

Science Engagement in Nature
at Winchester Science Centre

Exploring Chalk Landscapes

 **Winchester**
Science Centre
By *Wonderseekers*

Registered Charity No. 294582
Registered Company No. 02014929

Coming
Summer
2026



About our Charity

Wonderseekers is a children's charity that uses science engagement to empower children to improve lives and protect and heal our planet.

Our purpose is to raise children's aspirations and confidence when it comes to big topics such as climate change, as well as promoting diversity and inclusion, so that all children have the ambition and freedom to improve their own lives, the lives of others and ultimately life on Earth.

Founded in 1986, and renamed as Wonderseekers in 2022, the Charity has always focused on delivering hands-on science experiences for young children. Through fun, immersive and accessible experiences in schools, communities, online and at our Science centre in Winchester, the Charity is able to spark curiosity when it comes to science. Through our strategy "For People and Planet 2030" we will continue to use these interactive science experiences to positively engage children, through all disciplines of science, with the natural world to enable them to take action against climate change.

Exploring Chalk Landscapes - Summer 2026

This project represents a pivotal step in delivering Wonderseekers' long term vision for growth and impact without increasing our capacity or impacting on the landscape. As the first major milestone of our strategy, the project signals a step change in how the Charity engages children with nature, climate change and biodiversity loss at Winchester Science Centre.

The new outdoor experiences will broaden Wonderseekers' science offer, creating opportunities for children to explore real world science through play, discovery and interaction with the natural environment. They will also play a vital role in driving visitation during the summer months, when the site has clear capacity compared with the higher occupancy levels seen in term time and school visit periods. This development responds to changing visitor expectations and the need to strengthen year-round appeal, helping to secure the Charity's long-term sustainability while deepening our impact on children's confidence, curiosity and care for the planet.



Palaeontology dig play area

(145 m²)

Role play experience where children become palaeontologists and search for signs of prehistoric life in the sand.

The small wooden huts are 'research stations' where the young palaeontologists can identify their fossil and find out which species they have discovered. There is also pulleys and buckets to send equipment or information to other members of the explorer-team. There is scope for there to be a person-led palaeontology experience throughout the day during the public offer, where participating children are given a challenge to complete as a team.

Key design features include:

- Bones and fossils embedded in the sand for children to discover
- Giant bones of a 90m Year old Marine Reptile sticking up through the sand which children can play on
- Large chalk boulders with tactile fossils embedded in them scattered throughout for children to climb on
- Palaeontology huts or 'Research Stations' which contains key information about prehistoric species
- Accessible pathways for wheelchair users



Chalk stream water play

(approx. 140m²)

Using the natural slope of the land to create a water play area inspired by a chalk stream, one of the most iconic features of Hampshire's Chalk Downland.

Through play, children learn about the unique properties of a chalk stream and how the layers of chalk rock provide nutrient-rich waters which support an astonishing array of species.

Key design features include:

- A way for children to manipulate the water, i.e. a pump, tools to create small dams.
- A nod to some of the chalk stream species, i.e. tunnels for children to become water voles.
- A range of engagement and challenges for children of different ages.
- Accessible interaction and engagement points.
- Fresh, safe water supplied from new bore hole.



Hazel Dormice play structure

(approx. 54m²)

A small play structure that mimics the activity of hazel dormice through physical play such as climbing, jumping and hiding.

This structure will be situated next to the hazel coppice which we know is inhabited by real-life dormice.

Key design features include:

- A nest and adjoining climbing apparatus
- An accessible nest that is floor level for wheelchair access
- Redesign of the fencing nearest to the building
- Accessible footpaths to access all the play features
- Seating – benches around the edge of the play areas

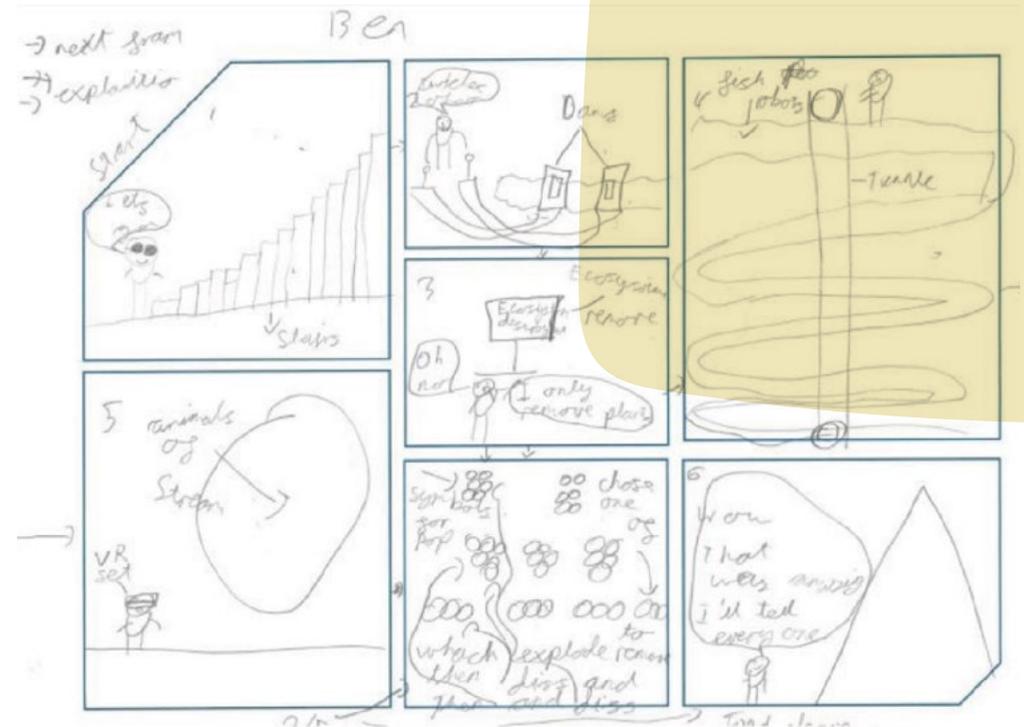


What the children said they wanted



Ellis is flabbergasted when he sees the new Chalk Stream Water Play.

First he grabs a magnifying glass and looks closely at some of the small creatures in the water, when suddenly a flying fish catapults out of the water. 'Weeeee!' says the fish as it lands back in the water with a plop. The stream has a glass tunnel running underneath it where Ellis watch all the fish swim by. 'Whaaaaaa! He then has fun jumping up and down the stream on stepping stones. Then goes over the slide-bridge which crosses the stream, and climbs up the rocks. THE END.

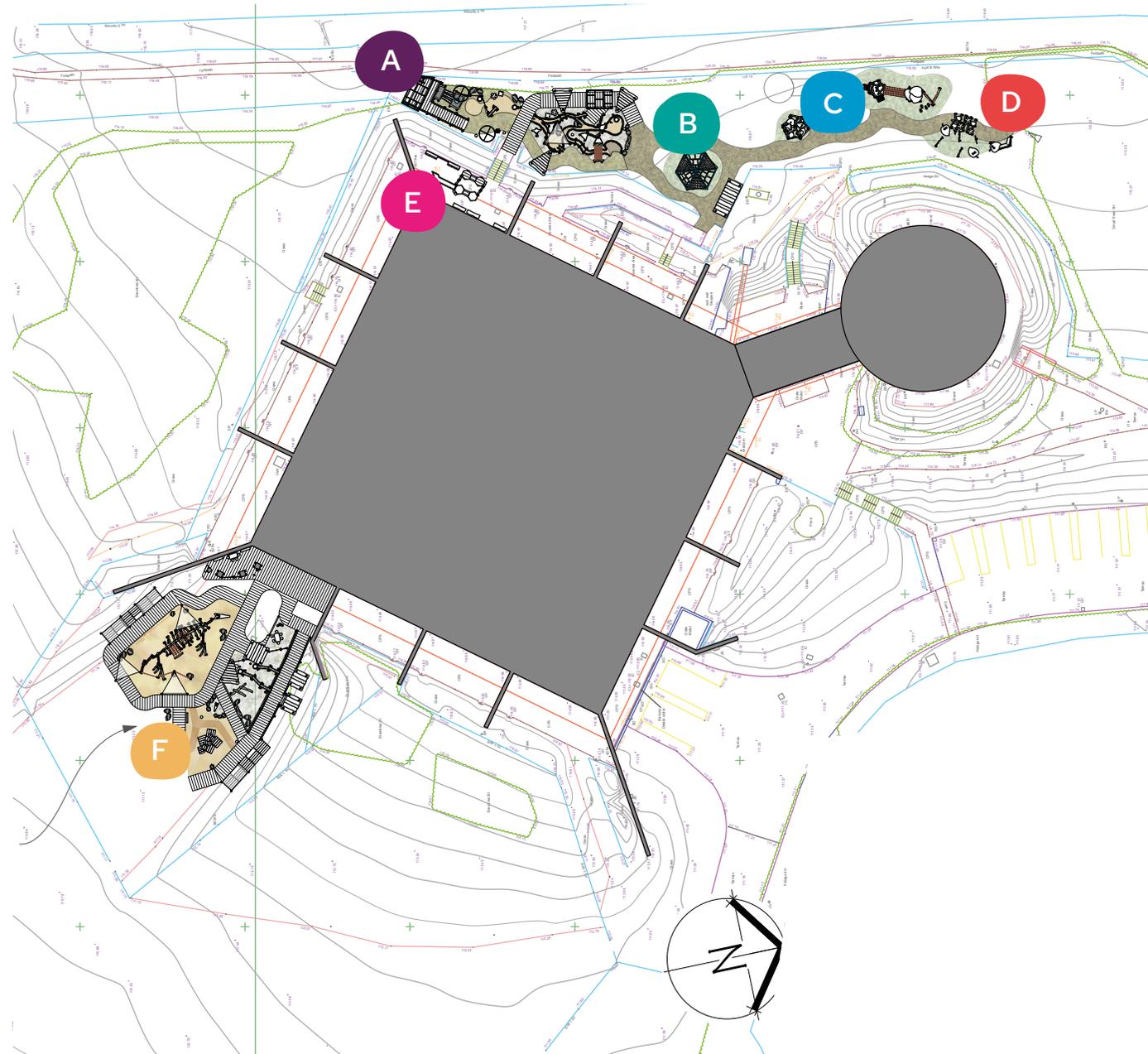


Ben is looking forward to exploring the Chalk Stream Water Play, 'Lets go', he says as he climbs the stairs.

He enjoys using the switches to release the small dams which change the direction of the water flow. He follows the water flow by crawling through a see-through tunnel, watching robotic fish swim past as he goes. BUT...by doing so, his action has destroyed the ecosystem and the food chain, by having a knock-on effect. 'Oh no!' he says, 'I only removed the plants'. He Learns more about this by having a closer look at the food chain through a VR set. 'Wow', says Ben, 'That was amazing! I'll tell everyone'.

Proposed site plan

- A Chalk Stream**
Water play zone with borehole water source directing to three push activated taps, loose fill pebble surfacing, wet pour surfacing, decked walkways and timber and stainless steel interactive play elements throughout
- B Meeting Place**
Central shelter with cedar shingle and decorative roof panels on robinia frame work with seating and larch shelter push chair storage shelter, both installed on safety pathways connecting play zones
- C Dormouse Climbing**
Natural low level climbing structure mimicking dormouse burrows with trim trail elements and ground level accessible nest den, installed on safety surfacing
- D Dormouse Story Walk**
Small world play teaching zone with decorative boards, robinia archway walk with larch carvings and seating, installed on safety surfacing and connect to dormouse copse with robinia archway entrance
- E Habitat Hex**
Small world play teaching zone with freestanding planting beds, work benches and seating
- F Paleontology Dig Site**
Interactive play zone with loose fill pebble and sand surfacing, safety surfacing, decked walkways, timber and stainless steel interactive play elements throughout and timber seating built onto existing bank



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