

LIVING COUNTRYSIDE AWARDS 2011

This is the fourth year of the CPRE Bedfordshire awards scheme, which aims to bring recognition to landowners, individuals and commercial users of the countryside who are making special efforts to preserve the visual appearance and biodiversity of the county for future generations. Their work often receives little public acknowledgement and the awards were therefore established to celebrate their achievements. Here are this year's best examples...

LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT



Harrold-Odell Country Park

Skilled management of the flooded gravel pits alongside the River Great Ouse over recent years has provided the county with a popular resource for leisure and recreational activities, whilst preserving the ecological value of the park's habitats. Up to 200,000 visitors each year now enjoy a widening range of facilities while its lakes, woodland and river bank quietly host many rare species in peaceful surroundings.



Turvey Community Orchard

A neglected piece of land next to the village cricket pitch is being developed as a community orchard by volunteers who have planted and now tend fruit trees sponsored by village donors. A wide variety of traditional species of apples, pears, plums and cherries are growing alongside more ambitious experiments with apricots and figs.



Townlands, Aspley Guise

Three years ago the Parish Council and a group of volunteers set about improving a disused piece of land which was attracting vandalism and have transformed the site into a much appreciated village asset. It now has open grassland, fruit trees, a willow maze and play equipment. But the highlight is a spectacular wildflower meadow, full of colour and interest, and improving year on year.

LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT



Henlow Bridge Lakes

The creation of two large fishing lakes with disabled access in former scrub land near Arlesey railway bridge provided an attractive new location for the county's anglers and a more diverse habitat for wildlife. The owner of the site, which includes a well designed caravan park, planted some 20,000 saplings and also voluntarily opened a new public footpath along the delightful bank of the River Hiz.



Old Road Meadow, Meppershall

The Parish Council took the unwanted allotments on the edge of the village in hand some ten years ago and turned the area into a meadow planted with native trees. A community orchard was also included in the scheme. All the trees are now well established and the meadow forms a pleasant amenity walk for the villagers.



Poplars Farm Secret Garden, Wympington

Two generations of the family who farm the fields to the east of the village and have a love of trees have created a hidden parkland over the last thirty years from what was a less productive area of the farm. It features broad lawns, mature trees of many types, a rose garden and buildings which enable it to be used for wedding receptions and other occasions.



Sheri's Garden, Bromham Lower School

A memorial garden to a former pupil has been completely renovated using creative landscape design, high quality materials and imaginative planting. The garden is accessible to villagers and the seating is arranged to provide quiet spaces for thought.



John O'Gaunt Golf Club Ecology, Sutton

The staff and members of the golf club, previous entrants for the Living Countryside Awards, continue to develop new areas for the benefit of wildlife and flora. The latest example is the Cartagena course, which is having the edges of the fairways enlarged to encourage wildflowers, gorse planted in old bunkers and its mature trees fitted with additional nesting boxes.



Stockwell Farm woodland project, Eggington

This huge voluntary project carried out on Stockwell Farm required the planting of 100,000 trees over some 80 acres. Ten years in the making, the woodlands now provide a rich habitat with indigenous Bedfordshire species. Broad avenues through the hilltop woods are lightly mowed for the benefit of visitors, who are welcome to explore this new landscape.



Rushmatters, Colesden

Felicity Irons and her staff have built a highly successful business producing a range of rush matting, tableware and basketry for customers worldwide, while at the same time keeping alive an ancient Bedfordshire craft. Rushes are harvested by hand from local rivers using punts and scythes and dried in an ancient barn. The high quality products woven by a small team of local craftspeople have found their way to customers as far away as Japan and the USA.

SUSTAINABLE LIVING



Roger Evans, Master Thatcher

Numerous examples of Roger's work, bearing his acorn motif, can be found throughout Bedfordshire and further afield. His contribution to preserving the authentic appearance of the county's villages over more than 30 years has been very significant. Roger was the first Thatcher to receive a Heritage Skills NVQ, level 3 award, enabling him to work on English Heritage's buildings; he now teaches this most visible and ancient craft to the next generation.



Stondon Lower School

The compact garden outside the school is heavily used for learning and play and much loved by enthusiastic teachers and pupils. It features a productive poultry enclosure, a very clever greenhouse built entirely from discarded plastic bottles, composting facilities and beds devoted to flowers and vegetables. Lessons in various subjects are created using aspects of the garden and the children are able to use it for rest or games.



Kingfisher Way Arts Festival

An imaginative new venture comprising a programme of music, visual arts and literary events held over the early summer period aims to encourage residents and visitors to enjoy the natural and cultural attractions of an area which encompasses Moggerhanger, Tempsford, Great Barford, Blunham and Roxton. It also complements the Riversmeet Hidden Britain initiative which provides local walking routes and information boards.



Pecks Farm Shop, Eggington

Set up eight years ago to promote healthy, locally grown food, the shop hosts visits for children and raises awareness of food transport issues. It stocks a huge range of products from local farmers including fruit and vegetables, meat, breads, preserves and its own honey, as well as a wide selection of beers from local micro breweries.



All Saints church, Little Staughton

The villagers were outraged when thieves stole the copper lightning conductor from the church in 2007, pulling down the top two metres of its stone spire in the attack. It has now been replaced and the building has recovered its former glory as a prominent landmark on the North Bedfordshire wolds.



Close Cottage, Swineshead

The ingenious and enthusiastic owners and their architect have restored a Grade II listed cottage which had stood derelict for the last ten years in an important location opposite the church. The owners have replaced rotten timbers, preserved wattle and daub sections and re-used pantiles to retain the building's integrity, whilst skilfully incorporating energy efficient measures such as an air source heat pump.



St Margaret of Antioch church, Knotting

The Churches Conservation Trust assumed care of the tiny village church in 2009 when its congregation became too small to sustain its regular use for services. Since then the Grade I listed building has been meticulously restored using traditional materials and skills in a two-year programme. It has a charming and simple interior with a timeless, rustic feel and is now well protected and prepared for its next few hundred years.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE



The Mansion, Shuttleworth College

The Grade 2* Victorian country house is a significant feature in the landscape but its roof and tower had started to leak in recent years. A major phase of restoration was recently completed, using stone acquired from the original Northamptonshire quarry before its closure and genuine Welsh slates.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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