

LIVING COUNTRYSIDE AWARDS 2014

Now in its sixth year, CPRE Bedfordshire's Living Countryside Awards scheme continues to recognise the people and projects that are benefiting our county's rural environment and green spaces. Over the years the entry categories have changed slightly as the emphasis on different rural issues has evolved, but the idea remains the same - to bring wider recognition to the landowners, individuals, groups and businesses who are making special efforts to enhance our countryside for people and wildlife. CPRE is delighted to celebrate their efforts, which bring enjoyment and environmental benefits to our communities now and for future generations. This year's awards recognise the following projects.



SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE



Chris Dodson, Master Thatcher

Chris Dodson is a master thatcher, proudly representing the fourth generation of a family whose work has contributed to the beauty of Bedfordshire's buildings over many decades. His entry listed thatching works across Bedfordshire, including a cottage in Bromham he was working on when the judges visited. He displays a high level of skill in working long straw and water reed, much of which is grown in the county. A further indication of the sustainability of the business is his commitment to authentic, traditional methods of harvesting and installation and to the training of future thatchers.



Cornfields Restaurant, Colmworth

A popular local restaurant and bar with all the character expected of a country pub, together with an attached six bedroom hotel suite for visitors from further afield. The owners use fresh, locally sourced produce where possible, thereby supporting other businesses and providing employment in a relatively under-populated part of the county.



Golden Gardens, Goldington

Two community gardens created from disused garages have transformed a concrete wasteland into a valued asset for the local community. Volunteers produce flowers and vegetables for fresh sale or freezer storage, and goods can be packaged in small quantities for elderly customers. The site includes a café that provides a lively social venue for volunteers and local residents, and the raised beds for cultivation enable wheelchair users to take a full part too.



Harpers Food, Pepperstock

This spacious fine food emporium has been created by modernising and extending a redundant pub in this small hamlet, and installing state-of-the-art food counters. A comfortable coffee shop and large function room add to its appeal as a lively hub for the local community and the business has become the largest employer in the parish of Slip End. The project has delighted residents, walkers and cyclists alike, by restoring a landmark building into a valuable local asset.

SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE



Woburn Golf Club Reservoir

Addressing the difficulty of providing the large quantities of water needed for a golf course located on heathland, the Club has made a major investment by constructing a borehole and a 108,000 cubic metre reservoir. The aquifer is monitored and extraction is carried out only when ground water levels are high. The surrounding land yielded Roman archaeological finds and is now laid to meadow, attracting bees, butterflies and birds of prey.



Mrs Middleton Ltd, Lilley

Two sisters have created an enterprising business, producing high quality cold-pressed rapeseed oil at Barton Hill Farm, farming in a way that enhances biodiversity on the land. The idea came from the realisation that many visitors to the countryside have little knowledge of how healthy, good quality foodstuffs are produced. The oil bottles show a map reference to indicate exactly in which field the seed was grown and bears a Made in Bedfordshire label. The company is set to become a leading sustainable food producer, with the oil already being used in top restaurants and selling at farm shops across England. The enterprise has also diversified into flour, which is ground locally at Stotfold Mill.



New Allotments, Haynes

This project is a great example of what a community can do to achieve greater sustainability, reduce food miles, improve residents' health and bring new friends together. The land was offered by a local farmer after negotiations with the Parish Council, and suitable fencing and an efficient semi-automated water supply have been put in. Almost all of the 22 plots are now being avidly cultivated by enthusiastic villagers, and there are plans to involve other members of the community.

BIODIVERSITY & LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT



The Foragers' Way, Linslade

This is an ongoing project to bring more trees, hedges and biodiversity to a disused sand quarry at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park. This includes the layering of a 500-year-old hedge on the site that includes trees rich in fruit which people have gathered for many centuries and lends its name to the project. Enthusiastic volunteers from the Friends of Tiddenfoot Waterside Park are also engaged in planting a new hedge to conceal an unsightly fence and maintain other features such as bird and bat boxes and open grassland in conjunction with the local council.



Hedgerow Restoration, Harlington Garden Cemetery

An untidy and overgrown hedge between the cemetery and adjacent allotments has been transformed by a dedicated group of volunteers working throughout the winter. The hedge needed careful laying to encourage the variety of plants established within it and the work was carried out under skilled supervision by The Conservation Volunteers. The result is a sturdy and neat boundary with better prospects for increased future biodiversity.



Jubilee Wood, Biggleswade

An ambitious project has developed a new public access open space on the edge of the town, close to large new housing developments taking place. Eight thousand trees of mixed native species have been planted over 4.5 hectares - half of them by local volunteers - and a further 100 fruit trees of local heritage are already bearing fruit. The project has a strong educational theme as well as creating a welcome new public amenity.



John O'Gaunt Golf Club, Sutton

Steve Thompson, a greenkeeper at the Club, has been enthusiastically promoting wildlife on the golf course he cares for over a number of years. This conservation work has included the installation of bird boxes, reinstatement of heathland and monitoring of riverside wildlife and bird populations. He has recently put into place Operation Pollinator, which entails sowing large areas with wildflower seed and providing habitats to encourage bees. He also encourages interest in the wildlife on the golf course by running nature walks, having a display board at the golf course and has contributed his experiences to magazines.

BIODIVERSITY & LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT



Poppy Hills Lake Footpath, Henlow

After many years of negotiation, the perseverance of the Parish Council has enabled the construction of a new footpath through fishing lakes which lie between the village's Millennium Meadows and a new bridleway, creating a popular circular walk for residents and visitors. Walkers can now enjoy views across the serene lakes and take the opportunity to spot its abundant wildlife.



Sand Martin Wall, Millennium Country Park, Marston Vale

An ingenious home for these attractive birds has been constructed in the wetland area of the Park to encourage the declining species to breed in artificial nesting spaces created in 86 pipes. The Bedfordshire Bird Club and local birdwatchers were involved in the project and a new bird hide on the opposite bank enables visitors to view the nests.



Lousy Bush Nature Reserve, Wrestlingworth

This 2.5 acre former gravel pit had become a site for rubbish disposal until a local walking group realised its potential as a home for wildlife. A huge effort in clearance revealed two distinct pond areas which together with the surrounding mature trees provide a good refuge in a very open landscape. The project is at an early stage but already some 25 species of birds and 112 species of moths have been recorded.



Millennium Garden and SOE Memorial, Tempsford

The Garden, which opened in 2000, was created out of a piece of land left over from the construction of the A1 Tempsford bypass which had become an eyesore. Since then it has been tended by volunteers from the village and developed to encourage wildlife. Its mature trees and footpaths provide a tranquil contrast with the nearby road. A striking new memorial to the WW2 Special Operations Executive heroes who departed from Tempsford airfield stands next to the Garden, designed by a local resident and includes a beautiful mosaic. The memorial was dedicated by HM Prince of Wales in 2013.

BUILDING DESIGN & RESTORATION



Linden Cottage, Harrold

A Grade II listed terraced cottage standing in a prominent position on Harrold Green was reroofed by Tina Nash, a sixth generation master thatcher. After considerable strengthening of the roof structure had been carried out, long straw, the correct and traditional material for this group of cottages, was skilfully applied. Locally grown straw and hazel spars produced in Riseley speak to the authenticity of the renovation.



Carlton War Memorial

This memorial was dedicated on Armistice Day in 2010 and represents the result of many years' campaigning by local resident and WW2 veteran Stan Smith and the parish council. It stands in a green space in the village which serves as a quiet corner for contemplation and its simple design and wording have been appropriately designed to honour all those who have lost their lives in conflicts.



Top Farm House, Colmworth

An ingenious reconstruction of a 1960s bungalow which had a controversial butterfly reverse-pitch roof has produced a spacious and light family home which makes full use of its rural location and fine views. The original house was designed by a local architect and the renovation project was handled by Thurleigh-based Judith Armstrong. The family of the first owners are delighted that the best features of the earlier building have been retained and it now continues to be a local landmark.

BUILDING DESIGN & RESTORATION



The Old Barn, Wick End, Stagsden

A former cart shed has been converted into a stylish and energy efficient family home which sits very comfortably in the surrounding open landscape. Great attention was paid to keeping the external appearance of the original structure by alternating infill and windows and other new outbuildings have been treated in a similarly sympathetic style.



Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre

Ridgmont railway station opened in 1846 but had been derelict since the 1970s. The picturesque Grade II listed building has now been restored for Bedfordshire Rural Communities Council and provides a delightful tea room, a shop, local history displays in the station master's office and three offices for local enterprises. The restoration work incorporated modern standards of insulation, rainwater recycling and waste treatment but preserves the character of the building as a practical amenity for both local people and rail tourists.



St. Mary's Old Church and Observation Tower, Clophill

Clophill Heritage Trust has found imaginative ways of restoring an important heritage building, with plans to make use of it for educational and leisure purposes and eliminating the antisocial activity that had blighted the site for many years. A new stairway installed inside the church leads to an observation platform giving all round views of beautiful countryside. This is a landmark achievement for the village, which identified the need for the site's restoration in its Parish Plan.



Bassmead Manor Barns, Staploe

A major development of existing and new farm buildings designed to create a stylish new destination wedding venue has been carried out with impressive attention to detail. The site has a scheduled monument comprising a moat and a magnificent 300 year old wooden barn which is now equipped to host the wedding service. Alongside, a new timber framed building has been constructed and older buildings have been restored using traditional building methods, providing further facilities and creating a stunning development that respects its history and surroundings.

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 Sir Andrew Motion



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