

LIVING COUNTRYSIDE AWARDS 2016

Now in its seventh year, the CPRE Bedfordshire Living Countryside Awards recognise the individuals and organisations who are going the extra mile to enhance Bedfordshire's environment. The awards were presented on 4th October 2016 by HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, at John O'Gaunt Golf Club. Here are this year's shortlisted entries.

SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE

Recognising enterprises that bring benefits to the local economy, environment and community.

CPRE MARK



Clophill Eco Lodges

The Eco Lodges provide stunning facilities for visitors to the Greensand Ridge and to groups in the surrounding area. The complex is located next to St. Mary's Old Church, which was imaginatively restored from a derelict and vandalised building into a heritage attraction in 2014. The lodges opened a year later, designed by a local architect and built by local companies to a contemporary and unobtrusive design. The lodges are part of a strategic plan to make use of the site's wealth of natural resources - namely its heritage, landscape, views, ecology and trails. This highly successful project brings benefits both to the community and to guests who enjoy the tranquility of the area and very comfortable overnight rest stops.

CPRE MARK



Warden Abbey Community Vineyard, Old Warden

This five acre field was first planted with vines in medieval times by the Cistercian monks of Warden Abbey. Centuries later, from the mid 1980s to 2008, it was again producing award-winning wines for the Whitbread family and now it is having a new lease of life as a project run by the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. The vineyard is managed as a not-for-profit educational and community resource by a Friends group who tend the vines by hand and run tours and events. They also provide opportunities for volunteers looking for work experience and link with local historic gardens to offer experience of vine pruning to their apprentice gardeners.

SHORTLISTED



Black Cat Farm Shop Expansion, Roxton

The Black Cat Farm Shop is a small cabin-based business located in the grounds of Roxton Garden Centre, which sells a range of local produce including fruit and vegetables, bread, meat, eggs, oil, honey, cakes and scones. The ethos of the shop is to supply 'Fresh, Seasonal, Local', and the owner also sells her own honey and home-made preserves. Since taking over the business in 2014, the owner has been revamping the shop and has ambitious plans to expand the existing business to provide a local shop service to surrounding villages. These include building another cabin alongside the existing shop to allow the production of preserves on-site to sell at the shop. Although in its early stages, it is anticipated that the expansion would lead to increased opening hours, a further part-time role and support for other local businesses.

BIODIVERSITY & LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT

Recognising initiatives that have enhanced the landscape and biodiversity of an area.

CPRE MARK



Galley and Warden Hills Grazing Project, Luton

This stunning chalk downland site is home to several rare calcareous plant species, butterflies such as the Small Blue and Chalk Hill Blue and is a breeding area for the Skylark and Corn Bunting. It is located on the urban fringe of Luton and is popular with local residents and dog walkers. To maintain its open appearance it needs continuous scrub control and also livestock grazing. An impressive project to carefully introduce Red Poll cattle for this purpose has taken several years to achieve and as well as installing fencing and water supplies, it has needed to engage local residents about what it is trying to achieve. The animals have been brought in to graze in selected areas each year since 2014 and already the benefits to the local wildlife are visible on the hillside.

CPRE MARK



Mowsbury Hillfort, Bedford

This is an impressive four hectare county wildlife site and a scheduled monument containing an Iron Age hillfort and a medieval moated site overlooking the northern suburbs of Bedford. A highly motivated group of volunteers have been working in this sensitive location for several years, balancing the ambition to make it better known and appreciated against the need to protect its unspoilt environment. The site encompasses a wide variety of habitats, including grassland, traditional orchards, deciduous woodland and a series of ponds. The volunteers are turning back years of neglect without destroying the natural ambience of this little-known gem and provide nature walks and information for the benefit of residents and visiting schools as part of their Friends' vision plan.

CPRE MARK



Pages Park Community Garden, Leighton Linlade

This spectacularly colourful garden has been established in collaboration between local organisations including the Council, the Rotary Club, a ramblers group and a supermarket. Some 25 volunteers now tend and develop the amenity, which features wide winding paths accessible by wheelchair and numerous ingeniously designed and planted flower beds. Arches and benches are included in the layout, which mixes sensory and insect-friendly plants and grasses with vivid herbaceous beds to create a much appreciated space for local residents and visitors to the adjacent narrow gauge railway.

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Heathland Restoration on Lord's Hill, Rushmere Country Park

Over 400 acres of woods, heath and meadow were purchased by the Greensand Trust and Central Bedfordshire Council in 2009 to create the Park. The award is given for an extensive long-term project, largely carried out by volunteers, to clear what was formerly commercial pine forest and return the natural heathland to its original appearance and richer ecosystem. The Trust's volunteers are gradually opening up lost views and creating more favourable conditions for birds such as woodlarks and nightjars and the indigenous reptiles and plants that characterise the Greensand Ridge.

COMMENDED



Harrold Odell Country Park, Harrold

The Friends of Harrold Odell Country Park conceived and commissioned a new boardwalk in partnership with Bedford Borough Council's Park Guardians. It provides a close up view, with full disabled access, of one of the woodland ponds which provide a home for bird and insect species in its surrounding reedbeds. The Park receives over 200,000 visitors each year to its lakes and paths and the Friends group have created several new features over recent years in addition to making a substantial contribution to its ongoing maintenance. This new structure adds a further source of enjoyment for the casual observer, an educational facility for young visitors and a tranquil place for contemplation.

COMMENDED



Putnoe Wood, Putnoe

This ancient woodland was first mentioned in the Domesday Book and was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 1994. A Friends group formed in 2011 works with Bedford Borough Council to maintain and improve the site, which is primarily composed of oak, ash and maple with some coppiced hazel plots. A rich carpet of spring flowers such as snowdrops, bluebells, primroses, celandine, violets and wood anemones make it a much loved local attraction and bird lovers can expect to see owls, sparrowhawks, woodpeckers, blackcap and warblers nesting or visiting during the year.

LIVING COUNTRYSIDE YOUTH AWARD

Recognising the efforts of young people and schools in enhancing the local environment and encouraging the enjoyment of the natural world now and for the future.

CPRE MARK



Swallowfield Lower School

These schools grounds have been thoughtfully enhanced to create diverse habitats for wildlife, and a well-used learning resource for the children. The grass boundaries of the school grounds have been left uncut and existing trees supplemented by new planting to create a sizeable wildlife area for learning and recreation. An active eco-committee of pupils plant saplings, maintain features such as the bug hotels and bird feeders and offers ideas for more initiatives. More ambitious features include the mature pond, polytunnel structure and an outdoor classroom. These are all actively used for learning across the school, bringing the classroom outside. There is a strong ethos to encourage all pupils to enjoy and engage in the outdoor environment through their learning and play, setting them off on the path to continuing interest and understanding of the natural world.

CPRE MARK



Woodlands Secondary Special School

A large section of this school's grounds has been developed into a striking food growing and wildlife-friendly sensory garden, within and around raised beds that can be reached by learners with a wide range of special educational needs. Volunteers and grounds staff built the initial structures and the planting and ongoing maintenance is carried out by the learners with help from teaching staff working under the guidance of a specialist gardening assistant. The garden was designed on permaculture principles and operates all year round. It features fruit, vegetable and floral areas and work areas such as a potting shed, polytunnel and an outdoor classroom. A gazebo and seating areas are located in an apothecary garden planted with culinary and medicinal herbs, which provide a delightful experience for all.

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Toddington St George Church of England School

The school is an active participant in the national Eco Schools initiative, achieving two green flags, and promoting an ethos that brings environmental sustainability into the heart of the school. As well as bringing the environment into the school curriculum, the school has provided growing and wildlife areas in the school grounds for the children to use, such as tubs, tyre gardens and allotment beds, which make the children more aware of where food comes from. A pond, wild areas and a living willow enclosure help the children to study wildlife and a variety of bird and bat boxes are also housed on site.

COMMENDED



Fulbrook Middle School

The children and staff have spent two years developing a beautiful wildlife garden in a fenced-off corner of the school playing fields. It incorporates new hedging, several fruit trees and a wildflower bed as well as wood piles for insects and a hedgehog home. The main feature is a pond which contains established colonies of tadpoles, newts and dragonflies and has already hosted a visiting grass snake. An allotment with greenhouses are sited in another area of the grounds so that children can grow food. A well supported gardening club is run three days a week and pupils have extensive access to the garden.

COMMENDED



Francesca Maza, Northill

With dog fouling of green spaces and footpaths a common environmental and public health problem in many areas, Northill Parish Council welcomed 13-year old Francesca's initiative to install emergency Poo Bag stations in strategic locations around the village. The bag dispensers are located on four of the most popular bridleways and footpaths in the Upper Caldecote and Northill area and the project has been running for half a year, with reports on usage returned to the councillors. Impressed by her youthful enterprise and community spirit, the parish council nominated Francesca for her efforts to make a difference to her local environment.

BUILDING DESIGN AND RESTORATION

Recognising good quality new build or restoration of a site that enhances its surroundings

CPRE MARK



Jordans Mill, Broom

This elegant rural mill site with its historical buildings has been beautifully enhanced by an additional visitors centre and interpretation building, along with elegantly designed gardens. The mill produced flour and cereals for the Jordans brand for over 100 years and in 2012 the family started their project to turn it into an educational attraction which retains the character of the original site whilst also providing modern facilities for the local community and visiting tourists. Three striking new timber buildings, constructed to the highest environmental standards, show great character and warmth sitting harmoniously alongside the original watermill on the River Ivel. A Heritage Centre houses a cafe and shop, the Mill Barn contains educational and historical material and the eco-houses serve as office accommodation. This is truly a significant proposal in this rural setting, worthy of our highest award.

CPRE MARK



The Swiss Garden, Old Warden

The work completed at The Swiss Gardens over two years is simply breathtaking and awe inspiring. Highlights include the idiosyncratic thatched Swiss cottage, a grotto and fernery topped by an impressive glazed dome, an intimate chapel, an oriental kiosk and a series of ornate cast iron bridges over beautiful waterways. The winding paths through manicured lawns and flower beds contrast with woodland sections studded with artworks. There is much surprise, intrigue and investigation to be done when exploring this site and the wonders never seem to end. The judges were greatly impressed by the historical research into the buildings and gardens which was carried out in preparation for this huge renewal project. The subsequent attention to the detail, design and quality of workmanship is at the pinnacle of restoration work in the UK and is now a great asset to Bedfordshire.

COMMENDED



Heron View Visitors Centre, Rushmere Country Park

Originally a 1960s bungalow overlooking a spectacular valley and heronry, this almost forgotten site is now being transformed, gently and appropriately into a valuable local asset. The visitor centre, which houses educational resources and the Treetops cafe, has been extensively remodelled to a design which respects its prominent location overlooking a steep wooded valley. Its features include panoramic windows, solar power and rainwater collection and a well equipped play area for children. Volunteers operate the cafe and others are on hand to explain the Heron Watch project where visitors can observe the heronry below and the bats living in the roof above.

COMMENDED



Re-thatch of property by Chris Dodson, Maulden

This recently completed work by Chris Dodson, a master thatcher and previous winner in the Living Countryside Awards, again demonstrates his continuing very high standard of craftsmanship. The very complicated roof of this cottage was re-thatched between late October 2015 and early January 2016. The project followed advice from Historic England, which specified combed wheat reed, necessarily sourced from Somerset, but the long straw for the ridges and the willow spars to fix the material were locally grown. The time and effort and attention to detail and the traditional craft techniques makes the renewal of this thatch a breath of fresh air on discovering the house at the end of its cul-de-sac. Chris and his apprentices' work can be seen in many locations in Bedfordshire, preserving the character of the county's villages.

Campaign to Protect Rural England is a national charity that exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

We have 60,000 supporters, a branch in every county, eight regional groups, over 200 local groups and a national office in London. CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning.

Our Patron is Her Majesty the Queen

Our President is Emma Bridgewater



MEMBERSHIP

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