

Nurture Biodiversity Award scheme
Howbery Business Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK
HR Wallingford

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Biodiversity Legacy*

Project overview

We began working on the six-year Nurture Biodiversity Award scheme across our 36 hectare business park in October 2019. Under the scheme, we have focused on a different area of conservation each year (bumblebees, birds and hedgehogs), meeting criteria set by the relevant wildlife trust and Nurture Landscapes.

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

Howbery Business Park grounds include riverbank, woodland and grassland, as well as formal gardens, attracting a wide range of flora and fauna. We had already begun making small improvements on site through a long-term environmental programme working with Nurture Landscapes, our grounds maintenance company. For instance, we created bug hotels, planted wildflowers, and in 2016 introduced beehives.

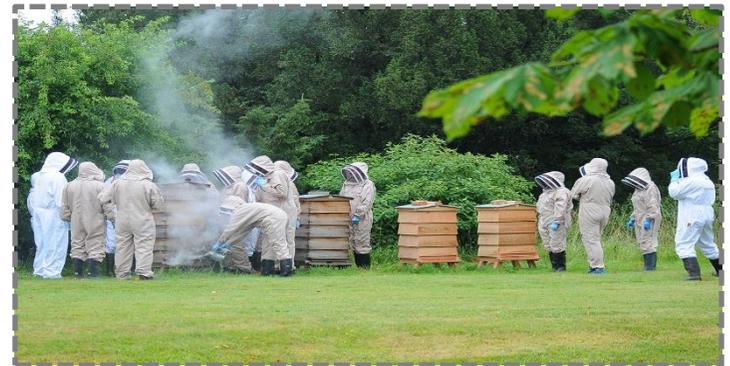
What were the reasons behind this project?

We believe we have a duty to cherish and nurture our beautiful landscape. Sustainability is important to us. Our tenants, staff and site users regularly tell us how much they appreciate our approach. We believe our ethos attracts new tenants to the park, which is currently fully occupied.

We wished to make our environmental work more structured and measurable. Nurture Landscapes designed the six-year biodiversity scheme at our request to give us more structure and allows us to demonstrate clear, significant biodiversity improvements. The scheme also gives us a forum to help raise awareness amongst our park community of particular flora and fauna.



One of our wildflower patches



A honey bee education workshop with our four hives

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We have chosen our focus areas to date – bumblebees, birds and hedgehogs – after observing existing flora and fauna on site, and thinking about what would be suited to our grounds and catch our community’s imagination, helping raise awareness.

Criteria for us to meet each year were set out by Nurture Landscapes with the relevant wildlife trust – the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, The British Trust for Ornithology and British Hedgehog Preservation Society. Measures taken so far have included surveying existing food supplies for times when bumblebees and birds are out and about, and adding plants to ensure they have plenty to eat at those times.

Some of our various new bird boxes were made from upcycled material. We also added three tawny owl boxes on the advice of a bird-watcher who had been on site for more than 40 years. He had seen tawny owls in the past but not recently. The Men’s Shed charity made us six hedgehog houses from wine boxes.

One of the scheme’s goals is to help raise public awareness of our focus area. We therefore installed bird feeders next to the café’s terrace, allowing people to observe the birds while there. We promoted our activities on site, in the local press, and on social media, sharing wildlife information about measures that can be taken to support biodiversity.

The focus year was just the starting point for work in that particular area of conservation, and we have continued improvements and monitoring beyond the first 12 months. For instance, we have repeated the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch this year and added more bird boxes. We have also taken some measures that fall outside our chosen focus areas, for example installing more bug hotels and an information board about them.



The new herb garden



Old apparatus upcycled into a bird box

Further information

Having noted each month which existing plants were visited by bees, we plugged the gaps, adding a herb garden, wild garlic, wildflower patches and more. Similarly for birds, we checked there were plentiful berries and grains all year long, and installed four feeding stations. For hedgehogs, we have put stickers on strimmers to remind gardeners to check borders for the little creatures before using them.

In terms of increasing awareness, the children's on-site nursery was keen to run activities based on our focus year, for example making fatballs for birds, and installing a hedgehog house in their wildlife area. We had to halt plans to run talks for a primary school on site because of lockdown, but plan to introduce community information events soon.

We record all our biodiversity improvements. We have taken part in the in The Big Garden Birdwatch for two years and will continue to do so. We will also check bird box use. We are planning to seek volunteers to run a monthly BeeWalk and to investigate formal monitoring options. More people have reported sightings informally recently, including two sightings of a tawny owl on top of the nesting box.

Having shown the success of the biodiversity scheme at Howbery, Nurture Landscapes has introduced it to other client sites.

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?

We wished to maximise benefits for flora and fauna in our park.



The newly added verbena bonariensis and sedum



Installing a hedgehog house in the on-site children's nursery gardens