

NATURAL WOKING
WOKING, SURREY, UK
Woking Borough Council

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement Award

Project overview

Biodiversity is a key element of our vision for a sustainable Borough. Through [Natural Woking](#), the Council's first biodiversity and green infrastructure strategy (March 2016), we want to promote and celebrate the area's diverse countryside and urban environments, enhance accessibility to our green spaces and support our natural habitats and wildlife. We want to help our habitats and communities to thrive!

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

The Council has a strong sustainability track record, including large scale schemes incorporating significant habitat creation. For example, our support for the new [Heather Farm Wetland Centre](#) and the Council's earlier [Hoe Valley scheme](#). More enhancement schemes are planned with biodiversity at their heart.

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

Natural Woking's ambitions are a long-term commitment, in line with its parent, climate change strategy [Woking 2050](#).

We're seeking biodiversity security and protection, not just today but for future generations to enjoy.

The document provides a strategic framework for action, including a new project series supporting local wildlife and habitats towards 'favourable conservation status'. The first, launched in May 2016, is a joint project with Natural England piloting an innovative landscape-wide approach for [Great Crested Newts](#).



Sharing the 'Wild about Woking' message with almost 20,000 visitors at our popular summer community event Party in the Park (July 2016).

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Natural Woking establishes seven key principles, to guide the Council and its delivery partners as we progress specific projects. Gains for biodiversity and engagement with the public are central tenets:

- **Living spaces:** Restore and expand habitats for priority species enhancing the links between these (reducing fragmentation).
- **Access:** Build a publicly accessible, ecologically sensitive, strategic network of open spaces, green and waterways, especially to and from our urban centres.
- **Urban life:** Adapt and increase biodiversity and green space in our urban centres and surrounds (as well as in villages and the countryside).
- **Productive places:** Make the most of our buildings, streets, watercourses and landscapes, taking opportunities for multifunctional use and capitalising on all funding sources.
- **Responsive:** Protect natural resources, proactively adapt to the direct and indirect changes in climate and population, ensure appropriate estate management and support new development.
- **Wild about Woking:** Promote knowledge of the value and beauty of all faces of Woking Borough's natural environment (town and countryside) and the benefits of getting involved, as a responsible individual, a community group or a business (green economy).
- **Legacy:** Protect and strengthen the resilience of the green infrastructure network and biodiversity, now and for future generations to enjoy.

Natural Woking was prepared in consultation with key local stakeholders and is a 'living draft', which we will strengthen over time, reflecting progress and its changing context.



Wild about Woking: promoting the value and beauty of our natural environment to all ages in the Eco Zone, Party in the Park.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

(Cont'd)

Natural Woking provides the context for action at a number of levels, from ongoing grassroots support to long-established environmental community group [Woking Local Action 21](#), to the new favourable conservation status projects, where we are proactively enhancing local biodiversity in the long term. Natural England are already replicating the Greater Crested Newts pilot elsewhere.

How would you best describe the project?

Enhancements – beyond simply mitigation, seeking net gains for biodiversity.

Further information

The [Natural Woking strategy](#) is accompanied by a comprehensive [Supporting Information](#) document, offering guidance to a wide ranging reader audience.

Implementation of the strategy is well underway. The Council's Green Infrastructure team was formed in November 2015, demonstrating its strong commitment. The first Natural Woking Action Plan was agreed in June 2016 (available on request), a three year rolling programme of steps supporting biodiversity diversity and the green infrastructure network throughout our 6,400 ha., 99,198 (2011) population, Borough.

We are actively promoting the 'Wild about Woking' message, through interactive stands at large community events this summer (in particular promoting wildlife gardening), via our website, social media and staff magazine.

We are now developing a second favourable conservation status project with Natural England to support bats. We want to support habitat protection, restoration and creation, accessibility and connectivity, to ensure sustainable populations of all key species over time, including the return of some lost to the area. These projects will also help facilitate the development essential for the Borough's future prosperity in a way that is in harmony with our environment.

Other new projects are being explored to retrofit biodiversity enhancements into the Council's property assets, ground maintenance regimes, and at an early design stage into its development schemes. Lessons learnt through the early projects are helping us to build our organisational knowledge, experience and skills, to secure even better outcomes for biodiversity and local people.



Wildlife up close: encouraging learning about local species at the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust stand, with Natural Woking in the Eco Zone, Party in the Park.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Natural Woking has been prepared by the Council's Planning Policy and Green Infrastructure teams, to guide actions to make a really positive difference to the Borough we look after, to benefit our natural environment and local communities.