

The Bee Project

Warwick National Grid House + 18 UK operational sites

National Grid

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Pollinator Award

Project overview

Pollinators are vital for food production and biodiversity but they face a range of pressures, from habitat loss to pests and diseases. We have introduced several initiatives which form 'The Bee Project'.

The Bee Walk is a free lunchtime activity for employees to attend. Following a set route each month, we identify species of bees and submit the results to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's citizen science research study.

New pollinator habitats have been created by employees through the production of nesting habitats and identifying areas of land around our offices where the mowing regimes have been altered to create wildflower areas.

Working with the British Beekeepers Association, we have identified areas of land to set up beekeeping apiaries.

We now have 19 sites and 20 beekeepers in partnership, with many more apiaries lined up for the coming year.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Our sites where the Bee Walks take place are predominantly office buildings with small pockets of biodiversity present e.g. trees. Grass was regularly mown short and there was limited biodiversity in terms of pollinator habitats.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

Our assets, operations and infrastructure all have an impact on the natural environment. Regulations require us to mitigate this impact, but we want to take this one step further.



Warwick National Grid House apiary – members of staff are training to become beekeepers to help look after the hives.

We have introduced an approach called the 'Natural Grid' which transforms the way we manage our landholdings by creating better, bigger and connected spaces for nature alongside our energy grids.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

National Grid owns a significant portfolio of landholdings, a large proportion of which is non-operational green space. The introduction of beehives has increased the number of honey bees available for pollination while providing a long-term management option for the land. Mowing regimes have been altered to encourage wild flowers to grow between April and September, creating vital refueling stations for wild pollinators. The project is replicable across many National Grid sites, providing there is a suitable area for an apiary and the site operations allow.

At an internal conference in November 2015, we arranged a team building exercise to build bug hotels from old wooden pallets and waste garden material. These were installed around our office grounds at Warwick to provide new habitats for pollinators. National Grid's environmental employee group 'Footprints' have recently taken over the maintenance of the 'hotels' to ensure they remain a five star establishment for the resident invertebrates.

On the Bee Walk, species of bee are identified and sent to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust on a monthly basis. The results inform the wider UK conservation strategy for particular species, which hopefully will lead to net biodiversity gain in the future as understanding of localised pollinators improve. So far this year we have found 10 different species, including the recent British colonist Tree Bumblebee. On each walk there is a group of up to 20 employees in attendance, all from different parts of the business.

The Bee Walk is organised and led by staff volunteers with the support of the sustainability team. Employees have created an online community where they can discuss biodiversity, share articles and keep up to date with the Bee Walk results. Future plans involve opening up the Bee Walk to other nearby companies.



Bee Walkers identifying bees on our Green Wall at Warwick National Grid House

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

Further information

Employees have been instrumental in making elements of The Bee Project happen at a range of sites across the UK. We have seen changes in bee populations on the monthly walks and the bug hotels and wildflower areas are now being actively used by pollinators, contributing to a net biodiversity gain on site. Objectives have been met but the project is continually developing as more employees become engaged. We hope to be able to introduce Bee Walks at more of our sites in the coming year and increase the number of beehives on National Grid land.

We recognise the issues facing UK pollinators but realise that there is no one size fits all solution. There is potential for a wider impact on pollinators by introducing a range of different initiatives at multiple sites. By engaging with and educating our employees and involving partners such as the BBKA, we hope this will leave a longer term impact outside of National Grid.

Our top tip would be “don’t be afraid to try something different” When we introduced the Bee Walks towards the end of 2015 we weren’t sure whether there would be much uptake, but it proved so popular that the group requested we run Winter Walks to identify tress and berries when there were no bees around to identify. There is a clear positive impact on the health and wellbeing of employees too because it encourages people to leave their desks at lunchtime, get some fresh air and partake in physical exercise.



Our wildflower areas have signs in place to educate and promote interest in employees and site visitors

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

We’re really proud of all we’ve achieved so far. It’s great knowing that something small can make a difference on a wider scale, and the feedback we get from employees is great motivation to progress the project and create a community at work.