

# Hertfordshire pupil's plea to HS2 secures new school play area

August 24, 2020



Today Three Rivers District Council has granted planning permission for a new landscaped play area for Maple Cross JMI school in Maple Cross near Rickmansworth, bringing a request to HS2 from a local pupil to life.

The ambitious project to redesign the school's grounds was initiated by a letter to HS2 from a child in Year Six at Maple Cross JMI, which asked that some of the material being excavated at the nearby South Portal construction site be brought to the school to "make a mound to roll down".

After receiving the letter, HS2 developed a year-long programme of engagement between artist and designer Emily Cropton and the pupils, staff and wider community, in order to make the pupil's wish come true.

The project involved educational workshops with school children in different year groups, in which they learnt about local history and the natural environment, and developed ideas for the design of their new play space.

Planning permission granted by Three Rivers District Council now means that HS2's main works civils joint venture Align will start the landscaping phase of the project by moving soil from its construction site 600m south of the school.

During the Autumn, Align's local contractors will work with Emily Cropton to create the new play area which will include an orchard of fruit trees, a meadow of flowering plants, an area of scattered tree trunks for climbing, and a willow tunnel. There will also be a fossil wall built of clay bricks designed with the children, showing what might be found at Maple Cross in another two million years and the stories these fossils will pass on.

**HS2's Head of Arts and Culture Anne Mullins said:**

"HS2 has been working with Maple Cross JMI School for some time, and this project is a key part of our ongoing engagement with the local community, reflecting our commitment to being a good neighbour to people along HS2's route.

"The project itself is part of HS2's arts and culture programme which works closely with local authorities and cultural organisations to develop projects that enhance the heritage of local areas along the route of the railway. As part of this, HS2's engineers, landscape architects, designers, architects, ecologists, and heritage teams develop plans for integrating art and design into the landscape around the railway."

Since the start of the school year in 2019, Emily Cropton has been working closely with Headteacher Hannah Trickett and HS2 to deliver educational activities for the children, including mapping the micro-climates of the school field, learning about the history of the local landscape, and writing stories about the importance of the natural environment.

**Headteacher at Maple Cross JMI, Hannah Trickett said:**

"It has been both a pleasure and incredible learning experience working with Emily. She has brought a passion, commitment and engagement beyond what we could have dreamt. Her dedication to the project and working with children to provide learning opportunities they would not usually experience has been phenomenal."

**Artist and designer Emily Cropton said:**

"This project has created a fantastic opportunity for the children to engage with their local environment. Through mapping, making and storytelling activities the children have learned about the natural and cultural forces that shape the landscape over time. Working with the children has brought a different perspective to my personal research and I've been hugely impressed with their ideas, which have contributed significantly to the design of the new natural play space.

"The design creates a landscape of contrasts, with ridges and valleys, light and shade, tall grasses and short grasses. Pathways and journeys invite the children to play in a different way and the life cycle of the wildflower meadow, orchard and fossil wall create a place to learn about time and celebrate the seasons. I'm very much looking forward to helping the design come to life over the next six months."

**Align's Project Director, Daniel Altier said:**

"Align is delighted to be involved in this project, as are our local supply chain contractors. It provides a great opportunity to leave a legacy for children in the local area and will hopefully help to inspire the next generation of engineers. It has also been a pleasure to work with the school and its governors to deliver Emily's wonderful design."

Through the detailed design, planning and construction phases of the project Emily's work with the school will continue. In particular, the construction phase will be an interesting and important period, and the school children will be able to observe the soil being moved, learn how the design is 'set-out' on the field and take part in planting.

HS2 has also been working with the school on other projects, including improving their pond and building new habitats, with enabling works contractor Fusion donating wooden benches, hanging baskets and planters. The school have taken part in HS2's Growing Spaces project, which is run in partnership with local business Growing Ideas, to install allotment boxes in primary schools and teach children about nutrition and the science of growing your own fresh produce. In addition, Hertfordshire County Council were successful in applying to HS2's Road Safety Fund to make pedestrian safety improvements to roads near the school.

*Photo credit: HS2 Ltd*

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