

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

2024 WINNERS BROCHURE



West Midlands
Combined Authority



Greener
Together



BARCLAYS | Eagle Labs

Rewarding the region's Natural Environment work

The Natural Environment Awards are all about recognising community groups, businesses, public sector organisations and educational institutions for the work they do to protect and enhance the West Midlands natural environment.

In 2021, the WMCA launched our Natural Environment Plan to work with partners over the next five years to enhance the region's biodiversity, protect endangered species, and improve access to green spaces and waterways for residents.

The Natural Environment Awards will showcase the regions good practice and highlight organisations and projects that could be replicated across the region. The awards aim to inspire others to work towards enhancing and protecting our natural environment.



I'm pleased to launch our 2024 Natural Environment Awards where we celebrate the fantastic efforts of organisations from across our region to protect, restore and enhance the wonderful waterways and green spaces we are blessed with here in the West Midlands.

We had a fantastic award ceremony last year and I look forward to seeing all of those applying at the award ceremony and wish them all the very best of luck.

Andy Street
Mayor of the
West Midlands

The Awards

The Natural Environment Awards are the first region wide award scheme dedicated to recognising excellence within organisations in the West Midlands for protecting, restoring and enhancing our region's natural environment.

The awards acknowledged the achievements of organisations from across the region, who have showcased their commitment and enthusiasm for creating improving our greenspaces and waterways, not only for environmental benefits, but also for the enjoyment of the local community.

The awards were open for nominations from October to January with winners announced in March 2024 by the Mayor of the West Midlands at an in-person awards ceremony, where all applicants were invited to attend.

The awards were hosted by Nature Allied Psychotherapist and ethnographer, Beth Collier, MA, MBACP. Beth is founder/Director of [Wild in the City](#), an organisation helping people of colour find their place in the UK countryside. Beth's practice has been featured in BBC Countryfile and Therapy for Black Girls. Around 100 guests joined the event to celebrate with the winners and learn more about the fabulous projects.



Beth Collier

Award categories

Community

This award recognised community groups and/or charities who went above and beyond to improve the natural environment for people and wildlife in their local areas. This could be a local group who has planted trees through to a charity who clears up our local waterways.

Education

A nursery, school, college or university who were committed to improving the natural environment. This could have been through encouraging hedgehogs onto the grounds through to creating new habitats for birds and amphibians where students are involved in learning and shaping the projects.

Businesses

A business (including SME's) who deserved recognition for continued and ongoing effort to improve the natural environment through their work. This could have been, but not limited to, a natural environment policy the company adheres to, improving habitats on sites they are working on or encouraging wildlife around their office building.

Public sector

An organisation who deserved recognition for their ongoing commitment to creating and improving the natural environment for local residents and wildlife. This could be through tree and hedgerow planting projects through to ensuring newhousing developments improve biodiversity.

Applicants

Applications for the awards were only open for organisations who are within the seven constituent authorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority which are:

Birmingham City Council

City of Wolverhampton Council

Coventry City Council

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Walsall Council



Judges

We invited a panel of independent judges to read through one categories applications and score based on the scoring rubric.

The judges then met to discuss their scores and decide on the winner and highly commended applications for each. We thank each of the judges for their time.

From left to right:

- Anna Volak, SLR Consulting
- Aisha Mahmood, BBC Wildlife Trust
- Jamie Murphy, RSPB
- Jade Willets, University of Birmingham
- Kuranpal Singh, Greater Birmingham Chamber
- Karl Curtis, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
- Richard Lindsay, Birmingham County FA
- Shameena Howles, Solihull MBC
- Taylor Lewis, BBC Wildlife Trust
- Liz Hopkins, West Midlands Fire and Rescue



COMMUNITY AWARD



Community Award - Winner

Masefield Community Garden

COMMUNITY AWARD

Masefield Community Garden in Northfield, Birmingham, is run by a team of volunteers committed to improving and conserving the site by creating a garden for the local community. They work together with local residents to promote health and well-being, deliver food growing skills to educate, inspire and support local people, encourage more environmentally friendly sustainable and healthy eating habits.

The garden has grown from a disused piece of land into a thriving garden through the help of dedicated volunteers, constituting as a community group in 2014.

The garden includes vegetables, fruits, flowers and trees along with a thriving wildflower area where pollinators regularly visit. The garden has a pond, of which frogs spawn and so from a piece of disused land the land has been brought back into use.

The garden brings people together, of all ages, regardless of gardening experience and are welcome to come and join them to 'grow and share'. 2023 saw 584 volunteer visits, from 80 volunteers, 63% of which involved children.



Community Award - Winner

Masefield Community Garden

They also saw a total number of 532 visitor visits (those not volunteering), through the events we hold such as Apple Day in October, attracting families and children. They have seen many visits from organisations such as Sense, engaging with children with disabilities and various SEND needs, and are currently writing a funding bid for improving access for those with visual impairments.

The produce from the garden is distributed to volunteers and put outside the garden in various baskets for the local community to take and help themselves. On Apple Day they give apples and free apple juice made onsite to all visitors, and no produce is ever wasted.

The longevity of Masefield is testament to the creativity involved in enhancing biodiversity. The committee and the volunteers are dedicated to not only its upkeep but its development, and ability to continue to support wildlife, protect and grow a diversity of plants which in turn attract a diversity of wildlife.



Community Award – Highly Commended Witton Lodge Community Association

Witton Lodge Community Association opened the Eco Hub to the public in April 2022, transforming a century old gate keeper’s cottage into an ambitious community venue with a firm mandate of environmental education and engagement.

Secured through an asset transfer from Birmingham City Council, the Eco Hub project saw a £1million renovation of the dilapidated Local Authority owned building – situated next to Witton Lakes.

The Eco Hub launched with a large community event where friends and neighbours could explore the new facility and learn about environmental issues. The new facility is proving hugely popular, attracting over 8,500 visitors between January and December 2023.

A popular venue for community groups, local schools, and people visiting Witton Lakes, the Eco Hub offers free to access Tai Chi sessions, yoga classes, a gardening club, and an Energy Café – providing advice on energy efficiency to both the local community and visiting groups.

The Eco Hub also developed the existing Velvet Orchard, which grows fresh food, plants, and flowers that further support the biodiversity of the surrounding green space and Witton Lakes and established dedicated spaces to support local wildlife, including special areas for frogs, newts, butterflies, and bees.



PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD



Public Sector Award - Winner

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD

Solihull MBC have committed to planting 250,000 trees by 2030 through local engagement with schools, residents, businesses, and community groups.

The 'Planting Our Future' campaign encourage residents to engage with tree planting, get involved in green infrastructure projects and offers support to private landowners who wish to plant trees. Since the campaign started in 2020, they have planted 75,000 trees across the borough, and are on track to hit a major milestone of 100k trees by the end of March 2024.

During this time, Solihull Council have engaged with over 700 volunteers in tree planting events. At every step of the way, the community have been involved from designing to planting. 50 community planting events took place, 10 of which were sponsored by local businesses.

An example of the positive impact on people and places is with the creation of Hope Coppice. This includes is a new woodland and community orchard for residents and families in remembrance of those affected by Covid-19 and to make the Solihull community more resilient to Climate Change. Hope Coppice was also the first location of the Severn Trent and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Forests.



Public Sector Award - Winner

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD

Since 2021, the project has engaged over 300 volunteers, equating to 715 hours of volunteering. They advocate the right tree is established in the right place, for the right reasons, and with the right aftercare, as well as engage with the community to ensure the planted trees are owned and loved by local communities.

The programme aligns with existing local policies related to environmental sustainability, urban planning, and biodiversity conservation, as well as feeding into the Solihull Urban Tree Strategy (2019-2029) and the Council Plan (2020-2025).

One of the areas they are focusing on is schools, educational facilities, and young people's engagement facilities such as scout huts. Over the last few years, they have supported over 16 schools in creating either carbon collecting hedgerows or orchards for break time snacks in future years.

Other ways in which Planting our Future go all out to engage in meaningful and impactful work is through creating partnerships with local landowners. One of our partnerships is with the National Trust, we currently have a 4-year partnership and by the end of this period, we will have collaborated with the charity in the planting of 12,000 trees including a new community woodland. Working in this credible way demonstrates our commitment to environmental conservation and community well-being.



EDUCATION AWARD



Education Award- Winner

Learning Through Landscapes

Throughout 2023, Learning through Landscapes (LtL) has been working with over 300 participants from 16 schools and 11 community groups/charities in Walsall. Over 400 hours of outdoor learning have been delivered which addressed issues of climate change and enabled physical changes to take place in school grounds and community spaces, to support nature.

The My School, My Planet project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and aimed to provide opportunities for young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who typically have less access to the natural environment, to learn about and engage with nature.

The delivery of the project, developed in line with the national curriculum, is aimed at KS2 pupils. The children's voice was an integral part of this process, they were given the opportunity to design, allocate funding and physically make these changes, whilst also communicating with members of the local community.



Education Award- Winner

Learning Through Landscapes

Environmental changes to school grounds and community sites included the addition of 55 raised beds/planters, over 4000 native plants added, 62 Bird boxes, hedgehog houses, log piles and bat boxes were constructed and over 50 trees and 46metres of hedging of a variety of native species, have been planted along with the creation and installation of 3 ponds and 6 water harvesting tanks.

To bring more depth and understanding to the project, they engaged with 11 community groups which included community gardens, allotments, mental health charities and a local scout group within Walsall. They cross-linked one or more school groups with each community group. These links allowed knowledge to be shared, design and implementation of environmental changes to be made, and awareness about the local community to be increased.

Participating community groups were also provided with grant funding to make changes to enhance or develop outdoor spaces to support nature and people's wellbeing.

The project provided links between the children, schools, and their local community, in many cases fostering longer lasting relationships.



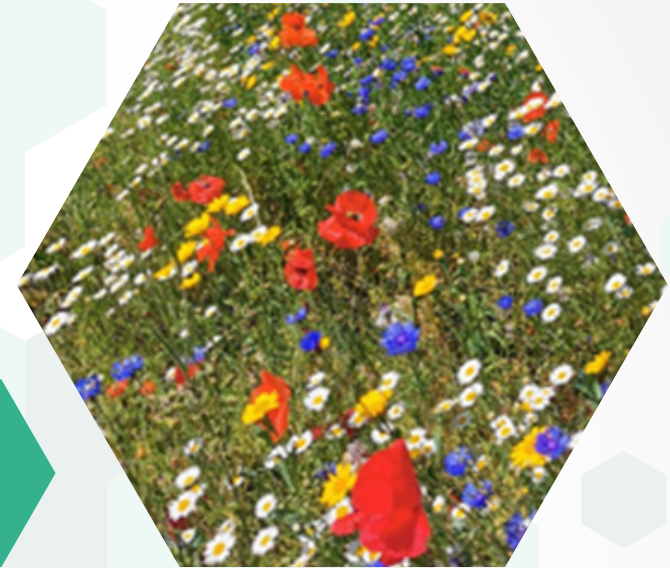
Education Award – Highly Commended

Pelsall Village School & Partners

Pelsall Village School wanted to improve the biodiversity of the school grounds and ‘the Nectar Room Partnership’ was created with the aim of creating a learning and activity hub within the school grounds. It was also important that the area was accessible to the public, and focussed on the environment, sustainability, and wellbeing. Crowdfund Walsall is a civic crowdfunding model, which is supported by Walsall Council and the Nectar Rooms crowdfunding campaign raised £20,267 from 124 ‘backers’.

The project was delivered in two phases: Phase One: 250m ‘discovery trail’ on school grounds around a wildflower meadow, including butterfly banks, habitat piles and other points of interest to encourage use, movement, and interest. Phase two: an outdoor classroom/bird-hide/community hub building to be used as a meeting space and outdoor classroom, as well as directing runoff from the building’s roof, into an attenuation pond.

School children were involved in the delivery of the project wherever possible, including making signs, planting and digging. The project was led by a steering group committee, including school governors, teachers, parents and community members. The committee are currently developing plans for extending the space further through restoration of woodland, and looking at how they can use the space to encourage increased community activity across parks in the area.



BUSINESS AWARD



Business Award- Winner

Severn Trent and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Severn Trent in partnership with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 'Making More Magical Meadows' project, covered a large extent of the Warwickshire area and invested in the establishment of meadows across 8 farms, creating a total of 7 hectares of biodiversity improvements in the area at a cost of £11,250. Meadows don't just affect the health of the biodiversity above ground, the works carried out will also improve soil quality, water quality and underground ecosystems in the area.

Cattle and sheep were allowed to graze the site at particular times of year to maintain the short sward of the meadow. From year 2 onwards the meadows were shut to allow for the flowers to go to seed and only grazed at specific times of year. To ensure the project's success farmers volunteered their time, by attending training days to aid them in helping to maintain the meadows, illustrating the support and interest that they had in the project.

After the success of the initial project an extension project was agreed on and established for another 20.1 hectares of meadow to be created with the involvement of an extra farm, taking the total number of farms involved in the project to 9, however last year alone, the project delivered 22.240 hectares, beating the targeted enhancements with another year to go, investing another £53,724 in our valuable environment.



Business Award- Winner

Severn Trent and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

BUSINESS AWARD

The meadows support a large variety of wildflowers, fungi, bees, butterflies, bats and birds making them incredibly valuable habitats. Reseeding the meadows aims to introduce 4 new butterfly species (after 2 years of habitat establishment) allowing them to support and enhance the diversity of species in the meadow.

The 4 species that were aimed to be introduced in the first application were Dingy Skipper, Brown Argus, Small Copper and Small Heath. The Dingy Skipper's distribution trend has seen a 61% decline since the 1970's and the Small Heath's has seen a 51% decline in the same period.

The original project ran in depth training events for farmers that proved to be valuable that included identifying meadow species and their maintenance. As part of the extension, the training will be available to others to inform and educate the community about the environmental enhancements that have been carried out, this will increase knowledge transfer and support the farmers. This will also hopefully aid in supporting farmers with volunteers, increasing the monitoring that can be conducted on site.



Business Award – Highly Commended IM Properties

The design and delivery of a high-quality, multi-use landscape as part of the best-in-class Peddimore Employment Park, putting biodiversity, people and sustainability at its heart. As a flagship employment site for Birmingham, The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield and the wider Midlands region, IM Properties and their design team committed to creating a diverse landscape setting that works in harmony with the built environment, delivering a strong sense of place and prioritising connectivity for both wildlife and people.

There are many elements included in the development of the site such as enhancement of 7 hectares of native species-rich grassland and hedgerow planting, realignment of the Peddimore Brook including a 60m mosaic of green and blue infrastructure forming part of the sustainable drainage system on the site. Extensive planting of native trees and shrubs, including woodland blocks, scattered trees and new/reinstated hedgerows have taken place and new formal public footpaths and bridleways have opened up the site to the community.

The nature-first design ethos adopted for Peddimore has gone on to inform the development of IM Properties Sustainable Futures Strategy, a sustainability framework that informs its approach to site acquisition, design, development and management through the lenses of People, Place and Planet.



Summary

We were delighted to be able to recognise the incredible achievements of organisations across the West Midlands on enhancing and protecting the regions natural environment.

We believe the awards will enthuse and inspire incredible projects across the region.

See all the winning videos and photos on our website here:

www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy/natural-environment-awards

