

Nomination for Managing Partner's Choice Award - Project of the Year

Learning through Nature – The Avenue Country Park

Learning through nature has three key aims, firstly, a programme of inclusive community activities, enabling participation in learning activities, guided walks, forest schools, practical conservation and volunteering. Secondly, forest school and nature activity areas, waymarked trails and interpretation of key site habitats and wildlife to enable outdoor learning and improved visitor experience and accessibility. Thirdly, wildlife viewing screens to allow visitors to spend time engaging with and understanding the variety of key habitats and wildlife present, while avoiding disturbance.

Elements one and two were completely new work at the Avenue Country Park, requiring initiative and determination to promote the project, engage with new audiences, and break down barriers to inclusion and work around the restrictions imposed by the Covid pandemic. Despite all of this our staff have worked so hard and have delivered varied and popular events, improved site accessibility and empowered people to know and care about their local wildlife.

'Branching Out' - Bentley Community Woodland

The six-week project offering a range of outdoor skills and activities, offered to newly arrived asylum seekers in the Doncaster area. This project was very popular and well received by all involved, and perfectly demonstrated the potential for using nature and green spaces to help people develop skills, socialise, and feel part of their local community and feel included.

The Natural Neighbourhoods team also organised our first Rural Skills event on the August Bank Holiday. Across four days over 500 visitors came to Silverdale to experience displays and taster sessions in blacksmithing, chainsaw sculptures, dry stone walling, scything, orienteering, foraging as well as meeting their local fire service, police service and many other displays.

Round House Project- Hassall Green Nature Reserve

Prior to the start of the Green Angels programme at Hassall Green Nature Reserve in 2019 there were no facilities on site for volunteers and visitors. An aspiration of the five year project was to provide some kind of natural shelter for site users, whether attending training sessions, community events or simply visiting the Reserve.

In the winter of 2021 we commissioned The Roundhouse Company to provide a 6m diameter timber framed roundhouse constructed through a series of workshops engaging 9 trainees. The structure is open-sided, with a timber roof supported on twelve round Larch poles with a floor of Douglas fir. The project battled storms, Covid 19, problems with supply chains and rising costs, but the result was delivered within budget and is fabulous, providing an invaluable resource for the site for years to come, and actually enhancing the nature reserve, with its warm colours and natural form.

West Wing Restoration- Fort Burgoyne

The Fort Burgoyne West Wing restoration has transformed a derelict decaying space which was suffering antisocial behaviour into a high quality mini Fort informal recreation space.

Community engagement forming part of Pioneering Places East Kent a joint Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund project saw participants provide their thoughts on potential future uses of the space in notebooks which were brought together into a Big Drawing by Charles Holland. Further volunteer participation came in the form of a two week community archaeology dig which informed landscaping plans and specification which appointed architects developed and secured Scheduled Monument Consent.

The potential value of the space to a new residential estate on adjacent land has resulted in the developer agreeing to provide water and electric supplies which will support potential event use.

Outside if Fun- TCV Kiveton and Diddington

Outside is Fun, led by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), was part of the Children and Nature programme funded by the Department of Education and supported by Natural England. The funding finished in March 22.

The Children and Nature programme is part of the Government's 25-year environment plan and comprises three separate projects. Outside is Fun is one of five Community Forest and Woodland Outreach (CFWO) projects and sits alongside Nature Friendly Schools and the Growing Care Farm project.

The aim of the CFWO initiative was to increase and help sustain community forest and woodland outreach activities being delivered to school children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, to benefit their mental health and wellbeing, engagement with school and other programme outcomes.

Outside is Fun aimed to establish a rolling programme that engaged year five or six pupils, within walking distance of community woodland sites across Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster. We had to adapt our approach to covid right in the middle of the funding and have received some great feedback from pupils and staff from the schools.

We are looking at how we can use the learning and reflections from this great project to take forward into our team for future work.