

CPRE HERTFORDSHIRE AWARDS 2022 NOMINATIONS SUMMARIES AND JUDGES' COMMENTS

Braughing Parish Paths Group

Set up over 20 years ago, initially to walk all the public rights of way in the parish to ensure they were kept open and accessible, the Group remains active today and has 20 to 30 walkers at each monthly walk, with an age range of 12 to 74. The Group knows every local path and also arranges occasional walks outside the parish. The walks are free, which encourages a wide range of people to access and enjoy the countryside. Knowledgeable leaders encourage learning too in subjects such as flora and fauna. The Group also carries out light cutting back of encroaching vegetation as necessary, while the need for more significant work is notified to the Parish Council and the County Council's rights of way team. An annual maintenance day is held at 'The Bourne' (a dry river bed), where volunteers get together to maintain the area.

Our judge was impressed by the Group's excellent relationships with the County and Parish Councils, as well as local farmers, and its success in getting the rural community together for sociable physical exercise every month.

Central and South Herts Beekeepers – Beginners' Course

This group of amateur beekeepers takes a professional approach to its work, communicating regularly with the National Bee Unit and organising hive inspections as needed. A large group of volunteers assists with duties and public appearances. They use an observational hive to take to educational and community events. The long-standing **Beginners' Course** is a key event for the organisation: run over four evenings in March each year, plus two practical sessions on a Saturday, it covers all aspects of bees and beekeeping. The course provides confidence to anyone interested in bees or wanting to start beekeeping, is good value for money and provides access to experienced experts and live apiaries. In most years there are 50 to 70 attendees.

The professionalism of the volunteers and their knowledge was noted in particular by our judge, who also commented that they have a key role in promoting the importance of bees to all communities.

Clare Gooden, of the River Hiz Conservation Group

Committed to protecting her local chalk streams (the Hiz and the Oughton) and their wildlife from threats like pollution, Clare set up a group of volunteers called the River Hiz Conservation Group, under the umbrella of Ickleford Parish Council. Volunteers help to clear the rivers of fallen trees, or other debris, some of which is fly-tipped. They also monitor water pollution and flows, and fish populations. Clare liaises with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust for guidance. She also provides research for matters that arise in Parish Council meetings (she is a Parish Councillor), relating to planning applications and other issues which may affect the rivers as well as flora and fauna in the village. She hopes that her work and that of the Group will help the local community to enjoy the rivers and the local countryside.

Our judge was very impressed by Clare's personal commitment to the task of protecting two of the county's chalk streams, and their rare and fragile habitats. She has taught herself about their biodiversity and management techniques needed for their maintenance, and has developed a proactive relationship with the community and councillors.

Emily's Teashop, Whitwell

Emily's Teashop is an independent café offering drinks and homemade cakes, mainly to cyclists and walkers. Its charming farmyard setting is tucked away off the main street in Whitwell and invisible to passing traffic. There is also a cycle shop offering what might be much-needed spares to passing cyclists. In the adjoining courtyard the fruit and vegetables for sale come from Thelma's barn up the road, and there's bakery produce on sale from the bakery in Welwyn. There is also a joinery, and art and photography studios, plus a livery and equestrian centre nearby. Next door is a 'secret garden', which is free to wander around.

Our judge noted the Teashop's popularity with cyclists and its longevity – it has been open for the past 15 years. There's an emphasis on using local suppliers, and free-range and Fairtrade products.

Friends of Bunkers Park

Bunkers Park, 123 acres (50 ha) of former cultivated farmland with some small areas of mature woodland on the edge of Hemel Hempstead, was acquired by Dacorum Borough Council in 1995 to create a wildlife-rich public open space. Soon afterwards local volunteers planted a large area of trees, of hazel and other deciduous species. Other areas are managed as wildflower-rich grassland. The Friends of Bunkers Park is a small group of local volunteers formed in 2009. Guided and equipped by the Borough Council they help with management tasks including coppicing, clearing overgrown footpaths, tree planting, fence and gate repairs and litter clearance. The new hazel woodland, coppiced on an eight-year cycle, is becoming a haven for wildlife. The Friends work for a morning once a month: for the volunteers this is an opportunity to take some exercise and make new friends. Three fields are grazed in the summer months by Belted Galloway cattle on loan from the Box Moor Trust. The Friends have formed a group called Cattle Watch: members work on a rota to check on the cattle daily.

Our judge said: 'The Friends give valuable support to the Borough Council, helping to achieve improvements in the accessibility and appearance of the open space and its biodiversity, and the working parties provide opportunities for local volunteers to meet together and do useful work'.

Friends of Hitchin Cemetery

Established in 2016, with support from the County Council's Countryside Management Service, the Friends evolved from an earlier group which received training to manage the topiary in the cemetery. They are concerned to improve the habitat value of this historic cemetery, planting shrubs around the boundary, introducing plants into beds around the walls and encouraging plant diversity in the grassland areas by introducing native wildflower seeds and plants. Members of the group meet every Friday to carry out tasks to enhance the wildlife while ensuring that the grounds look well cared for, which cemetery users appreciate. Some volunteers meet more often, such are the demands of the large site. The Friends lead guided walks, featuring the history of the chapel and the cemetery and some of the interesting characters who rest there, as well as the wildlife. One member of the group writes a blog detailing his wildlife sightings. Local Scouts also help with management chores.

Our judge was impressed by the Friends' management approach, which succeeds in balancing the natural beauty of the greenspace associated with the cemetery with the manicured expectations of historic 'park' management.

Friends of Woolmer Green Pond

The pond was once an attractive and popular local amenity, but about ten years ago it was colonised by the very invasive weed *Crassula helmsii*, an Australasian native. Official advice not to touch the weed or attempt to remove it (risking spreading it to other water bodies) has recently changed, but not before the pond became carpeted with the weed and invaded by other weed species as well. As a result, the pond is no longer the attractive place it once was. Local residents are now in the process of setting up a charity, to enable them to raise funds to tackle this issue and return the pond to its former condition, so that it is again an attractive amenity as well as a wildlife habitat.

Our judge noted that this project is at a very early stage in its work. We wish the Friends every success with their fundraising.

Friends of Wormley Open Spaces (FOWOS)

The group was set up by local residents in 2000 when the 14 acres (5.7 ha) of Top Field and adjoining Cozens Grove (in Broxbourne Borough Council ownership) were proposed for an extension to the nearby golf course. In 2005 FOWOS achieved Local Nature Reserve status for the land and later lobbied successfully to stop the site being removed from the Green Belt. Now the group also looks after another green space, Baas Hill Common. The group undertakes practical tasks to implement the site management plan prepared by the Borough Council, keeps the area litter-free, leads guided walks and organises events for local people. From Top Field there is a fine view across the Lea Valley towards the hills of Essex. FOWOS recently influenced the design of adjacent housing to reduce its impact on the view. Earlier in 2022 FOWOS led an engagement project with Broxbourne School: a poster competition for years 7 to 9 on the theme of 'Beauty dies where litter lies', which attracted a large entry.

Our judge commended the significant achievements by FOWOS in protecting these areas, and their ongoing management and public engagement activities. Notably some of the original group members are still involved after more than 20 years.

Groundswell - The Regenerative Agriculture Show and Conference / Weston Park Farms

The Cherry brothers were pioneers in adopting sustainable regenerative farming in Hertfordshire, attracting attention nationwide: their methods include no-till, cover crops and reintroducing livestock into the arable rotation, so as to improve the health of the farmer's most important asset, the soil. Their mission goes beyond running a successful farm. They want to demonstrate to other farmers that industrial farming methods are neither sustainable nor a good business model. The Groundswell Show and Conference is now seven years old and in 2021 welcomed 3,500 delegates. Attracting international attention, and showcasing practices, equipment, and other resources for regenerative farming, the annual conferences are also attended by those concerned with carbon sequestration and flood prevention.

Describing this as an 'excellent enterprise', our judge was impressed when meeting Paul, one of the brothers, by his 'Incredible knowledge and passion for sharing his knowledge', adding 'Paul is a fantastic spokesperson for the farming industry today'.

Heartwood Monitoring Group

In 2008 The Woodland Trust acquired 857 acres (347 ha) of farmland, with some ancient woodland, near St Albans, and proposed to establish the largest new area of native woodland in the UK by planting and natural regeneration. Now 600,000 trees and shrubs have been planted, mainly by volunteers. Before the planting started members of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society recognised the important need to set up a monitoring project to chart the change in wildlife populations as the proposals were implemented. An impressive team of volunteers, professionals and amateurs, has been assembled to cover many different species groups. Novice observers are also taking the opportunity to learn alongside the recorders. Photographic records have added to the data recorded, in what is possibly a unique project. The Group gives talks and runs guided walks. Records are deposited with the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre and relevant national databases. Three scientific papers have been published, with more planned.

Our judge commented that the group could consider presenting the information as practical guidance, for example to assist landscape and ecology professionals involved with rewilding and biodiversity net gain. Our judge was especially impressed by three beautiful guidebooks produced by the Group: Heartwood Butterflies, Heartwood Wildflowers and Heartwood Arboretum, which are for sale in local outlets, helping to connect local people to the countryside.

Hertfordshire Walker Website

David Brewer, an enthusiastic walker, journalist and website expert, and Ellie his wife have put together a set of over 200 on-line walks located across all of Hertfordshire. These are very easy to access and very popular, with lots of positive feedback. The information is free and includes photographs and interactive maps. GPS files are free to download so that the walks can be enjoyed on any device. Most walks include a pub stop and several pubs have incorporated walks into their own websites. David sees pubs as integral to the rural way of life, and notes that we are blessed in Hertfordshire with a particularly dense network of footpaths. They encourage walkers to report ploughed-up public paths and other issues to them and to engage with the relevant council rights of way teams, and many paths have been reinstated as a result. They are currently working on buggy-friendly routes in response to demand. The website is creating a 'fellowship of walkers', connecting with each other, with pubs and the countryside, and with landowners and the county council.

Our judge said: 'This is a fantastic project connecting people with the countryside'. Others have said that the project is 'simply amazing' and 'we have explored much more of the local countryside than we would have otherwise experienced'.

Jake Gutteridge and Tarant Hobbs

This grandson (Jake) and grandfather (Tarant) duo were nominated as the 'eyes and ears' of Cedars Park in Waltham Cross, Cheshunt. The 19-acre (7.7 ha) park occupies the site of the 16th century royal palace known as

Theobalds, a very popular green space for local people. The pair regularly undertake a number of tasks around the park, and report problems to the Borough Council. The park contains an arboretum with a large number of species, some rare in cultivation, and including several very large London plane trees. Between August 2019 and September 2021 Jake and Tarant carried out a tree identification project, using identification labels attached to individual trees which are referred to in a series of leaflets available from the park's café. Their website includes more tree-related information including leaf and bark identification guides.

Our judge thought that the tree project is a valuable asset helping visitors to discover the trees in the park. Their species lists and measurements, shared with the Woodland Trust and Kew Gardens, have contributed to our national knowledge of trees in cultivation.

Mark Wilkinson, founder of Friends of the Rib & Quin

This community-based organisation is dedicated to improving two local chalk streams, the Rib and the Quin, which like many other precious chalk streams are in crisis due to over-abstraction and pollution. Set up in 2019 the group's aims are to raise awareness of the issues facing the rivers, benchmark the river landscape, wildlife and biodiversity, and campaign with other river groups to stop over-abstraction and pollution. They work with many local community groups, attend events and public meetings, give talks and hold 'days by the river' with school children. They have just started to organise walks to encourage access the riverbanks as well as to raise awareness of the plight of these habitats. They challenge Affinity Water's abstraction rates, now in association with the Chalk Aquifer Alliance which they helped to set up. Around 10 trained volunteers carry out regular monitoring of the rivers' environments (sampling and testing of the water quality) at locations along the rivers: data is shared with the Environment Agency. The Friends' website is comprehensive and contains interesting articles.

Our judge commented on the passion of the Friends' founder and group leader – Mark Wilkinson, as well as their excellent community involvement.

Regina Gudisauskaite

Regina lives in Royston and about 12 years ago started to improve the neglected state of one of the town's cemeteries, where some of the graves date back to the 19th century. Ivy had encroached across many of the graves, some of which were also damaged. Single-handedly she has cleared ivy and repaired some of the damaged graves, and has planted flowers and bulbs. These she has sourced mainly from old pots discarded as rubbish by people attending to graves, with some donations from well-wishers. She also tends to a flowerbed at nearby sheltered housing for the elderly and helps in the garden of the school where she used to work.

Our judge enjoyed visiting the cemetery to see the results of Regina's work: the cemetery is tidier and very much brighter which benefits those people visiting graves and the people who walk there.

Rights of Way Parish Surveyors

With over 1,865 miles (3,000 kilometres) of footpaths, bridleways and byways in the county, the Countryside and Rights of Way department of the County Council decided four years ago to recruit a team of volunteers to help look after these unsung assets of our countryside. Now over 80 volunteers look after a parish or sometimes more than one (there are some vacancies). They devoted a total of 1,600 hours in 2021/22. After initial training volunteers walk the rights of way in 'their' parish regularly, dealing with minor tasks like replacing waymarking roundels and cutting back overgrown vegetation. They note and report more serious issues to County Council staff. Some volunteers help with processing reports as well.

Hertfordshire has a reputation for its well-maintained and accessible public rights of way. Our judge was impressed by these volunteers who are making an important contribution to keeping them in a good state, so that they are open and accessible to all. They also free up the time of County Council staff.

Save Beane Marshes

In 2019, an area of Beane Marshes in Hertford – a beautiful marshland habitat containing rare species adjoining the river Beane, a chalk stream – was put up for sale in separate parcels. 'Plotland' sales are all too common in Hertfordshire and elsewhere: the lots are likely to be purchased by people hoping to get planning permission for houses, with each one enclosed by fencing. A group of residents established the 'Beane Marshes Conservation

Group' and persuaded the landowner to hold off selling the land. The group set up a charity, 'Save Beane Marshes', to raise money through events and crowd funding to purchase the land. Their target was £165,000. This was reached in 2020, with a significant contribution from Hertford Town Council. The site has been transferred into the ownership of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and Save Beane Marshes continues to raise funds for the management of the site and the establishment of the area as an educational resource. There is a nearby parcel of land that they may wish to purchase in the future.

This is a major achievement by a small, grass-roots group determined to protect their local environment from a serious threat. The fundraising was a huge community effort and the whole project is an example of how threatened land can be brought into protective ownership. Our judge was especially impressed by the founders of the group who saw the project through to its successful conclusion.

Sunnyside Rural Trust

The Trust was founded in 1990 in Dacorum Borough as a small horticultural project for young people and adults with learning disabilities, aiming to enable vulnerable people to reach their potential and live a healthy life. It is now a thriving charity and social enterprise, offering training and work experience for over 150 vulnerable people in the local community, with an emphasis on acquiring skills in a number of rural activities. These include beekeeping, looking after chickens, growing a wide range of plants and produce, landscaping and garden maintenance. There is a focus on the full "plot to plate" cycle, from sowing seeds and nurturing plants to making produce to sell in the farm shop or local markets, all of which is as environmentally friendly as possible. The Trust has participated in the Herts Youth Futures project, aimed at young people aged 15 to 21. The Trust is now based at three sites, which include woodland, greenhouses, allotments, a café and a farm shop. Volunteers support trainees, assist with site management, help with the shop and market stalls, and drive the minibus.

Our judge was particularly impressed by the Trust's work aimed at incorporating young people with learning disabilities into the work stream and its role in making environmental and farming issues relevant to the community. 'There is exemplary planning and management in this organisation. Animal care as therapy, habitat development and vegetable crop production, community outreach programmes (such as the Repair Shed), and school partnerships have all been developed and are showing measured success'.

Sustainable St Albans - Open Food Gardens Project

Open Food Gardens is a project run by the Sustainable St Albans charity since 2009 in St Albans City and District, to promote home-grown food. The aim is to provide access to places where food is grown (private gardens, allotments and community spaces) for a few days each summer to showcase food growing, in particular of fruit and vegetables, to inspire more people to grow their own. Entrance to the gardens is free and volunteers from Sustainable St Albans help garden owners while their gardens are open. The project has suffered due the pandemic, but in 2020 the project went virtual, with a series of videos of food growing in local gardens. Normally there are 10 to 12 open gardens per year, attracting around 100 visitors, but this fell to only three in the summer of 2022.

We would like to wish the Open Food Gardens Project every success in the future with restoring the project to its previous position.

The Beautiful Benington photography project

Fiona Sinnott set up the project two years ago when she was new to the village; it was a way of getting to know the community, and a fundraising project for the local village hall that was not able to open at the time due to lockdown. Inspired by her marketing background and passion for photography, through the village Facebook page Fiona asked local people to submit photos of the area to create a village calendar. Over 180 images were submitted by people aged from 2 to over 90, including children from the local school. From these she compiled the 2021 calendar. A local employer sponsored the printing of the calendar by a local company, which sold around 180 copies. An exhibition of the photos submitted for the 2021 calendar in the village hall was supported by an East Herts District Council grant. It was also featured by Hertfordshire Life magazine and she was invited onto the village halls podcast. The process was repeated for the 2022 Calendar which has so far raised £3,000 towards a new awning system for the village hall, which a local company has offered at cost and will fit for free.

This project was recognised by our judge as an excellent example of promoting rural life and ensuring that communities can thrive. It has encouraged people to look with fresh eyes and with pride at their local area and generated such an interest in photography that there is now a photography group at the village hall. Fiona's passion has created a lasting legacy for the village, bringing all ages together in the local community. As a result of her podcast appearance Fiona has been advising a village in north east Scotland over the running of a similar project there.

The Friends of Hanstead Wood

Hanstead Wood is a community woodland tucked away in Bricket Wood quite near The Gate pub. It was formally opened in 2007 after three years of involvement by the community in planning, and planting 2,000 native trees and a wild flower meadow, laying hedges and establishing paths. It extends over five acres (two ha) and has the feel of a mature wood. Grassy paths wind through the wood, which consists of a large variety of trees and shrubs. There is some signage, an information board and several benches. The 'blue shed' is a barn-sized building that provides storage and a meeting point for volunteers, and is used by visiting groups. The wood is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including deer, badgers, voles and moles. Birds include woodpeckers, blue, great, long-tailed and coal tits, robins, wrens and nuthatches. There are lots of insects and reptiles too.

Our judge was impressed by the success of this project, saying: 'The Friends of Hanstead Wood have recreated on a small slice of land a microcosm of natural woodland in a busy part of the county that is accessible to all. Without their effort the place would not exist'.

The Go Wild at Hudnall Project

The Go Wild Project employs specialist teachers working in a forest school setting, supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to improve their emotional wellbeing and develop their knowledge and skills in nature. So far the Project has enabled more than 530 children and young people aged 5 to 25 and their families, who may otherwise struggle to access nature, to experience a wide range of learning, wellbeing and volunteering opportunities. Supported by Hertfordshire County Council Services for Young People in partnership with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, the Project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Hudnall Park comprises 85 acres (35 ha) of woodland and meadow within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: it is an enclosed area where participants can safely engage in the wide range of activities.

Our judge was impressed by the positive feedback from the young participants and their families, and accompanying teachers. Alongside the diverse range of activities offered, the project has enabled significant improvements to wildlife and habitats within the Park's area.

The Refill Pantry

The Refill Pantry was established in 2018 by founder Celina Mendoza and now operates in two shops, on the outskirts of St Albans and in Berkhamsted, with several part-time retail assistants. Selling a range of food goods, including pasta, rice, cereals, oils, nuts, seeds, spices and chocolate, and cleaning and personal care products, customers are encouraged to re-use their own containers, although bags and bottles are available to buy. The Pantry promotes recycling and zero waste, and ethically produced and organic products, preferably locally sourced, while avoiding single-use plastics. Customers are initially helped with the weighing and pricing process, and soon learn to serve themselves. Marketing is via social media and word of mouth.

Our judge said of the store he visited: 'Products are very well presented and convey a wholesome sense of quality. The Refill Pantry is helping to protect the environment in many ways'

The Walled Garden at Stanstead Bury Farm, Stanstead Abbots

Gini Trower moved to the farm with its 300 year old walled garden in 2001: the garden made her family self-sufficient for many years. When her children were grown up she wanted to make sure that it continued to play a role in teaching people (and especially children) about gardening, the environment, flora and fauna, and sustainability. Her first community gardening session was in March 2018 and even though it had snowed, several families came and enjoyed themselves. Gini has continued these ever since (on a roughly monthly basis). The workshops are aimed at young children (3-5 years old) and their families. Sessions of two hours cover general

gardening tasks and seasonal sessions include scarecrow making and Christmas decorations. Gini is particularly keen on teaching about sustainability and the environment: she shows the children her rainwater harvesting system, talks about insects and plants, and takes them to visit the farm's cattle. She also does workshops in nursery schools or nature classes in their school gardens, and runs some local after-school clubs too.

Our judge recognised Gini's passion for the work she does in the Walled Garden to introduce young children to so many aspects of the natural environment and local food, commenting: 'Ensuring that they get outdoors, get muddy and have a lot of fun is a fantastic way to introduce children to the natural world'.

Tring's Own Apple Fayre

This event has been held each October since 2006. A single event, an Apple Day held in 2005 at Jeacock's Orchard, Dunsley, Tring, has grown into a month-long celebration of apples, orchards, local foods and sustainable development. The Apple Day continues to be held at Jeacock's Orchard and there is now an apple-themed farmers' market and procession in Tring town centre, and numerous other community events held in and around the town. Sales, demonstrations and displays of apples, apple products and other local foods feature throughout. Supported since 2016 by Tring Together, the Apple Fayre is now one of four key seasonal celebrations held in Tring. As well as promoting local apples and orchards, the aims of the Apple Fayre are to enhance local awareness of local food growers and producers, and their local outlets; to encourage people both to grow their own food and consume local food; to promote an understanding of the seasons and seasonal produce; and more generally to help people connect their own lifestyles to impacts on climate, biodiversity and landscapes.

Our judge said: 'Martin Hicks set up the first Apple Day and has continued to play a central role in organising the Apple Fayre. His enthusiasm, long-standing commitment and continuing key role is impressive, as are the number of events which make up the Apple Fayre'.

Welwyn Planning and Amenity Group (WPAG)

This 50 year old charity campaigns and leads projects throughout Welwyn Parish and has a reputation for taking the initiative on matters of concern to local residents which have not otherwise been tackled. Its website includes a useful 'knowledge base' on planning matters. Over the past three years WPAG has helped residents to engage in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan process and has helped to shape the community's response, in particular regarding proposed development on Green Belt sites. It has recently taken on responsibility for the Welwyn Heritage Trail, installing new signage and developing a new website. There are plans to extend the number of locations. A very current concern is the protection of Singlers Marsh, a local green space part owned and part leased by the Borough Council, which is a wildlife site and nature reserve. WPAG campaigned against proposed Local Plan development sites in nearby Green Belt, which required road infrastructure on the Marsh. WPAG has formed the Singlers Marsh Action Group to campaign for registration of the Marsh as a village green, which achieved a higher than usual community response to the consultation process. It is now fundraising for legal representation and preparing for the forthcoming public inquiry into the registration.

Our judge said: 'This is a focused group with a committee made up of experienced people offering a variety of valued skills. The Group has had a number of successes with recent campaigns and continues to rise to the challenge of new issues. The Group is an exemplar of thoughtful, independent and well-informed advocacy'.