers, families and community partners has been truly inspiring. It is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision. As we often say at Knaphill Schools, together we can achieve great things, and this project truly brings that belief to life.

We are excited to see the lasting impact this will have on our children for years to come."

Debbie Harrison – Headteacher, Knaphill Federation of Schools

"I was delighted to provide an Outline Design for this project with a brief of maximising the circulation space and open-ended opportunities for the children to play and connect with nature. The volunteer team have evidently poured so much time and effort into bringing this to life and the result is incredibly heart warming. I hope the children fully embrace the space and have no doubt that they will benefit from their regular connection with the natural world."

Victoria Stanton, Garden Designer

"I am proud to support the Knaphill Federation of Schools and their projects to support the mental wellbeing of young people in Knaphill. This Nature and Curiosity Garden will be an inspirational space for generations of children."

Councilor Saj Hussain

