**Morecambe Bay Schools: Where the Wildings Are!**

**Background**

Schools are important hubs in the community, supporting children and their families in ways that go far beyond their traditional role of providing education. The challenges of Covid 19 have only served to emphasise the many additional benefits that schools provide; from the free childcare that enables parents to work, through to the essential ingredients of mental and physical wellbeing – for example social and emotional support for children, a decent hot meal and safe outdoor play space every day. This project uses schools' role as community hubs to tackle three urgent challenges: climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity.

Lancaster District is already being severely impacted by these challenges. For example, we are seeing increasingly frequent flooding and many households in the region – including those with children – are experiencing food poverty. Covid and Brexit have also illustrated the potential vulnerability of our food system: the empty shelves resulting from panic buying at the start of the pandemic and the queues of lorries waiting to cross the channel prior to Christmas 2020 are important indicators of the fragility of 'just in time' supply chains. Meanwhile, international social movements such as 'Fridays for Future' also highlight an urgent need to change the ways in which we engage young people with environmental challenges. Specifically, it is vital that 'head-based' theoretical learning in the classroom be combined with practical action where pupils can also engage their hearts and hands in generating creative responses to the challenges we face.

Importantly, the schools-based project described in this proposal is not an isolated project. Rather, it forms an integral part of two major strategy processes: North Lancashire FoodFutures' 10 year strategy for developing a healthy, fair and sustainable food system in the district and work needed to progress the ambitious Morecambe Bay Curriculum in collaboration with Eden Project North. This project will provide a key part of the on the ground infrastructure needed to enable these strategy processes to materialise and have concrete impacts on the ground.

**Aims & objectives**

This project is an ambitious 5-year programme of work that uses educational establishments across the district as a hub to reverse climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity. Key objectives across three key areas are listed in the table below.

| | **Environment & wildlife** | **School life & curriculum** | **Family life** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Outcomes over 5 years** | Every educational establishment in the district will have:<br>● Rewilded its site<br>● Planted edible/ornamental/wildlife-friendly landscaping | Every educational establishment in the district will have:<br>● Developed a healthy living programme within the schools where the produce grown is | ● Food poverty for school-aged children and their families is reduced as a direct impact of the programme. |

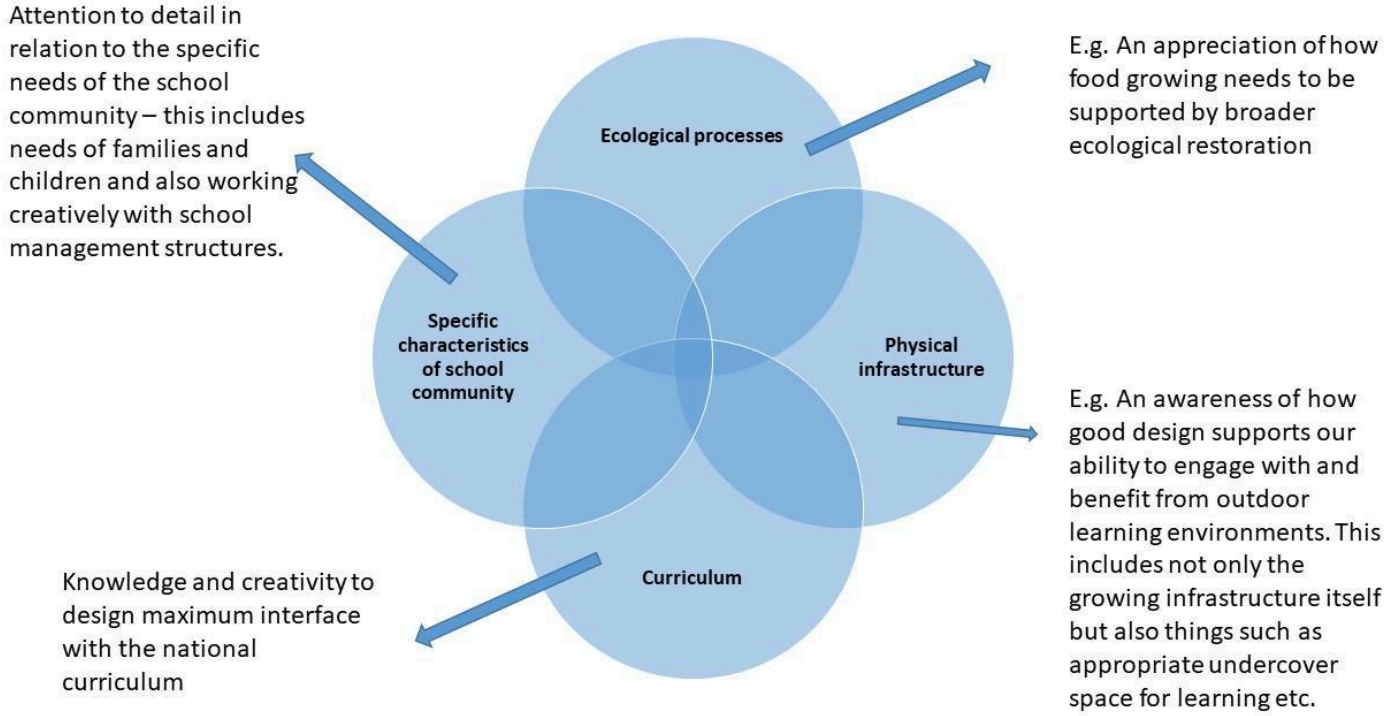
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| | ● Some dedicated food growing space[1]. | used to feed pupils, staff and their families.<br>● A curriculum that teaches horticulture, ecology, botany and conservation through a hands-on as well as theoretical approach.<br>● A pedagogy that enables healthy lifestyles and sustainable futures.<br>● Created the physical infrastructure necessary for outdoor learning | ● Support for families to re-green home gardens, yards and alleys<br>● Families embrace active and healthy lifestyles. |
| **Advantages of these outcomes** | ● Improved soil ecology and habitat regeneration for plants, invertebrates, pollinators, birds and mammals as the basis for everything else that follows<br>● Regenerates plant biodiversity and creates habitats for complex ecologies to reform<br>● Creates essential islands and corridors of biodiversity<br>● Enhances resilience of ecosystems in a rapidly-changing climate<br>● Major increase in the amount of fresh local food available in the district. | ● Provides the physical framework necessary for the head, heart hands approach to environmental learning which is central to the Eden Project North Morecambe Bay Curriculum from birth to 24 and also the Permaculture curriculum (Lusi Andersloe Children in Permaculture)<br>● Enhanced opportunities to teach a wide range of subjects – including physical activity, PSHE as well as core skills such as maths and literacy – in creative settings. | Improved physical and mental health through:<br>● Increased provision of fresh healthy food & plant-based medicine at home and in school.<br>● Increased opportunities for fun, creative play and exercise in nature (proven to de-stress, enhance imagination and counteract increased screen use and Nature Deficit Disorder) |

[1]● Depending on the school this could include features like an orchard with top fruit and soft fruit, a vegetable garden, a seed saving project/library and/or a propagation/plant nursery.

**Project approach**

This project has been developed in collaboration with headteachers and key local stakeholders including the Eden Project North and North Lancashire FoodFutures. It also draws on the learning from a number of pilot projects such as the Off the Ground and gardener in residence programmes which have taken place in the district in recent years. Key features of our approach include:

1. **A holistic approach to project design**. Reviews of previous pilots show that school growing programmes often fail to reach their fullest potential because they focus on only one element of the system; for example, they build a raised bed without thinking about the interface with the curriculum or limits to staff time and expertise. This project covers all the areas needed for success captured below:



2. **Resilient and diverse approach to project management**. The diagram below shows that we have planned for a coordinating management team which is composed of diverse expertise across all the areas required by the project. All these professionals have already had input into the design of this proposal. This team will then work closely with an (equally diverse) team from each of the participating schools whose role will be to integrate the project across all the areas described above in the unique community of that particular school.



3. **A template based approach to development**. Our analysis of previous projects shows that it is possible identify key design features which can be easily adapted to the specifics of any educational establishment. Our approach will therefore involve the creation of templates – both for the physical landscaping and for the curriculum interactions – that can easily be adapted to the particular circumstances of any school or back yard. These templates, which will be created during years 1-2 of the project and then refined with each successive cohort of schools, will enable us to roll out easily and quickly without reinventing the wheel each time.
4. **An ecosystem approach to the school community**. This project will involve the creation of a network among the participating schools which can exchange knowledge, learning and edible produce. This is a vital distinction from previous projects because it builds on the unique characteristics of each school to develop an overall food system that is better for everyone. Under this approach, schools with a large land area can grow produce at scale (for example potatoes, carrots, apples), while those with smaller premises can concentrate on growing more compact crops such as herbs and/or indoor operations like raising seedlings. It is easy to see how this approach – based on exchange and synergy between the participating schools – can deliver a much better result than through a model in which every school has to try and grow everything they need for their own community, which would be very hard to replicate with such unequal resources in terms of land and buildings.

**Project timeline**

The following plan outlines how the project will progress across years 1-5. The model of expansion we have adopted is one based on successive cohorts (a group of participating schools who progress through the programme at a similar pace) with cycles of review and adaptation.

| Years 1 & 2 | Years 3-5 |
|---|---|
| ● Establishment of project management group<br>● Recruitment of 6 initiating primary schools who will form the first cohort<br>Within these schools:<br>● Consultation with key stakeholders (staff, children, families, governors) and formation of participating school team management group<br>● Design of the grounds including physical infrastructure and planting plans in tandem with curriculum design<br>● Tender to landscapers<br>● Construction/planting and training delivery to staff and families<br>● Review of each stage and write-up for dissemination<br>Going through the above process with the first 6 schools will enable the creation of the design templates, curriculum/lesson templates and training resources for staff/parents which will inform the rest of the programme and enable a faster rollout in years 3-5. | Based upon review of the first cohort and incorporating learning and changes:<br>● Each year, after review and amelioration of the process, roll out across more schools<br>● Bring on board nursery sites, secondary, college and university sites<br>● Possible large training event to facilitate design and delivery across the increasing number of sites |