

Case study: Leighton Buzzard

Background

Leighton Buzzard is an example of a community that has successfully mobilised itself for pollinators. Building on prior conservation work, in 2012, South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth set up the campaign 'Keep the Buzz in Leighton Buzzard'. With support from Leighton Linslade Town Council, Leighton-Linslade in Bloom, and the Greensand Trust, they had the knowledge, tools, and funds that were needed to transform eight sites across the town. They did this with the help of local residents, town centre retailers, local businesses, and schools.

One of the earliest 'Keep the Buzz' projects was clearing and planting along the banks of the River Ouzel. The banks that once lacked diversity are today adorned with many pollinator-friendly plants, such as oxeye daisies, comfrey, wild angelica, primrose, dog rose, and red campion. In addition, with the support of London Midland and British Flora, in 2011, a wildflower area was created at the local railway station. Rough grass has been replaced by yarrow, marjoram, scabious, and purple toadflax.

At the Town's war memorial garden, a permaculture garden that grows a range of bee friendly flowers and organic vegetables has been set up for the local community. Local pre-school children have been involved in the planting to assist their learning about pollinators. On some neighbouring playing fields, the volunteers dug up an area of turf to plant wildflowers. Similarly, in a space sandwiched between a play area and a road (Mill Road), Spencer Rail volunteers helped to dig up turf and local residents planted wildflowers. Other projects across the town include a community orchard, further wildflower planting, and transforming the banks of a local brook.



Successes

In 2013, Leighton Linslade Town Council voted to be a bee friendly town, and in 2014, the council paid for the local Wildlife Trusts to train their staff on management for biodiversity. Particular successes have been in engaging young people, such as Heathwood Lower School planting wildflowers in a town park.



Challenges

Securing funding and resources for the 'Keeping the Buzz' campaign was a challenge. However, the town council offered increasing financial assistance and the local MP was also highly supportive. Expert advice on planting and regeneration was at first hard to find, but was met through the Community Tree Trust in Bedfordshire, the Greensand Trust, British Flora and the Suffolk Wildlife Trusts. The biggest challenge was conveying to the public that 'untidiness' (such as long grass) is important for pollinators. This is being addressed through interpretation boards, explaining that untidy can be good.

TOP TIPS

- Leave a tidy mown strip beside wildflowers.
- Spend time listening to, and engaging with, all parts of the community.
- Really engage with the council, and understand their challenges. A small grant or donation can go far.

Looking Ahead

In the short term, 'Keep the Buzz' is aiming to further encourage local residents, particularly schools, to plant wildflowers. Work is also being done with 'L.B. First', an organisation of local retailers and residents that are working to create habitat for pollinators. The Town is also helping to identify areas where grass can be left to grow long. Longer term, 'Keep the Buzz' wants to create a whole range of biodiversity-rich habitats across the town, so that people can engage with nature without having to drive to a nature reserve.