Biodiversity for All – 2024

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority awarded Huntingdonshire District Council a three-year £1.35 million bid to accelerate the delivery of measurable biodiversity net gain in Huntingdonshire. This will be delivered through five key themes – CPCA Overview, Jobs and Skills, Strategic Open Spaces, Community Driven Delivery and Mapping. Four of these themes have developed into their own work programmes - please see project updates below.

Project Updates: 20th September 2024

Jobs and Skills

The Vision:
To increase local green skills to help tackle the biodiversity crisis and facilitate further green jobs, bringing local stakeholders and residents together to support nature, educate and contribute towards a Net Zero Huntingdonshire. Find out more here.

What has been achieved this week?

- Julie has been working on the contract extension for the Greenskills project to ensure that there are 5 more Greenskills projects that will go into 2025.
- We are actively recruiting for participants for our next Green Skills project at Berman Park.

- Read about all the latest Green Skills Case Studies recently uploaded to our website here - Green Jobs and Skills - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk

GREEN SKILLS PROJECT

CASE STUDY 5: HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

15th April - 7th June 2024

WHAT DID THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

The project was made up of a number of different tasks scattered around Hinchingbrooke Country Park.

Raised Wildlife Pond

The creation of the raised wildlife pond included levelling the ground, digging channels, constructing pine sleepers, laying the liner, creating beaches and exit points for different species using rocks, aggregates and pieces of wood.

Willow Fencing

The rangers on site constructed a wire and pine skeleton fence, which the volunteers then wove through willow branches to create a thick layer of natural material along this fence. The volunteers also pushed through branches vertically to give it a natural appearance, innkeeping with the surrounding woodland.

OUTCOMES:

INCREASED BIODIVERSITY

A wildlife pond is a thriving pocket habitat that supports a huge variety of species, including many invertebrates, freshwater plants and amphibians. Starting with invertebrates, wildlife ponds are vital for many different species life cycles. For example, dragonflies spend most of their lives in water as nymphs. This also applies to many other invertebrate species that start life in the water. The pond will also support a wide variety of freshwater plants that cannot grow in other settings. These will provide wonderful cover for many invertebrates who find their way into the pond. Although raised ponds are not as good for amphibians, due to accessibility, with suitable ramps, it can provide a safe haven for many species, including newts, frogs and toads. The rangers on site also plan to create exit ramps in the future, boosting this habitat further. The pond all also be used by birdlife as a drinking spot, bath location and the increased invertebrate life will provide a better food source. The fence will also become a home to many different species of invertebrates supporting biodiversity in the area.

The project also successfully led to the planting total of...

23 trees

54 shrubs

250 bulbs

These plantings exclusively consist of native species, expanding the ecological range and showcasing a diverse array of flora. The benefits include:

The trees play a crucial role in reducing atmospheric CO_2 levels, thereby contributing to the mitigation of Climate Change.

These trees contribute to soil stability, curbing erosion and serve as effective flood mitigation measures through various mechanisms.

In the designated habitat pocket, the trees not only provide a habitat but also serve as a food source for numerous species of birds and invertebrates. Complimenting the trees, shrubs and bulbs also contribute to this ecosystem. The bulbs prove beneficial for various species of bees, both hive and solitary.

GREEN SKILLS PROJECT

CASE STUDY 3: ST. NEOTS RIVERSIDE PARK

20th September - 15th November 2023

WHAT DID THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

The project was made up of two primary tasks:

Deadwood Habitats

Construction of a green treated timber fence around the standing deadwood with attached bat boxes.

Increasing tree canopy cover

Planting of a variety of native trees, both inside the fenced area and adjacent to the miniature railway in Riverside Park

OUTCOMES:

INCREASED BIODIVERSITY

Preserving standing deadwood serves as an invaluable habitat for a diverse array of species. Thousands of invertebrates depend on deadwood for both sustenance and shelter, forming a crucial part of the ecosystem for various species, including bats and birds. The standing deadwood also serves as excellent nesting sites for bats, providing proximity to their food source and an open canopy that aligns with their predation methods. Standing deadwood supports a variety of fungi, lichens and moss and over time contributes rich organic matter to the soil, enhancing its nutrient content.

Strategic Open Spaces

The Vision:

To prioritise key HDC strategic sites across Huntingdonshire for biodiversity development. The aim is to gather evidence, engage with the community to co-design and deliver on projects to boost biodiversity on these sites.

What has been achieved this week?

Alternative Land Management

Just over half of district council-maintained land is what is known as amenity grass – grass that is intensively maintained and closely mown every 2-3 weeks between March and October. We manage and maintain just over 256 hectares (2.56 million m2) of which 52% is amenity grass and in terms of biodiversity, is currently classed as Poor.

Our commitment is to:

- *alter how we manage 25% of these areas by allowing grass to grow to meadow grass and cutting once a year*
- *increase the number of floral meadows we sow by 25% over the next four years (currently 1.4 hectares)*
- *increase the tree canopy by adopting and implementing a four-year tree planting programme (approximately 10,000 trees).*

We have continued working with the group of volunteers that came forward to help us with the ALM project. This has involved selecting and meeting team leaders, creating volunteer packages with PPE, recording sheets, ID guides, and equipment to go out on the survey days, and more. We have now started the collection of the ALM data. This approach has enabled us to combine training and volunteering opportunities and deliver this ALM data collection exercise. We have five volunteers assisting us with the data collection and learning how to do ecological surveys.

Biodiversity for All Strategic Sites

- The costs for the Strategic Sites have been approved, so Glendales will be getting the go ahead to proceed at Hill Rise and Priory Park where we expect work to start mid-October. In the meantime, we have been working with the Rangers to discuss the best way to communicate the work to the public and the users of the parks, so they know what to expect.

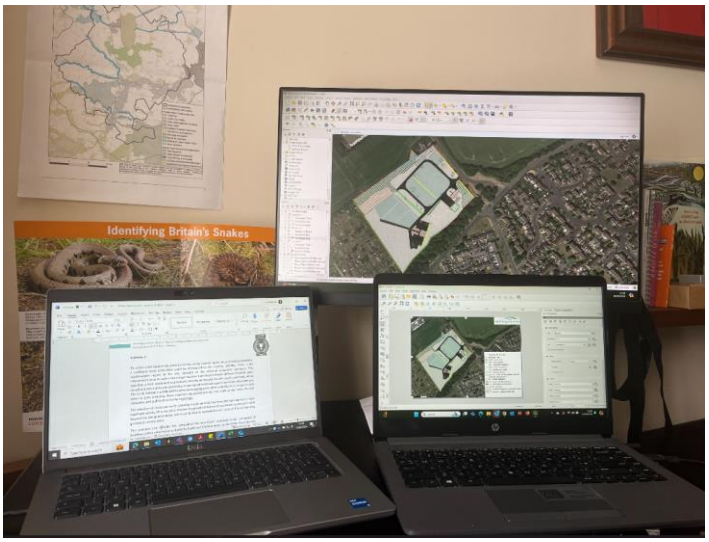
Community Driven Delivery

The Vision:

To encourage and enable others within Huntingdonshire to increase biodiversity through community engagement and delivery.

What has been achieved this week?

- This week, our Graduate Ecologist, Lola, continues to write the Community Biodiversity Grant Scheme reports and recommendations, which are typically over 10,000+ words each. In the meantime, check out Lola's video about completing the biodiversity site audits across Huntingdonshire here.
- We are at the final stages of reviewing and finalising the reports



Working as an ecologist – the other part of the job, which involves many laptops and screens!

Mapping

The Vision:

To collate data, collecting observations of species on sites. To inspire and educate future generations to raise awareness of biodiversity and the part they play in the ecosystem.

What has been achieved this week:

- iNaturalist statistics – In the past two weeks, observations have increased by **126** to an overall total of **14,385** and identified species have increased by **4**, totalling **2,213**. There are currently **1,0906** Huntingdonshire residents signed up to log observations through the iNaturalist app.
- The most recorded species was the Common Blue Damselfly.
- This week, observers found (amongst many!):

A Devil’s Coach Horse Beetle

A “Large White” Butterfly