



# Celebrating seven years of success



# Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this Natural Networks booklet, which celebrates the inspiring work taking place across Worcestershire to restore and enhance our precious natural habitats. Through the partnership between Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, the programme has supported landowners, community groups and organisations to create wildlife-rich spaces that benefit both nature and local people.

Funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, the programme offered expert biodiversity surveys and targeted grants. Natural Networks has enabled projects that strengthen our blue and green infrastructure and contribute to a thriving, connected landscape.

These case studies highlight what can be achieved when communities, professionals and volunteers work together with a shared commitment to protecting and improving our environment.

My thanks go to everyone involved for their dedication and enthusiasm. The achievements showcased here demonstrate the real and lasting impact of investing in nature.

**Councillor Ian Cresswell,  
Cabinet Member for Environment  
and Communities**

Natural Networks encapsulates all the best elements of modern nature conservation: a positive and willing partnership, brimming with skills and expertise, working together with local people to improve their green spaces for wildlife. The case studies in these pages demonstrate the power of such an approach and the statistics of success speak for themselves.

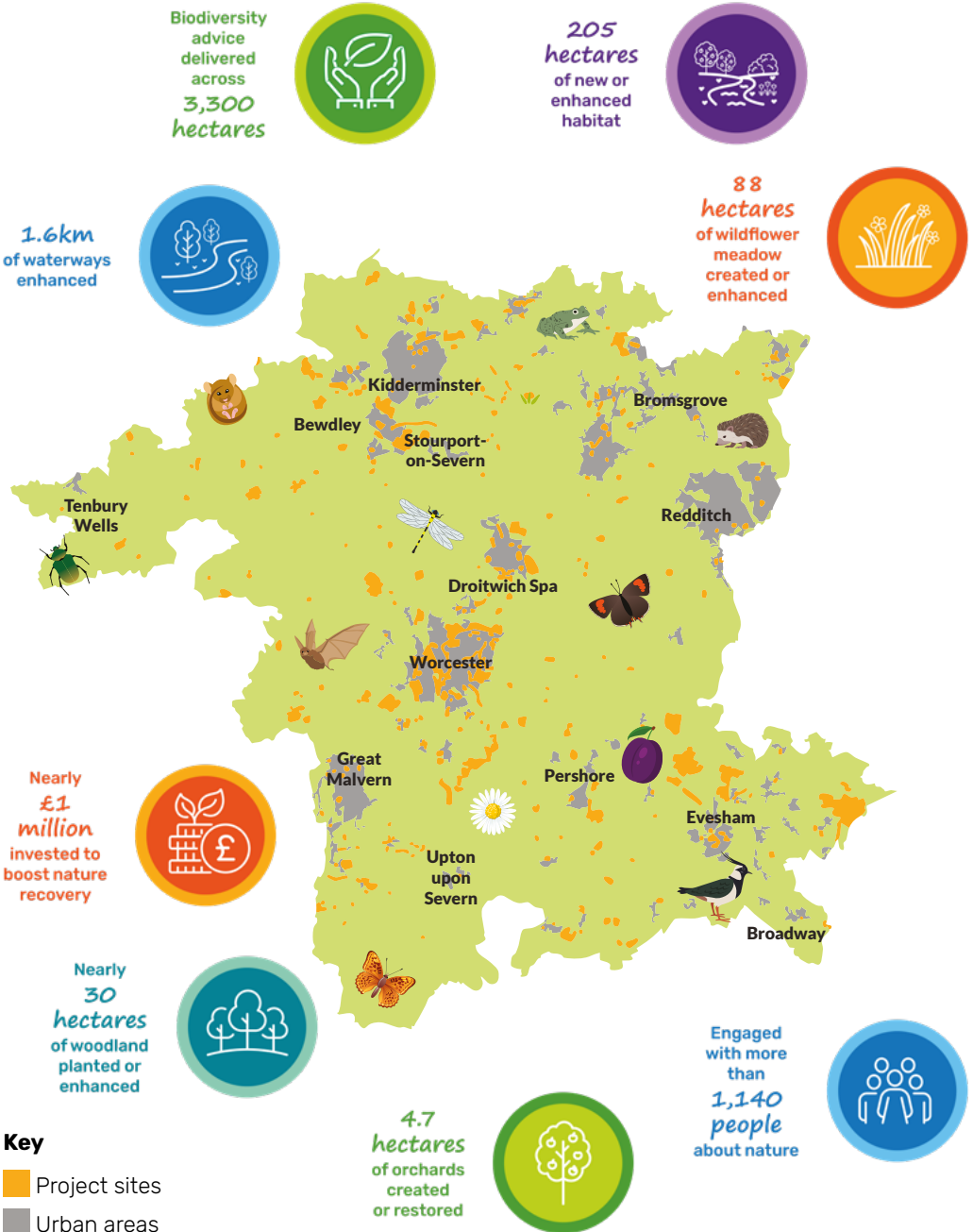
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has been proud to partner with Worcestershire County Council, bringing conservation advice and funding to people from across Worcestershire who aspire to improve their bit of the county for nature. By working together we have achieved an astonishing amount, enhancing places that benefit not only our precious wildlife but also provide safe havens for people to enjoy the species and habitats for which the county is so important.

While this phase of the project is at an end, the Trust remains committed to Natural Networks and looks forward to the bold next steps.

**Steve Bloomfield,  
Head of Conservation,  
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust**

# Between 2018 – 2026...

Natural Networks has provided wildlife enhancement and management advice to 337 sites, resulting in over 200ha of land being improved for nature.



# Churches and burial grounds

Natural Networks has given advice to 27 churches, faith spaces and burial sites across Worcestershire.

5.8km  
of hedgerow  
planted



## St Nicholas Church

Hidden away in a pretty corner of Warndon lies St Nicholas Church, a Grade 1 listed building with parts that date to the early 12th Century. Bats roost in the tower and are often seen emerging as they head out at dusk to find food.

The project involved a range of interventions to boost biodiversity as well as enhancing people's enjoyment of the space. The defunct metal railing around the perimeter was removed and replaced with a 40m long native hedgerow. As this matures, it will provide fruits, berries and nesting habitat as well as a corridor for wildlife to move across the site. It will also act as a screen between the graveyard and the car park.



*New hedgerow, St Nicolas Church*

Spring flowering plants – English bluebells, snowdrops, primroses and greater stitchwort – have been planted to greet visitors with a flush of colour. Plants that attract night-flying moths by producing scent after dark were included to increase insect numbers and give the resident bats a source of food.

Almost  
305,000  
plug plants  
and bulbs  
planted



Shade-lovers, such as nettle-leaved bellflower, hedge bedstraw and wood sage, have been planted to diversify flora under the tree canopies. The north-facing bank has been planted with native ferns to add further habitat diversity.

Two mini container ponds were installed and planted with a range of native species, such as hornwort and water forget-me-not, with log piles and stones providing a means of entry and exit for wildlife. Amphibians - frogs, toads and newts - are in the area so the addition of water, no matter how small, is always beneficial to wildlife.

The area of grassland near the entrance is now being managed as a mini hay meadow by relaxing the mowing regime. The grass is now cut and collected once a year at the end of summer. This will encourage the wild plants to flower, set seed and provide resources for insects, birds and small mammals, further enhancing the backdrop to this wonderful little church.

## Welland Cemetery

Survey work highlighted a great diversity of waxcaps and coral fungi. A new mowing regime has been implemented to benefit both the wildflowers that bloom through summer and fungi that fruits in autumn, so that the site can cater for all its wildlife.

Non-native conifers have been replaced with a native hedgerow and the stumps have been transformed into owl and fungi sculptures by a local chainsaw artist.

Log piles were created around the site to benefit invertebrates, small mammals and amphibians.

Scarlet waxcap, Welland Cemetery



## Westall Park Natural Burial Ground

Plug plants and wildflower seed have been used to aid in the ongoing restoration of species-rich grassland. Ponds were restored to benefit frogs and other amphibians whilst hedgerows and scrub are now managed sensitively for birds, small mammals and rare butterflies, including brown hairstreaks.

**Community  
green spaces**  
better quality  
habitats help  
connect people  
to nature



**Protecting  
rare species**  
improving  
habitats for key  
Worcestershire  
species



# Business and tourism

When local businesses engage with sustainable land management, there can be great outcomes for both nature and the local economy. Natural Networks has worked with several organisations that have done just that.

## Bowbrook Lodges

One of Natural Networks' largest wetland creation projects is found at Bowbrook Lodges, a 30 acre caravan and glamping business just north of Pershore.

Two large pools with shallow margins were created whilst two 'backwaters' – channels linked to the Bow Brook – provide important calmer waters for fish fry and invertebrates. This new nature reserve holds back water in times of flood, providing excellent wetland and grassland habitat along the brook's floodplain in a landscape otherwise dominated by farmland. On higher ground, orchards have been created within newly established hay meadows, producing a mix of dessert and cider apples, pears, plums, gages and damsons. A strip of native woodland along the northern boundary creates links between hedgerows, extends wildlife corridors and provides a visual and audio buffer from the busy A-road.

*White-legged damselfly, Bowbrook Lodges*



*Wetland creation, Bowbrook Lodges*

The project demonstrates how thoughtful stewardship of the land can boost tourism as well as biodiversity, providing good quality habitat, a tranquil experience for visitors and much needed revenue for small businesses.

*Blue connections*  
healthy waterways  
reduce floods and  
enhance shared  
nature spaces



## Fulford Heath Golf Club

To enhance the site for members and wildlife, the team carried out a number of improvements over several years. The most impressive was the transformation of a vertical, slab-lined ditch to a wildlife-friendly, flower-rich wetland feature by graduating the edges and installing wildflower turf.

New life was breathed into a pond by enlarging it, reprofiling the edges and planting with native wetland plants. Wildflower seed has been sown along the fairways, trees and bulbs were planted and log piles, bug houses and bird boxes installed, creating a benchmark for more wildlife-friendly golf courses in the county.

*Enhanced ditch, Fulford Heath Golf Club*



## Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury Castle is a historic site featuring a mix of habitats including ponds, wet woodland, grassland and wood pasture. The site received two grants from Natural Networks to enhance habitats in Old Moat Coppice and for wood pasture restoration. Even-aged stands of alder were coppiced to vary the woodland structure and a silted-up pond was restored, benefitting resident frogs.

Tree planting took place to restore the old horse chestnut avenue and replace large trees lost to storms within the wood pasture. Bird and bat boxes have been installed and thousands of newly planted bulbs will provide pollen and nectar resources in spring.

**36.5**  
**hectares**  
of wetland  
created  
or enhanced



**Sustainable**  
**tourism**  
tourism in  
balance with  
nature boosts the  
local economy



# Farmland

With over 110,000 hectares of farmland in Worcestershire, there are plenty of opportunities to provide spaces for nature in field corners, buffer strips and hedgerows.

1.6km  
of waterways  
enhanced



## **New Farm: Diamond Leaf project**

The County Council's Diamond Leaf carbon management project, near Evesham, benefited from Natural Networks' ecological expertise and grant funding.

Large woodlands aren't a feature of the landscape in this corner of Worcestershire, so a tree planting project wasn't appropriate here. Instead, 33 hectares of flower-rich grassland were created, benefitting native pollinators as well as sequestering carbon.

The seed mixes included meadow staples, such as black knapweed, wild carrot, oxeye daisy, lady's bedstraw and yellow rattle, in keeping with local grasslands. Many arable 'weeds', including fat hen, field poppy and mallow also flourished in the first year following ground disturbance. These species can be an important source of food for a range of birds and insects, further supplementing the sown mixes.

This site is a perfect example of how areas of farmland can be managed for wildlife and work towards creating landscapes more resilient to climate change.



*Cornflower, corn marigold and corncockle, New Farm*

Reprofiled ditch, Craycombe Farm



## Ryden and Craycombe Farms

Lying on the floodplain of the River Avon between Evesham and Pershore, these two farms benefited from the enhancement of a series of ditches and reedbeds. Working with the Farming and Wildlife Advice Group (FWAG), Natural Networks part-funded the reinstatement of sluice gates to existing ditches, helping to enhance the wet pasture and reedbed habitats. These provide perfect overwintering grounds for birds like redshanks, curlews and lapwings, whilst in the summer, dairy cattle benefit from the lush pasture.

## Saltway Farm

The farm, just outside Feckenham, has areas of arable and pasture. As well as providing management advice on ponds, grasslands and field margins, Natural Networks funded the planting of 5,640 trees and shrubs and 2,300 native bulbs and plants. A new orchard of local varieties was created and 10 bird and bat boxes were installed to boost nesting and roosting opportunities.

## Bransford Court Farm

Bransford Court Farm is a 74 hectare mixed farm adjacent to the River Teme in west Worcestershire, with part of the enterprise being run as a community farm. In collaboration with Worcestershire County Council's Natural Flood Management scheme, Natural Networks funded the creation of three attenuation ponds, as well as restoring an existing pond, to help store more water in times of flood.

Other natural flood management interventions included installing leaky dams along a woodland stream and tree planting for water retention and to reduce soil erosion.

Leaky dam, Bransford Court Farm



**Climate adaptation**  
nature reduces  
the impacts of  
climate change  
on communities



**Soil health**  
healthy soils  
filter water,  
grow our food,  
capture carbon  
and sustain life



# Village greenspaces

Natural Networks have worked closely with communities, enhancing local green spaces to inspire a sense of pride in their local environment.

72  
ponds  
restored  
or newly  
created



## **Martley Millennium Green**

The Natural Networks team is proud to have worked with Martley Millennium Green Trust several times to give management advice and funding to further enhance this already high quality site. This has included restoration of both ponds through de-silting, vegetation management, removal of leaf litter and reducing the canopy of overhanging trees. A section of the round pond's margin was re-profiled and native wetland plants were added to benefit fauna and flora.



*Round pond, Martley Millennium Green*

Sections of the grassland with lower floristic diversity have been sown with native wildflower seed and areas beneath the tree canopy have benefited from shade-tolerant seed and native bulbs. 115 metres of native, species-rich hedgerow have been planted, creating and linking habitat around the site's perimeter. Fruit trees of local Worcestershire varieties were planted to breathe new life into the remnant orchard and bird and bat boxes have been installed. Two hibernacula have been created for reptiles and amphibians, whilst a bee bank and bug hotel bench now provide vital nesting and resting sites for insects and other invertebrates.

In spring and summer, this little wildlife haven is awash with blossom and wildflowers, buzzing with insect life including several butterfly and dragonfly species. Grass snakes and smooth newts have been spotted using the wetland habitats and grassy margins.

**Linked habitats**  
connected habitats strengthen biodiversity and ecosystem health



## Four Acre Meadow

A community recreation field in Clifton-upon-Teme received support from Natural Networks. Its native wildflower turf is awash with colour and buzzing with insects in summer; the wildlife garden has shrubs, trees and herbs and there's 160 metres of new, native, species-rich hedgerow alongside wide grassland margins which act as vital wildlife corridors. Log piles and nest boxes add further habitat niches for wildlife.

Wildflowers, Four Acre Meadow



## Hollow Meadow

Nestled within the rolling hills of west Worcestershire, Hollow Meadow is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) that's recently been safeguarded through the creation of Guardians of Hollow Meadow, making the site a community space.

The site already had excellent wildlife habitats, including a floodplain meadow, acid grassland and a wildlife pond. Working alongside Severn Rivers Trust, a further two ponds were created, helping to reduce flooding impact downstream in Tenbury Wells and filtering run-off from a neighbouring field. Nine fruit trees were planted alongside 83m of new hedgerow and a handful of bird and bat boxes added.

The Guardians of Hollow Meadow say that the works by Natural Networks were key in making the transition from private to community ownership. The site now hosts workshops for nature, crafts, wellbeing and spiritual refreshment.

**Community stewardship**  
volunteering builds pride in local spaces and brings people together



**Engaged with more than 1,140 people about nature**



# Urban spaces

Having access to a local green space is essential for our wellbeing. Natural Networks has helped to enhance these important urban green spaces to benefit both people and wildlife.

*Wellbeing*  
nature supports  
mental health  
and community  
resilience



## **Cromwell Crescent Park**

Cromwell Crescent Park lies near the southeast edge of Worcester and provides a mini oasis within the surrounding residential areas. Worcester City Council wanted to enhance the habitats to benefit wildlife as well as making the site welcoming for local people.

Several hibernacula were created to provide safe areas for resident slow-worms to shelter and hibernate within. Newly created wildflower strips increase the amount of grassy habitat for these protected reptiles as well as providing pollen and nectar sources for invertebrates. Bulb planting across the site will also help to diversify the flora.

Non-native, invasive species, such as cherry laurel and snowberry, were removed and replaced with native shrubs and trees. Dead wood is an incredibly valuable resource for wildlife and Cromwell Crescent Park has utilised timber from the on-site tree works to create fantastic vertical 'loggeries', horizontal habitat piles and natural seating.

An all-weather accessible path was created in the southern part of the site whilst a more naturalistic, woodchip path compliments the trail around the small woodland to the north.



*Bird box, Cromwell Crescent Park*



*Vertical log pile, Cromwell Crescent Park*

Opportunities for roosting bats, nesting birds and hedgehogs have been boosted via the installation of wildlife boxes around the site. Interpretation panels help to inform and educate visitors and help inspire appreciation and care for this new and improved local park.

*Air quality  
greening urban  
spaces reduces  
air pollution*



## **Churchill and Blakedown Signal Box**

Natural Networks' smallest site, measuring only 200m<sup>2</sup>, the Signal Box was a worthwhile patch to upgrade. Funding allowed the sealed surfaces to be transformed from artificial grass and concrete to planted borders and a mini wildflower meadow with shrubs, trees and climbers to green the walls.

Wildlife features have been squeezed into every corner of the site, including a mini pond with wetland planting, bug hotel benches, solitary bee post and bird boxes. Hedgehogs now have permeable boundaries into neighbouring gardens and a house for the spiny visitors is tucked away in a quiet spot.

An interpretation panel informs visitors, showcasing what can be achieved in even the smallest of spaces.



*Churchill and Blakedown Signal Box*

**1,155**  
bird and  
bat boxes  
installed



**53**  
bee nesting  
habitats  
created



# Enhancing large public sites

Balancing conservation with access in large public spaces.

## Burlish Meadows

One of the largest Natural Networks projects, this exciting venture led by Wyre Forest District Council is delivering more than 17 hectares of habitat restoration on an abandoned golf course at the edge of Stourport-on-Severn. Adjacent to several other nature reserves, it really is part of a 'natural network' and is a fantastic addition to the special habitats already in the area.

88  
hectares  
of wildflower  
meadow  
created or  
enhanced



*Burlish Meadows vista*

Natural Networks provided funding and advice to help with the restoration and creation of acid grassland and heathland mosaic habitat. This habitat, found on sandy soils in the north of the county, includes plants like heather and harebell and is very rare in Worcestershire. Bunds and bare ground were created, which are incredibly important for the many species of insect that specialise in this sort of sandy habitat.

Restoration of scrub and hedgerow habitats was important in offering a range of micro-climates across the otherwise very open site. The once neglected pond has been restored by clearing fly-tipped material and reprofiling the margins, providing a much needed safe and clean water source in an otherwise dry environment. Bat and bird boxes were installed to boost the availability of nesting and roosting sites and public footpaths have been reinstated to invite local people to enjoy this rejuvenated place that's buzzing with life.

## Perdiswell Park

Owned by Worcester City Council, this large, 52 hectare park in the north of Worcester had been both a golf course and a landfill site. Its location between residential and industrial buildings and agricultural fields gives it potential to form an oasis for local people and wildlife. Four hectares of grassland, once regularly mown, has been transformed into fields of flowers, with pathways cut through to allow visitors to enjoy the feeling of being immersed in a meadow.

Five hectares of tree and shrub planting is creating woodland habitat, with shade tolerant seed mixes sown and bulbs planted to further boost floral resources. Bee banks have been made within the old bunkers to provide bare ground for insects and basking areas for reptiles. Hibernacula have also been created to cater for amphibians, reptiles and small mammals. This large, urban project will go some way to help Worcester City Council achieve the aims of their pollinator, environmental and sustainability strategies, as well as improve the wellbeing of local residents.

Spotted longhorn beetle, Perdiswell Park



## Bull Meadow

This ex-arable field, purchased by North Claines Parish Council to protect the area from development, is now a community asset, richer in nature. A large wetland complex has been created, planted with aquatic plants and providing habitat for dragonflies and other wetland species.

48 orchard trees were planted of local apple, plum, pear and damson varieties, providing fruit for the local community and wildlife. A tiny forest planted by local school children provides woodland habitat and 600m of hedgerow creates wildlife corridors across the site. A 1km accessible path was installed, providing an ideal running or walking circuit for the community.

Fruit tree, Bull Meadow



4.7  
hectares  
of orchards  
created  
or restored



Nearly  
30  
hectares  
of woodland  
planted or  
enhanced





Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust would like to thank everyone who has been involved with Natural Networks over the past seven years. Particular thanks go to our funders and partners, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council and Wyre Forest District Council.

Natural Networks will continue to provide advice and guidance through Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. If you have an outdoor space you'd like to enhance for nature, please get in touch!

Bird box, Martley Millenium Green



*Photos by: Becca Bratt, Finley Reynolds, Steve Bloomfield, Wendy Bufton.  
Front cover photos: Perdiswell Park, St Nicholas Church, Westalls Burial Ground.*

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