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Welcome to Wildspace!

Space to walk, to talk, to think, to learn and play, or simply to enjoy. The living green spaces that form parts of our towns, cities and villages are important to us not only because they support a rich and vibrant variety of wildlife, but because they make the places where we live and work healthier and less stressful.

Helping local communities to create more Local Nature Reserves, green spaces for people and wildlife, make the ones we have even better and improve the quality of their local environment – that's what Wildspace! is all about.

Wildspace! is run by English Nature, thanks to a National Lottery award from the New Opportunities Fund. In the first year alone, Wildspace! gave 113 grants to 90 community-based projects – a total of nearly £5million. Wildspace! money has also meant that more than 60 organisations have been able to employ Community Liaison Officers, and seven areas of land will be bought to become new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

“We see Local Nature Reserves as fundamental to people's lives and wellbeing,” says Sir Martin Doughty, Chair of English Nature. “Wildspace! aims to make LNRs accessible to everyone. We have managed to distribute over 90% of our funds in the first year, which gives some projects up to four years to make sure people everywhere can experience and enjoy the LNRs.”



A Wildspace! indian adventure event at Farley Copse, Binfield, Bracknell
Photo by Stewart Turkington

Over 85 per cent of first year grants went to benefit people in areas where accessible green space is at its scarcest. The money is involving them in caring for, enjoying and learning about nearby reserves. The Wildspace! Community Liaison Officers are there to help people get involved and develop the skills and interests they'll need to continue caring for their green havens long into the future.

Stephen Dunmore, Chief Executive of the New Opportunities Fund, said: “The Fund is committed to distributing lottery money to schemes that will help local communities to enjoy a better quality of life. Exercising, socialising and getting in touch with the natural environment can boost both physical and mental wellbeing.”

Community spirit lives on in cemetery



Local Historian and volunteer Chris Maguire gives a talk on the history of Abney Park LNR to a local Jewish group
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

Walking through Hackney in London's East End you can expect to hear any of 220 different languages – and that's just among the residents. So how do you encourage such a mixed bunch to discover their local nature reserve?

Kirsty Peterken, Community Liaison Officer for Hackney's Wildspace! scheme, has put together an incredible programme of events and activities that reaches out to every part of the community.

Abney Park Cemetery, one of the oldest garden cemeteries in London, is Hackney's first Local Nature Reserve. A 13-hectare woodland, important both for its ecology and its impressive architecture, the park is managed by the Abney Park Cemetery Trust.

“Leading up to our open day earlier this year, we organised all kinds of arts and crafts workshops for groups

with special needs, groups of elderly people, schools and many others,” says Kirsty.

“The elderly people went on journeys through the park and collected leaves and flowers to set into handmade paper; we did old-fashioned photography that uses light-activated paper but needs no cameras, and we made small chairs to fit with our theme of the enchanted forest.”

And that was only part of it. Teenagers – a notoriously difficult group to get involved – got stuck into creating banners and windmills; elderly people from a local Jewish centre visited the reserve for the first time, and Kirsty even brought in an interpreter to help with history and nature walks for Turkish visitors from the Daymer Centre.

Over the summer, hundreds of local

children came along to the summer playscheme to play games, make masks and learn about the wildlife.

“We have an amazing mix of people around here,” says Kirsty. “Not only are there 220 languages spoken, people have different abilities and

“Elderly people went on journeys through the park and collected leaves and flowers to set into handmade paper”

different interests. I use my background in arts and crafts to offer workshops, walks, talks and events that bring all kinds of people into the reserve.”

Next year is the 10th anniversary of the LNR and Kirsty is already preparing.

“The next project is to get local people involved in creating signs in different languages – possibly using mosaics.”

Reserve Watch turns locals into crime-busters

Burnt out cars, vandalism and fly-tipping – no wonder local people wanted action. Now, with the help of a new Reserve Watch scheme, they're helping make their green spaces crime-free.

When Anna Gorski took up her job as a Community Liaison Officer for Wildspace! in Dudley, she inherited two Local Nature Reserves and a challenge.

“One of the sites, Cotwall End Valley in Sedgley, had had varying degrees of management over the previous 10 years and was suffering from the lack of a dedicated officer on site,” says Anna. “It was exciting to get out and speak to local people to find out what they'd like to see done there. I quickly discovered that most people wanted to see the site made cleaner and safer. The question everyone was asking was: what are you going to do about burnt-out cars, fly-tipping, graffiti and vandalism?”



Anna Gorski (right) with volunteers and some of the rubbish they have just cleared from a pond at Cotwall End LNR, whilst clearing the pond of unwanted weed Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

Anna re-invented an earlier scheme and re-launched it as Reserve Watch with new leaflets, posters and promotions. A card, with a blank form on the reverse, was distributed throughout the area so that people could record details of crimes committed on the nature reserve. Nearly 2,500 of these flyers have been delivered door-to-door and left in libraries and community centres.

The scheme is being piloted at Cotwall End with a view to extending it to the other two Wildspace! reserves over the next two years. If it's successful, it could go borough-wide.

Anna organised meetings between the local police and residents groups and, though it's still early days, believes the scheme is starting to make a difference.

“People shouldn't get disheartened if the police don't have the resources to respond immediately,” she says. “But, if we can improve the quality of the information passed on to them, patterns in the data might emerge which will help the police make a more effective response. We can't simply demand more police patrols until we have the public's co-operation in reporting crimes on a more regular basis.”



The Dudley reserves are teeming with wildlife, including great crested newt (right), southern marsh and common spotted orchids, an array of ancient meadow plants and bluebells and other ancient woodland plants.



Photo by John Robinson

Volunteers at Catwall End LNR clear the nuisance plant Japanese knotweed which chokes out other wildlife

Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

Middlesbrough is one of the 10 most deprived boroughs in England – and, until now, it didn't have a single Local Nature Reserve.

Getting into the car and spending a day in the countryside is just not possible for thousands of families in Middlesbrough. Here, unemployment is twice the national average and 48% of households don't have access to a car.

Over the next few years, though, Middlesbrough Council's Wildspace! Officer Sue Antrobus will be working to make sure that every single resident will be no more than a kilometre away from a Local Nature Reserve.



People entering Berwick Hills Community Park. The place used to be a huge allotment area, but it is now earmarked as a possible Local Nature Reserve
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

Banging the drum for nature

Meadows near the MetroCentre? Kittiwakes nesting amongst new developments? Six new Local Nature Reserves are being created in urban Gateshead.

Rock-drummer turned conservationist, Peter Shield is Gateshead's first community wildlife officer – and he's behind the area's *Next to Nature* project, helped by a £76,000 Wildspace! grant.

“When I realised I wasn't going to be a rock star, I decided to switch to other things I enjoy doing,” said Peter, who took an HND in Countryside Management.

Now he'll be helping to breathe new life into the Norwood Nature Park created by Northumberland Wildlife Trust for the 1990 National Garden Festival. The Park used to be a coke works before its transformation, then – after the Festival ended – became an education centre. Recently, though, a lack of funds had led the site to be closed to the public.



“We're opening it up for school groups and public visits and will be managing it for wildlife again,” explains Peter.

“It has woodland, grassland and ponds and will be one of our best reserves because it represents so many different habitats. It will be a fantastic educational resource.”

At the time of writing, Norwood was about to become an LNR. Others about to be declared included the Kittiwake Tower, an artificial nesting platform built for birds displaced by the Baltic flour mill redevelopment. In 2002, around 100 young birds fledged there. These six sites were chosen so that people in areas that lack safe, accessible, open space

Green islands in a jobs black-spot

A tall order, but the first LNR, Stainton Quarry, has now been declared. Three more have been identified as potential LNRs – Marton West Beck, Berwick Hills Community Park and Linthorpe Cemetery. Work is under way to write management plans and work with local residents and groups to get them using the sites. Community groups are already caring for some of the sites and Sue is giving them practical support and encouragement.

She will be organising walks, talks, training opportunities and links with local schools, community centres and libraries to get more people involved.

“The nature reserves are a good way of safeguarding some of our open spaces, and a real chance to get people involved and increase awareness of the countryside and wildlife on their doorstep,” says Sue.

“Some sites were already being used a little, but now we can promote their true value and get more people visiting them. Others – such as Berwick Hills, which used to be a huge allotment area – were closed off to the public and are being opened up as spaces for people to use.”



A quiet moment to reflect in Linthorpe Cemetery LNR Middlesborough
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

Peter Shields at the Butterfly Station
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

would benefit. Events have been held at many of the sites already – all with the aim of encouraging people to discover beautiful green spaces close to home.

There’s been a wildflower fun day at Cross Lane Meadows near the Metro Centre, a guided walk that took in the Kittiwake Tower and, at Bensham Butterfly Station, a new Wildlife Watch brings children on site once a month to learn craft skills, play games and learn about the environment.

“Feedback from local people has been great,” says Peter. “They’re keen and interested, and have been getting involved in improving the look of these green spaces with litter-picking

and management projects. I’d like to see ‘Friends of’ groups and Wildlife Watch groups at all the sites.”

Peter also recognises that, for the reserves to go on thriving after the project ends, people need to play a real part in their management and care. “The aim of our Wildspace! project is to bring people and wildlife together. A lot of people don’t have cars and find it hard to get out into the wider countryside,” says Peter. “We want people of all ages to realise

that they can make a real difference and make their local environment better for themselves, their families and future generations.”

Members of a ‘children who care for adults’ group help restore a footbridge at Norwood Nature Park, the former garden festival site in Gateshead

Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature



The estuary of the River Axe – a lovely part of East Devon, but until recently, with barely a footpath in sight. Now, though, local people can visit their neighbouring marshes on foot or even by tram.

East Devon District Council had owned the 26 acres of Seaton Marshes for years and leased them for farming. But the Council recognised that what might have looked to some like a ‘boring old field’ could become a haven for wildlife and for people.

So, in 1999, the Marshes became a Local Nature Reserve. Two years later, East Devon District Council won a Wildspace! grant to help buy an area of saltmarsh nearby at Colyford Common to create a second LNR on the estuary.

The two sites have important and fascinating environmental features that Nature Reserves Officer Fraser Rush felt local people were missing out on.

“Seaton, Colyton and the neighbouring small villages are rural communities, right next to the

estuary, but without any means of visiting or viewing the area,” says Fraser. “There are no public footpaths and no facilities for disabled people.”

“We put in a new bird hide at Seaton Marshes and a viewing platform at Colyford Common and

Little egret is one of the birds to be seen in the area

Photo by John Robinson



The five kilometre Seaton Tramway is a fantastic way of watching the birds in places like Seaton Marshes LNR

Photo by Paul Glendell / English Nature

Taking the tram across the marshes

then, with Wildspace! help, began work on improving the wetlands to encourage more birds.”

One of their first jobs was to build a footpath around the nearby sewage works and plant trees to screen the works from the reserve. Then, they dug out two new lagoons and several smaller shallow ponds. New bunds (low banks) were also created to retain water. This meant that large areas could be kept under water during the winter, creating the perfect conditions for water birds.

Earth dug from the lagoons was used to create a raised path and to improve the Borrow Pit Nature Reserve next door. New direction signs went up, along with a notice-board for announcing up-to-date bird sightings and on-site work.

When Fraser asked for volunteers to act as wardens on the site, he was amazed at the response. They now have two or three local people every day, keeping an eye on the reserve, as well as volunteers who carry out practical work such as fencing or

building board-walks. “The response was a real testament to the community spirit here,” says Fraser.

He’s hoping that when their new Wildspace!-funded community liaison officer is appointed, they’ll be able to set up links with schools and create just as much enthusiasm among local children.

Fraser’s also capitalising on one of the area’s more bizarre features. Back in 1970, the former railway on the sea-wall between the marshes and the estuary became a tram-line for enthusiasts running vintage trams.

“It’s great to see the old, brightly painted town trams running on five kilometres of track through beautiful countryside,” says Fraser.

“We’ve worked with the Seaton and District Electric Tramway to publish a leaflet about bird-watching from the tram – it really is a fantastic way of seeing birds. And we’ve also devised a programme of bird-watching tram trips with them.”

Linking people with the wildlife on their doorsteps

Dorset may be known for its rural charms, but for many people in the county's towns and villages, lack of money, transport or time means the countryside is a world away.

Katie Pollard and Danny Alder, part-time Local Nature Reserve Officers for Dorset County Council, are now helping local councils bring the countryside to town.

“Although Dorset is a rural county, many people don't have access to areas of countryside nearby, and some sites have no clear role or appropriate management.” explains Danny.

“We're now looking for green spaces on the edges of villages and towns that could be made accessible. The job, then, is to encourage people to use and care for them.”

With many of Dorset's rich wildlife areas in private ownership and so closed to the public, it was up to the local councils to find a new way of working together to create the much-needed wild spaces.

Helped by a Wildspace! grant, the County Council and six district councils are now starting to bring their *Working for Wildlife in Dorset* project to life.

Through the project, a network of



The raft spider is one of the inhabitants of Slop Bog LNR, which is now the subject of some enthusiastic work. Below, Danny Alder and volunteers help to construct a pond to encourage dragonflies and other insect life

Photos by Paul Glendell/English Nature and John Robinson

Blandford Forum and Riverside Meadows near Sturminster Newton. A fourth site – Slop Bog at Ferndown near Bournemouth – was on the list too, and is the subject of some intensive management work.

“Simply creating an LNR is only part of the work,” says Katie. “We'll be getting local people involved by

giving them a chance to manage and monitor the sites themselves.”

“We've set up a 'Friends of' group at Slop Bog and, working closely with Butterfly Conservation, a number of local people have already made a start carrying

out surveys. At Riverside Meadows, the angling group is planning to build a fishing platform for disabled anglers.”

Katie and Danny are also planning countryside tasks such as making nest boxes, tree planting and land management, and hope to create work experience opportunities for students, volunteers and unemployed people.

“The legalities and responsibilities for different areas can make it hard for councils to co-ordinate what they're doing,” adds Katie. “But this project should also create a forum for sharing good practice between local authorities.”



Below: Nature on the doorstep – Slop Bog LNR looks out on local houses
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature



new LNRs will be set up, many of them in or close to towns and housing developments where access to natural open space is limited.

At the time of writing, three North Dorset areas were already on their way to becoming LNRs – Castle Hill near Shaftesbury, Woolland Hill near

When you think of Gloucestershire, you probably think of the countryside. But in the south of the county there's a real mixture of urban fringes, industrial sites that have closed and countryside areas that local people need help to manage.

“South Gloucestershire is one of the fastest growing areas for development in the country,” says Wildspace! Partnership Officer John Morris. “With that, comes the need to protect and enhance the green spaces that benefit both wildlife and local people,”

South Gloucestershire Council was given a Wildspace! grant to fund John's job for three years, to help develop community management plans for five new Local Nature Reserves and to manage the two existing LNRs.

New life for old places

Pressure for housing and business developments threatens many of our open spaces. In South Gloucestershire, new nature reserves are preserving green places for the communities around them.

Patchway, a disadvantaged area close to the M5, and Bradley Stoke, the largest private housing estate in Britain – if not Europe – are two of the communities in the project. In both, development has been very heavy and open space is therefore highly valued by local residents.

By contrast, Wick is a rural village on the outskirts of Bristol. Its now-closed ochre works was once world-renowned and supplied the red pigment used to colour the road surface of The Mall outside Buckingham Palace. The works that turned the river and woodlands red closed in 1970 and nature has since taken over.

“It's now a popular place with the locals, so we want to get them involved in drawing up a management plan for it by finding out what people want from the site,” says John.



Traces of otters can be found at Willsbridge
Illustration by English Nature

HOME COUNTIES



Small woods provide much more

As Bracknell has grown, fragments of ancient woodland, once surrounded by fields, have become wildlife havens amongst high-density housing.

Though these pockets of green have survived, there's often little sense of community around them and few opportunities for local people to learn about or use them.

Bracknell's approach to seven small woods, now surrounded by housing, could have an impact on how other councils think about and manage their own 'token' green spaces.

Liz Manley became Woodlands Project Officer in November 2001. Since then, she's been making sure the copses in Binfield and Warfield – six of them now Local Nature Reserves – are alive with people as well as wildlife.

“They're surrounded by houses, but have a huge diversity of mainly broad-leaved trees,” says Liz. “Species include

Project Officer Liz Manley leads a wildlife walk in Jock's Copse, Bracknell
Photo by Paul Glendell/English Nature

oak, ash, beech, sycamore and rowan. These, in turn, support lots of insect and bird

At Willsbridge, a wooded valley with a river, a former industrial site and an old quarry, schoolchildren have been interviewing older residents to record their memories of the area. From these oral histories, the children created drawings, which were then turned into clay tiles and bricks – the clay donated by a local manufacturer.

At a special event in August, the children’s artworks were laid in place at the mill, which marks the start of the heritage trail.

The last of the LNRs is Avon Valley. A wooded spot with Bristol and Bath at either end of the valley, it’s an escape from city-life.

“Getting as many people as possible to hear about and visit the sites has been my main job so far,” says John. “At October half-term, we organised a Wildspace! Week with events at all seven sites. We’ve also created a website at www.wildspaces.info, which will grow as we get more events and groups up and running.”

Youngsters make wildlife bricks to form a mosaic at Willsbridge

Photo by Julian James



More than token green space

species, which spill out into the neighbouring gardens.”

Regular dog walkers and long-term residents appreciate the copses but, at the start of the project, many people didn’t even know the woods existed.

So, Liz has been organising a busy programme of events to get more people involved. They’ve included conservation days, treasure hunts and an Easter egg hunt. Wildlife walks – especially night-time bat-spotting – have proved popular too.

The most successful conservation day was a pea stick event. Liz advertised at allotments and gardening clubs, inviting people to come and coppice an area of hazel and take any useful material back to their garden for trellises, supports and sculptures. “I’m trying to develop community

woodland groups and would like to have at least one ‘Friends of’ group in the area,” says Liz. “We want to reach the whole community, including people who have never thought about getting involved in community groups or nature conservation.”

Liz has also been visiting the schools within walking distance of the copses. Every class from Whitegrove School has already taken a field trip out to Whitegrove Copse. In fact, more than 1000 student hours have been spent in the woods, learning about them and linking knowledge and skills to the National Curriculum.

“It’s also an ideal opportunity to remind local children about how to behave in the countryside,” she adds. To make visiting the woods easier for

everyone, new paths have been laid – a practical improvement that also helps stop woodland flora from being damaged.

“Patches of green space have to be included in new housing development, but are often neglected and ignored,” says Liz. “With a bit of care, they can be turned into something of real value for the communities nearby and for the wildlife.”



Greater spotted woodpecker is one of the birds to be found around the Bracknell woods

Photo by John Robinson



Putting a new slant on nature

Local Nature Reserves are for everyone. And Epping Forest District Council has been using art to get all ages involved.

The oak bench and sculptures that now stand in Roughtalley's Wood aren't just the work of artist Will Glanfield – they're testament to the enthusiasm and ideas of local children and adults.

After the LNR was declared in August 2000, English Nature gave Epping Forest District Council a grant to lay a 700 metre path around the wood, but Countryside Manager Paul Hewitt knew he had to get creative to encourage more people to visit. With a Wildspace! grant, Paul, who works for the Council's Countryside Service, was able to commission Kent-based artist Will Glanfield. The brief was to interpret the environment of the wood in a new way.



An owl sculpture forms part of the entrance gates at Liniders Field LNR, Epping Forest

Far left, Countryside Manager Paul Hewitt enjoys the recently installed oak seat at Roughtalleys Wood LNR

Photos by Paul Glendell / English Nature

The project included volunteer days in the wood and workshop sessions with local schools and residents. Trips to the wood were also organised and talks were given to local sheltered housing units for the elderly and families in temporary housing.

The result? A beautiful oak seat and a standing sculpture in the wood, artworks in the two primary schools and an influx of new volunteers and visitors.

"Children and adult volunteers helped clear trees and install the bench and sculpture," said Paul.

"Before the project, it was surprising how few people from the village even knew where the wood was," says Paul. "Even children from the local primary school were unaware there was a wood in the middle of their village. We brought them onto the reserve and soon they were bringing their mums and dads along too."

Kingfisher-cam puts wildlife on the web

Real-life nature and virtual visits are being combined to make three green oases in Runcorn and Widnes hot-spots for leisure and learning.

Where do you go when you really want a bird's-eye view of the world? Jeff Clarke, Wildspace! Officer for Halton Borough Council has the answer.

He and his colleagues have created Wild about Halton – a zone on the Council's website that will broadcast live pictures from the area's new Local Nature Reserves at Oxmoor, Dorchester Park and Clinton Wood.

Four web-cams are being set up on-site – one of them on a kingfisher perch and another in an area noted for kestrels.

"If you're not lucky enough to be visiting the website just as a kingfisher arrives, you can look at footage from as many as 21 days previously," says Jeff.

While wildlife movies on your PC screen might be good fun, they're an important part of Jeff's ground-breaking educational work too.

He has teamed up with education consultants and schools to develop learning packages linked to science and humanities at Key Stages 3 and 4. "Most existing material is aimed at Key Stages 1 and 2," explains Jeff.

"These new packages include classroom materials, but also involve visits to the LNRs, field work and follow-up projects at school and via the website. All Halton's 71 schools have direct links to the website too."

The LNRs themselves have huge potential for education – not just for



Engineers install a kestrel box in a water pumping station next to Oxmoor Wood LNR
Photo by Paul Glendell / English Nature

schoolchildren but for adults too. Oxmoor LNR is a tranquil spot with spring butterflies, water vole and beautiful flora - yet, it's in the middle of a light industrial area. A visit there can be a real escape, but very few people use the reserve.

"The local community is the business community," says Jeff. "I'm looking at ways of encouraging them to visit the wood during their work breaks."

Dorchester Park is a varied mix of birch woodland and orchid-strewn grassland in the midst of a housing development. Not only is it easy for local people to get to, it's an important site for biodiversity.

Many people also live close to the third LNR, Clinton Wood, but its wet conditions deter many visitors, especially those with a disability. Part of the £67,600 Wildspace! grant will be used to create a new pathway. "The three reserves are important in many ways and the website is a great

way of promoting them and of encouraging people to use them," says Jeff.

"It's also an important promotional tool within the Borough Council.

Too often, development destroys biologically rich areas. I'm hoping that this project will build on the ground-breaking work carried out by Halton's Nature Conservation Officer, Paul Oldfield, in helping to raise the profile of the green spaces."

"Only by ensuring that local people appreciate the true value and importance of the borough's natural assets, can we protect the reserves' long-term future."



Kingfisher

Photo by John Robinson



Awarded for excellence



The Wildspace! team

The Wildspace!
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Applying for a Wildspace! grant

Money might not grow on trees, but an English Nature Wildspace! grant can help trees, wildlife and communities grow and thrive.

Grants of between £5,000 and £25,000 are available to local authorities, wildlife trusts, Local Nature Reserve management groups, 'friends of' groups, charities and other organisations.

English Nature wants to encourage local people to help and care for their Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Applications are especially welcome for new LNRs in areas without accessible green space; for projects that will have lots of community and voluntary involvement, and for projects that make existing LNRs more accessible to more people.

How do we apply?

English Nature's Wildspace! grant management team can give you advice on developing your project and about declaring an LNR. Before you apply give them a ring on 01733 455415 and chat through your ideas, this could save you time, effort and disappointment in the long run. Information on the sorts of projects that might be eligible, and funding priorities, can be found in

Wildspace! A Grant Scheme for Local Nature Reserves – Guidance Notes and by visiting the English Nature web site www.english-nature.org.uk.

On the website you will also find copies of the applications form, examples of successful applications and information on the projects currently being funded. You can also get an application pack by calling free on 0845 0000 121.

Because money's limited, not everyone who applies will get a grant. Wildspace! runs until September 2006, but it's likely that most funds will have been committed by April 2004.

If you aren't successful, English Nature's area teams can point you in other directions. You can find out where your nearest team is based by visiting www.english-nature.org.uk.

Wildspace! is one of eleven grant-making schemes delivered by award partners like English Nature for the New Opportunities Fund's Green Spaces for Sustainable Communities Programme. Further details can be found at www.nof.org.uk



Children in Willsbridge, South Gloucestershire, play 'Eye in the Sky', using the shiny side of CDs to look up to the woodland canopy to give them an idea of the view a caterpillar or insect may see

Photo by Julian James