

LIVING COUNTRYSIDE AWARDS 2012

Awards for those using and caring for the countryside

This is the fifth year of CPRE Bedfordshire's Awards scheme. Once again, the number and scope of the entries demonstrate the enthusiasm of landowners, individuals and commercial users of the countryside who make special efforts to preserve the visual appearance and biodiversity of the county for the benefit of future generations. These Awards celebrate their achievements, which often receive little other public acknowledgement. Here are this year's best examples...

SUSTAINABLE LIVING



The Community Tree Trust, Clophill

The Trust was established in 1996 and its volunteers collect large numbers of seeds and saplings from ancient woodlands and hedgerows throughout the county. These are grown on for two or three years and then sold to landowners and farmers who want to restore or enhance land or plant new woodlands including the Forest of Marston Vale, using truly local native species. The Trust has a strong educational ethic and is now diversifying into wildflower collection.



Carlton Lower School

The school's nature reserve was created about eight years ago to help rural children understand rural matters and reinforce its core green values. Each class has its own vegetable plot and the area contains woodland and a wildlife pond which are used for teaching purposes. A hen house completes the scene and it is clear the children derive great pleasure and pride from their projects.



Garden Friends Farm Shop

The shop alongside Roxton Garden Centre offers a wide range of locally produced food and craft goods in addition to running a successful vegetable box scheme. The meat, fruit and vegetables on sale are all local varieties and other products include sauces, jams, pickles, bread, honey, cakes and soft drinks. Wool, charcoal and ointments are also on sale in the shop, which provides a vibrant outlet for the county's suppliers.



Oak Bank School, Leighton Buzzard

The school caters for about 60 pupils with behavioural difficulties and aims to give a child self-confidence and pride as well as providing the basic curriculum. The horticultural area, which comprises raised beds and plots for individual pupils, produces fruit and vegetables which can be sold to parents and teachers. A varied collection of animals completes this imaginative educational resource.

LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT



Permissive paths, Meppershall

The owner of an extensive arable farm which lies between Shefford and Meppershall wanted to link up existing footpaths with three permissive paths on his land, greatly improving enjoyment of the area for local villagers. These pass ancient boundary hedges and bluebell woods and one section provides a new safe path routed away from a very busy and dangerous road.



Taylors Mill Bridge, Stotfold

When the construction company Amey was commissioned to rebuild a weak bridge over the river at Taylors Mill, they realised that the road was used each spring by large numbers of migrating toads. Using careful construction techniques they minimised disturbance to the creatures and have subsequently installed attractive warning signs for traffic along the road.



Stanbridge Meadows, Leighton Linlade

This designated County Wildlife Site, formerly part of the RAF station, was acquired in 2010 and is described as rich lowland meadow. The plan is to rid the site of its invasive hawthorn scrub and encourage its underlying biodiversity with a combination of hand cutting and grazing cattle. Species include the healing herb agrimony, bee and pyramid orchids and a wide range of butterflies and moths.



John O'Gaunt Golf Club Ecology, Sutton

The groundsman at the club, a previous Award winner, continues to work on the landscape under his care, with the support of the management of the golf club, to improve the terrain for wildlife. This latest initiative attempts to increase the area of heathland on the fringes of the fairway by planting heathers which should attract more insects, and hence birds, to the area.



Rectory Farm, Wilden

This 250 acre arable and livestock farm has been owned by the same family for three generations and is managed in traditional ways which maintain a rich wildlife habitat. Woodland is carefully tended and buffer strips are provided around the arable fields to encourage biodiversity. Over 100 types of grass can be found in the meadows, which are cut for hay in July and fed to the visibly contented cattle later in the year.



Clapham Millennium Park

A new park alongside existing allotments was created by volunteers with local council and National Lottery funding and now provides an attractive local amenity. It features a wildlife area tended by the village's pre-school children and scout group, native fruit trees and several striking wood sculptures by chain-saw artist Carrie Yuen, based on ideas by local pupils.



Grace Baptist Chapel churchyard, Carlton

When the 18th century chapel was closed and converted into a house, the churchyard was given to the Parish Council with a small endowment to help with its future upkeep. An enthusiastic group of volunteers now maintain the site as a wildflower site, mowing it only for hay, but keeping the graves in this tranquil setting accessible for visiting relatives and the local community.



Manor House Gardens, Stevington

Known locally as Kathy Brown's Garden, its owner has developed the open land around the original farmhouse into an artistic and imaginative garden. It contains formal beds, herbaceous borders, a wildlife meadow and intriguing features linking the visual arts directly to gardening. The garden is frequently open to visitors, with some proceeds donated to local charities, and is a real asset to rural Bedfordshire.



North Lane hedges, Haynes

The owner of North End Farm - a previous Award winner - has turned his attention to the hedges lining the local roads. His family have layered an extensive section of hedge, originally planted in 2003, in a style traditional to the area. It consists mostly of hawthorn, with hazel, blackthorn, field maple and dogwood and forms an attractive and authentic approach to the farm.



Bellcote Millennium Green, Shefford

When a substantial housing development was completed, the town council vowed to dedicate the adjacent water meadow - one of its few green spaces left - to nature and recreational use. The area contains three distinct habitats - water meadow, boggy ground and native woodland - and is heavily used by residents who value its easy accessibility and links to the local footpath network.



Ickwell Bury Reserve

The grounds of a former country house were donated to the Harpur Trust in 1958 and have since been used as an educational resource by Bedford School. The tranquil estate is rich in wildlife habitats which include mature woodland and an extensive lake full of amphibians. Management plans for the reserve are carefully allowing more access to this valuable ecological asset.



Rushmere Country Park, Heath & Reach

Some 400 acres of woods, heath and meadow were purchased by the Greensand Trust and Central Bedfordshire Council in 2009 to create this beautiful new country park. Its visitor centre has a spectacular view over a pine forest and a lake with a heronry which can be viewed through a CCTV system. Its extensive footpath network through woodland also holds surprises such as sculptures and adventure playgrounds.



North East Luton Green Corridors

The Corridors project is a collaborative project by Luton Borough and the Wildlife Trust to improve public access to the Warden Hills SSSI from nearby housing estates. New fencing and interpretative signs have improved the visitor's experience in this open chalk landscape and the resulting engagement of local residents should help raise awareness and ensure its protection.

HISTORIC AND NEW BUILDINGS



1 The Green, Ickwell

The cottage stands in a prominent position on the edge of the village green and its owner has gone to great lengths to ensure its appearance and authenticity have been preserved during a major renovation of the property. The thatch, which is very complex and striking in its design, has been beautifully executed by a master thatcher using Norfolk reed, the building's earlier covering.



The Ongley Mausoleum, Old Warden

This conspicuous building, erected in 1787, stands in the corner of St. Leonard's churchyard and was a local landmark in danger of collapse before the Parish stepped in to repair it. The building has been made waterproof and its architectural details conserved but its dark, damp underground interior still provides home for thriving colonies of frogs and toads.



Unity Hall, Barton-le-Clay

The recently completed building for the scouts and guides of the area represents the realisation of an ambition held for 30 years by the local community. Its clever design echoes the simplicity of the farm buildings found in the surrounding area but it uses the latest energy saving technologies and its architecture blends perfectly with the dramatic backdrop of nearby Sharpenhoe Clappers.

HISTORIC AND NEW BUILDINGS



Potters End Cottage, Eversholt

A derelict house owned by the Bedford Estates has been turned into a highly energy efficient family home. Much of the traditional brick and timber construction has been retained and the idiosyncratic layout of the original building is still in evidence, but the comfort of its modern conveniences and its stunning rural location in a quiet river valley make it a most attractive dwelling.



Old Forge Cottage, Moggerhanger

The owners of this ancient timber building found it was suffering from rot and needed urgent remedial work. Brick supports and a slate floor were installed, the tile roof was renewed and the forge was clad in weatherboarding to replicate its original appearance. It now forms a prominent feature as it is a comparatively rare type of building located on the main road through the village.



The Plough, Bolnhurst

The inn was originally a medieval building and was substantially restored after a fire a few years ago. Its current owners were hampered by lack of space and chose to take on the challenge of creating more room without compromising the original layout. The new light oak and glass extension has integrity as a modern building and greatly enhances a successful local business in the heart of rural Bedfordshire.



The Old Bridge, Clophill

The replacement of the river bridge is the centrepiece of an ambitious project to enhance the village green. Its red brick, single arch style is certainly more in keeping with the locale than the huge ramped steel footbridge over the A507 which dominates the view. Other works include the provision of a grassy community seating area and the planting of local specimen trees.



Affordable Housing, Old Warden

Pear Tree Piece affordable housing is a credit to the Parish Council, the Howard Cottage Housing Association, their architect and the conservation officer from Central Bedfordshire Council. It took ten years to complete the much needed project which provides homes for local people where they are often priced out by local rents. Its pleasing design features and layout blend well in this sensitive location.



The Old School, Cardington

A Victorian school building with attractive external features now houses the offices of the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. The building renovations included new ceilings and insulation, the installation of heat pumps and solar panels on the rear roofs. It now has a new lease of life whilst respecting the timeless appearance of the village conservation area.

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.

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