

## Bee focus year

Howbery Business Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK

HR Wallingford

## BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Pollinator Award*

### Project overview

We spent a year (October 2019-2020) focusing on measures to support bumblebees across our 36 hectare business park. We met criteria set by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Nurture Landscapes, as part of the Nurture Biodiversity Award scheme. Since then, we have introduced other pollinator-friendly initiatives.

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

We had already begun making small biodiversity improvements on site through a long-term environmental programme working with Nurture Landscapes, our grounds maintenance company. We already had four beehives on Howbery Business Park, on the Manor House lawn, introduced in 2016, and the honeybees had thrived.

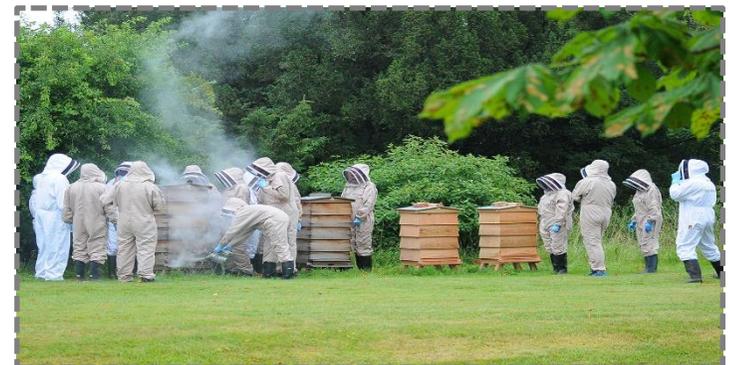
### What were the reasons behind this project ?

Nurture Landscapes designed a six-year biodiversity scheme to meet our request to make our biodiversity work more structured and to be able to demonstrate clear, significant biodiversity improvements. The scheme also gives us a way of raising awareness amongst staff, tenants and site users of flora and fauna.

As we already had beehives on site, bumblebees were an obvious choice to focus on during our first year of the scheme – our initiatives would support the honey bees as well. We also had already had a lot of interest from our park community in our honey bees, and expected them to show similar enthusiasm for bumblebees.



*One of our wildflower patches*



*A bee education workshop with our four hives*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

In each month between March and October 2020, when our bumblebees were not hibernating, our gardeners noted which existing plants in our grounds they visited – to help make sure that they had a plentiful food supply while out and about. To plug gaps during the year, we added a range of bee-friendly plants, including a whole new herb garden, wild garlic, a huge patch of wildflowers, and perovskia, verbena bonariensis and sedum.

For the new herb garden, we bought herbs grown by the UK-based Hairy Pot Plant Company. We picked the supplier for their eco-friendly measures, including using peat-free compost and coir pots, rather than plastic ones. We constructed a willow fence around the garden to keep out rabbits.

The focus year was just the starting point for supporting bumblebees, and we have continued making improvements beyond the first 12 months. Last year we introduced ‘no mow May zones’, increasing areas that are not mown from 400m<sup>2</sup> to 920m<sup>2</sup>. In areas that are mown, we have begun to leave the grass longer, which, along with the reduced the use of pesticide, has encouraged the growth of pollinator-friendly flowers.

To meet our objective of helping improve public awareness, we have shared bumblebee facts on our internal communication and social media channels, and gained coverage of our work for bees in local publications and websites. We also provided copies of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust’s ‘big 7’ bumblebee species sheets to the on-site nursery to help children spot the bees.

A group of school children were scheduled to come to the park to learn about bees, but that had to be postponed because of the coronavirus lockdown. We are rescheduling for early autumn this year.



*Our newly added verbena bonariensis and sedum:*



*Our herb garden*

### Further information

By mowing grass at a longer length, we have seen more clover flowering in our lawns – with bees often observed upon it. We have also informally observed a lot of bees in our wildflower and formal flower beds. We have realised that it would be useful to formally monitor the impact of our initiatives for bumblebees and are planning to seek volunteers from the park to take part in a monthly BeeWalk. Our results will feed into the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's monitoring of bumblebee populations. We have also added our wildflower areas to Buglife's B-Lines map.

Our honeybees continue to thrive, which we can see from our hive records, and last year we gave away two colonies. We sell our honey to our park community and use some in our restaurant. We have restarted our workshops about honey bees – extracting honey or learning more about them – for our park community who continue to attend with enthusiasm.

### Project Team

- Howbery Park Estates Management team (part of the HR Wallingford Group)
- Nurture Landscapes, our grounds maintenance company

### What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Cherishing our lovely site to the benefit of people and wildlife is important to us and our community. We believe our sustainable ethos, as well as being the right thing to do, attracts new tenants to the park, which is currently fully occupied. The south of England is important for pollinators, and we are delighted to be able to contribute to supporting them.



*Honey extraction workshop*



*No mow May zone*