



# THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

## 2023 Award Winners

# Rewarding the region's Natural Environment work

The Natural Environment Awards are all about recognising community groups, businesses, local authorities and educational institutions for the work they do to protect and enhance the West Midlands natural environment.

In 2021, the WMCA launched our [Natural Environment Plan](#) to work with partners over the next five years to enhance the region's biodiversity, protect endangered species, and improve access to green spaces and waterways for residents.

The Natural Environment Awards showcased good practice from across the region and highlighted organisations and projects that could be replicated elsewhere. The awards aim to inspire others to work towards enhancing and protecting our natural environment.

*I'm so pleased to help launch the Natural Environment Awards this year and say a special thank you for all of the wonderful work that organisations right across our region are doing to protect and enhance our green and blue spaces. They're enriching quality of life for local people and it's important to celebrate the difference these organisations are making and will continue to make in the months and years ahead.*

**Andy Street**  
Mayor of the  
West Midlands







# As headline sponsors of the Natural Environment Awards,

we're proud to support the recognition of the achievements made towards creating and improving green and blue spaces across the region. We're confident that such recognition will inspire other organisations towards taking action to enhance and protect our natural environment.





# The Awards

The Natural Environment Awards were the first region wide award scheme dedicated to recognising excellence within organisations in the West Midlands for protecting, restoring and enhancing our region's natural environment.

The awards acknowledged the achievements of organisations from across the region, who have showcased their commitment and enthusiasm for creating improving our green and blue spaces, not only for environmental benefits, but also for the enjoyment of the local community.

The awards were open for nominations from October to January with winners announced in March 2023 by the Mayor of the West Midlands at an in-person awards ceremony, where all applicants were invited to attend.



The awards were hosted by broadcaster and community gardener Tayshan Hayden-Smith.

He initiated the Grenfell Garden of Peace to help the community close to where he grew up in North Kensington. Tayshan has also appeared as a designer on BBC's Your Garden Made Perfect.

Around 100 guests joined the event to celebrate with the winners and learn more about the fabulous projects.

Tayshan Hayden-Smith  
Image: Remarkable Television / Adam Lawrence





# Award categories

## Community

This award recognised community groups and/or charities who went above and beyond to improve the natural environment for people and wildlife in their local areas. This could be a local group who has planted trees through to a charity who clears up our local waterways.

## Education

A nursery, school, college or university who were committed to improving the natural environment. This could have been through encouraging hedgehogs onto the grounds through to creating new habitats for birds and amphibians where students are involved in learning and shaping the projects.

## Businesses

A business (including SME's) who deserved recognition for continued and ongoing effort to improve the natural environment through their work. This could have been, but not limited to, a natural environment policy the company adheres to, improving habitats on sites they are working on or encouraging wildlife around their office building.

## Public sector

An organisation who deserved recognition for their ongoing commitment to creating and improving the natural environment for local residents and wildlife. This could be through tree and hedgerow planting projects through to ensuring new housing developments improve biodiversity.



# Applicants

Applications for the awards were only open for organisations who are within the seven constituent authorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority which are:

**Birmingham City Council**

**City of Wolverhampton Council**

**Coventry City Council**

**Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council**

**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**

**Walsall Council**





# Judges

We invited a panel of independent judges to read through one categories applications and score based on the scoring rubric. The judges then met to discuss their scores and decide on the winner and highly commended applications for each. We thank each of the judges for their time.



From left to right: Lydia Dutton, CBRE; Rebecca Freeman, Tyler Grange; Morgan Roberts, SWM ; Mel Dyer, RSPB; Toqueer Quyyam, Footsteps; Elizabeth Goodchild, BVSC; Francesca Silcocks, SWB NHS Trust; Kimberley Jassal, ARUP; Amie-Beth Sabin, WSP; Louise Woollen, West Midlands Police; Luke Strickland, Mott MacDonald; Salma Zulfiqar, Art Connects; Andrea Wilcockson, SLR Consulting; Chris Crean, FOE; Jodie Southgate, EPR.



# THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

## Community Award



West Midlands  
Combined Authority



WEST MIDLANDS  
Greener Together



# Community Award - Winner

## The Royal British Legion and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

The Armed Forces Community Garden provides a safe, non-threatening environment in which individuals can feel free to explore the garden, getting involved with the gardening, or just sit back and contemplate. The space also helps to promote better communication between service users and residents, and acts as a meeting area, reducing loneliness within Solihull. It also helps individuals with sensory disorders to develop or reactivate their remaining senses; this aspect is especially important because a lot of Veterans suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The garden includes a community orchard, wildflowers, sensory planting, insect hotels, and shallow water to attract invertebrates and insects.

The judges described this winning project as an innovative and impactful project for the local community and for veterans.





# Community Award - Winner

The Armed Forces Veteran Garden is located within Hillfield Park, an old landfill site in the centre of Solihull. The project was a collaboration between the Royal British Legion and Solihull Council to create a lasting legacy that not only improves the environment through increased bio-diversity but supports local veterans through natural therapy.

This project was had a multi- agency approach and involved a large number of stakeholders including the tri- services, local community, residents, neighbouring primary and junior school, relevant charities such as Troop Aid and local housing for Veterans and their families; Star & Garter.

The garden was created with input from all involved to improve biodiversity by planting bee friendly and sensory plants, wildflowers and the Friends of Hillfield Park Group and local children planted over 800 bulbs of native snow drops and daffodils in the garden.

The longer-term plan for the garden is to link the current woodland in with the garden to create a woodland walk.



The space before the garden was created



The opening ceremony for the garden



Sensory plants were chosen for the garden



Friends of Hillfield Park tending to the garden



# Community Award - Highly Commended



## Handsworth Association of Schools

The Green Influences programme increases the aspirations and wellbeing of disadvantaged BAME young people, and enhance their sense of community through participation in environmentally focused youth social action. Over 70 young people have created wildlife gardens, planted trees, increased the biodiversity of their learning environments, and campaigned to make environmental change area wide for everyone in their community.

350 new trees have been planted on 7 local school sites via the Queen's Green Canopy project and the project has seen schools improving the flora and fauna in their grounds, hot composting, and adding bat and bird boxes.

This project was celebrated by the judges for being youth led, allowing young people to work together to solve problems and develop skills which will be beneficial later in life.





# THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

## Public Sector Award



West Midlands  
Combined Authority



WEST MIDLANDS  
Greener Together



# Public Sector Award - Winner

## Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Partners

Extending across 10,000 hectares on the fringes of the West Midlands conurbation, the Purple Horizon Project is restoring and connecting fragmented nationally and internationally important heathlands to create a mosaic of heathland-wetland-woodland-grassland, vital for the recovery and long-term resilience of the area's reptiles, birds, and pollinators.

The project partnership is developing a plan for connecting with communities in the deprived areas of Walsall (one of the top 10% most deprived local authorities in England), to understand the community needs, and where habitat creation and green infrastructure will deliver the greatest health benefits.

The project has kick started the restoration of 21 ha of important and unique habitats such as heathland, acid grassland and lowland meadow in its first year of development. It has also funded machinery to enable seed collection, mowing, scrub control and further habitat restoration, some of which is suitable for volunteers to operate easily. This project was described by the judges as an ambitious but achievable project.





# Public Sector Award - Winner

Walsall Council are working with a large partnership of different organisations co-ordinated by Natural England. Lichfield Council, the Wildlife Trusts from Birmingham and the Black Country and Staffordshire, plus other organisations such as the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust are all part of this wider partnership.

Purple Horizons is a 20 year project to try to link the important nature conservation areas of Cannock Chase and Sutton Park, providing better links between wildlife sites to ensure that bio diversity is given a better chance of survival through climate change and adaptation.

The partnership will continue to grow and develop over the next few years and more research will be carried out in order to understand and develop the project concepts and ideas in more detail and to find the best ways to invest in the future of this important lowland heathland area in the Midlands.



The project has developed new interpretation panels to explain the importance of the geology and the underlying soils to the restoration of heathland in the area.



# Public Sector Award - Highly Commended



## Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvement Project undertook a wide range of habitat and nature improvement projects across the borough. The project was completed in 2020 to conclude an ambitious three-year programme of habitat creation and ecological enhancement schemes in over 20 publicly accessible green spaces within urban areas of Solihull.

The projects have provided wildflower meadows and verges, tree and hedgerow planting, created new ponds, extended existing and created new woodlands, restored woodland structure and diversity, restored river sections, and removed invasive non-native species.

The work undertaken across all the projects involved in the Nature Improvement Project are feeding into the development of the national Nature Recovery Strategy and used to inform Biodiversity Net Gain commitments.



**Solihull**  
METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



# THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

## Education Award



West Midlands  
Combined Authority



WEST MIDLANDS  
Greener Together



# Education Award - Winner

## Kings Rise Academy

This Academy provides a nurturing, happy and holistic learning environment for over 400 primary school children. Based in a neighbourhood which is amongst the most deprived neighbourhoods in all of the UK, there is a lack of green spaces in the local area.

They raised £85,000 to transform a disused area of their playground into a wonderful Wildlife and Wellbeing Area. Designed together with their children's eco council and Forest Schools Birmingham, they created a beautiful new area for the whole community to enjoy, which was officially opened in July 2022.

Based in a neighbourhood which is amongst the most deprived in the UK, there are a distinct lack of green spaces in their local area. The new space includes wildflower meadows, fruit trees, vertical growing walls for growing salad crops, a Forest School area, bat and bird boxes, a woodland meditation area, and a greenhouse for growing fruit and vegetables.





# Education Award - Winner

The garden was named after the legendary water monster, the KRAKEN area (which stands for Kings Rise Academy Knowledge and Education in Nature), and educates users about the wonders of the environment, inspiring them to take steps to save water, protect our planet and care for our community.

The project was described by the judges as a really inspiring project that has shown real creativity in bringing the natural world to a deprived neighbourhood.

With a dedicated outdoors teacher, the children now have the opportunity to learn, play and connect with nature every single day. Lessons are scheduled for every class, from nursery to year 6, to learn outside at least once a week, and during lunchtimes and after school the space is used to support those with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The space is now open to the local community outside of school hours, which includes running a gardening group, parent and toddler groups, nature craft workshops and open days.



The garden before becoming the KRAKEN area and the images to the right show the transformation



# Education Award - Highly Commended

## Hob Green Primary School

Hob Green Primary School created their own Forest School where they hold sessions for children from nursery to year 6. They have planted around 200 trees, including a willow fence and other willow structures. They have large composters and conduct a bio blitz at the site and have new minibeasts turning up each year, such as cardinal and longhorn beetles along with Burnett Moths. The Forest School is a space where children can be free to find their own inspirations and intrinsically motivate the sessions. It is a place where children are released from the constraints of the classroom and learn to empathise with others and the world around them.

Hob Green's Project was favoured by the judges for the various initiatives taken to boost local biodiversity and increase pupils' interactions with the natural environment.





# THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

## Business Award



West Midlands  
Combined Authority





# Business Award - Winner

## Idverde and Complex Development Projects

The Linear Park project was created to connect communities in the north of Coventry with the city centre, greening a neglected urban environment. The project aimed to create new and sustainable habitats for wildlife, offer safe playing areas for local families and bring nature right into the city centre.

In addition to planting almost 2,000 mature trees and saplings, giving instant additional nesting and food for birds and other wildlife, they created a range of habitat features including bird and bat boxes, stag beetle loggeries and hedgehog houses.

They also created a new wetland area which will support a wide variety of species, supported by planting more than 23,000 shrubs and creating a native wildflower meadow. The project was described by the judges as an excellent example of connecting community with nature.





# Business Award - Winner

The overall project reconnects communities that have been separated for many years by the 'concrete collar' ring road. It links with an existing park to create a continuous 1km green link from Belgrade Square in the city centre, under the ring road, up to Naul's Mill Park.

The old boating lake at Nauls Mill Park did not support biodiversity and the project created a new wetland area which supports a wide variety of species. Duck Island was the final completion of the works to provide a protected area for ducks nest. The scheme also recreates the culverted Radford Brook as the central landscape feature running through the development.

The project is a great example of how modern urban regeneration can make a huge difference to the surrounding community.



The space before being developed into the park and below images show further developments of the area with Nauls Mill Pond restored along with the walkway.





# Summary

We were delighted to be able to recognise the incredible achievements of organisations across the West Midlands on enhancing and protecting the regions natural environment.

We believe the awards will enthuse and inspire incredible projects across the region

**See all the winning videos and photos on our website here:**  
[www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy/natural-environment-awards/](http://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-and-energy/natural-environment-awards/)







SUPPORTED BY  
PMG

West Midlands  
Combined Authority

THE NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
AWARDS

THE NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
AWARDS

THE NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
AWARDS