

Photo credit: Peregrine Falcon, James Sellen

Welcome to the autumn 2019 Natural Woking newsletter! We hope you enjoy learning about some of the natural environment initiatives and events taking place across Woking Borough.

## Greening the Grey



Woking Borough Council worked with Mobilane UK to install a living green wall of ivy screens along High Street in Woking Town Centre. Completed in May 2019, the 75m wall contains a mix of variegated ivy species for interest and colour. The ivy screens help to green the urban area which can in turn help improve air quality, by trapping and capturing pollutants, and encouraging insects and wildlife. There are also noted positive impacts to people's physical and mental health and wellbeing through greening urban spaces. Further planted walls are planned.

## Countryside Management

Woking Borough Council has committed extra funding towards countryside management. The additional £75,000 will be used for priority works to maintain and manage our natural green spaces. Initial works will include heathland management and restoration, management of new planting in Woking Park and Hoe Valley undertaken as part of the flood defence scheme; and some woodland management including urgent tree work and non-native species removal.

## Woking in Bloom 2019

The Borough's gardening champions were recognised at the annual Woking in Bloom and Allotment Awards on 25 September 2019.

The Awards are open to residents, business and schools, and, along with the Allotment Awards, there are categories to cover all aspects of gardening, from pots to plots. There is also the Best Wildlife Garden award, organised by local environmental group [Woking LA21](#) (winning entry pictured).



All winners and runners up received certificates and prizes of garden centre gift vouchers and trophies. To see a full list of winners, visit the [Woking in Bloom Awards page](#).

Woking Borough Council would like to thank everyone who took part this year. Thanks also go to the competition's sponsors - Squires Garden Centre, Serco and Lansbury Business Estate – for their continued support.

For more information about Woking in Bloom, or to register your interest in next year's competition, please

contact Woking Borough Council's Neighbourhood Manager, Andy Calfe, on 01483 743451 or email [andy.calfe@woking.gov.uk](mailto:andy.calfe@woking.gov.uk)

## Swift Town Twinning sign



The Mayor of Woking, Cllr Beryl Hunwicks, formally opened a new swift, bat and town twinning sign in Woking Town Centre on 1 August 2019. The sign provides a nesting chamber for swifts and bats and celebrates Woking's twinned towns.

The sign is made of three sections, providing nesting chambers in the upper section, a middle section featuring finger post style arms showing the way to Woking's twinned towns, all atop a beautifully specially engraved, conical stone base showing the birds' amazing annual migration, and surrounded by planting.

Designed by 51 architecture, the sign stands in Gloucester Square, between the theatre, the Civic Offices and just over the Basingstoke Canal from WWF's Living Planet Centre.

The Mayor was joined by councillors and representatives from Woking Town Twinning Association, 51 architecture, ThamesWey's [Swifts in Woking project](#), and national expert Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation to recognise the installation of the new sign.

Swifts are a bird species in sharp decline and over the past 20 years the UK's swift numbers have halved. The sign incorporates a system which will play calls to draw the swifts' attention to the boxes, and features webcams to give an insight into nest life to share pictures when new swifts have moved in.

The nesting chambers in the new sign add to those being provided elsewhere through the conservation efforts of local residents, [ThamesWey](#) in the Swifts in Woking project, New Vision Homes and Woking Shopping.

## Swifts in Woking



The Swifts in Woking project has successfully increased the number of available nesting sites across the borough for the iconic swift.

Almost 175 tailored-made nest boxes were set up and made available for these endangered birds this summer, with a staggering 105 nest boxes provided for installation on the homes of 43 engaged residents, 45 on ThamesWey owned properties and 20 swift bricks incorporated in ThamesWey developments.

Hopefully the swifts this year have prospected these new artificial nesting sites and will take up residence in the years to come, using these new homes to nest and raise their offspring.

The legacy of this project has been secured through the handing over of the Swifts in Woking project from ThamesWey to the locally active Surrey Bird Club, who will continue to log swift sightings and reports of nesting swifts. ThamesWey will continue to contribute to the project through the installation of swift bricks in suitable developments.

The swifts are now in Africa for the winter season but when they return next May, please report any sightings to Surrey Bird Club by emailing [conservation@surreybirdclub.org.uk](mailto:conservation@surreybirdclub.org.uk). You can view sightings to date on the map [here](#).

## News on Newts

The Great Crested Newt (GCN) Pilot continues to be successful. A joint project between Woking Borough Council and Natural England, it moves away from the traditional method of conserving GCN in the context of development, to take a more proactive, strategic approach. This better focuses efforts where it will most benefit the GCN, whilst also simplifying the process involved for developers. Habitat improvements are provided upfront which developers can buy into. The Council has made a 25 year plus commitment to providing and maintaining these habitats.

In April and May 2019 monitoring surveys by local volunteers, guided by the Council's ecologists ADAS, confirmed the presence of GCN populations in a number of the ponds both on and adjacent to Westfield Common. Overnight bottle traps were used for the first time, in addition to the usual torch surveys and habitat suitability index assessments. If you'd like to volunteer to help with next year's surveys, get in touch by emailing [green@woking.gov.uk](mailto:green@woking.gov.uk).

Although dry weather this summer caused water levels to fall, the new ponds created earlier this year are doing well. This autumn, the Council will be working with ADAS to review this year's survey results and plan our work programme for the year ahead.

Habitat fragmentation is a real challenge to biodiversity so connecting the Westfield GCN population to others nearby is an aim for the project.



# Peregrines



The Woking Peregrine Project is a community and Borough Council run project which supports a pair of peregrine falcons living on one of Woking's tallest office building, Export House.

The project has had another year; five young peregrines were successfully reared and fledged.

Tune into the website at [www.wokingperegrines.com](http://www.wokingperegrines.com) to see videos, view the photo gallery and watch the peregrines live next spring.

Photo credit: Peregrine nest box at Export House  
CCTV image, James Sellen

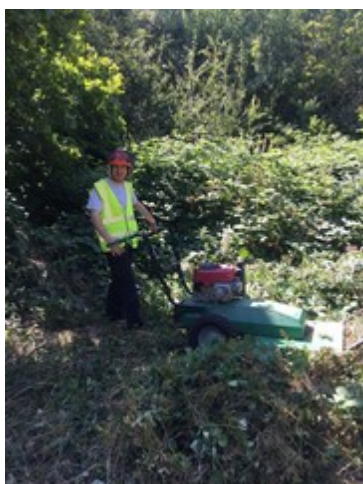
## Wild volunteering opportunities

Are you Wild about Woking? If you'd like to get involved in Woking's great outdoors and make a difference for nature, there are many opportunities in this area – you can join in some conservation on the Commons, grow wildflowers with Woking Biodiversity Project or get growing in public with Incredible Edible!

We'd be happy to put you in touch with local organisers who always welcome a helping hand. Simply email [green@woking.gov.uk](mailto:green@woking.gov.uk).

You can also find out about all kinds of other local volunteering opportunities at [www.woking.gov.uk/jobs-and-volunteering/volunteering/ways-volunteer/why-volunteer](http://www.woking.gov.uk/jobs-and-volunteering/volunteering/ways-volunteer/why-volunteer)

## In the Spotlight – Surrey Choices Growth Team



The Growth Team is a vocational project within Surrey Choices, a Local Authority Trading Company who provide a range of support services to improve the independence, confidence and life skills of people with a range of disabilities and support needs, whatever their age, in their local community.

It can be a difficult journey into employment for individuals with disabilities or support needs. As a result Surrey Choices strive to overcome employment barriers by providing support into work. The Growth Team is one of six of Surrey Choices' Vocational Projects which enables customers to prepare themselves for work, learn valuable skills and increase self-confidence.

The Growth Team has carried out Surrey Countryside Management for over twenty years, which initially involved managing public rights of way across the county for Surrey County Council's Countryside Access Team. The team has grown substantially over this time and now has a wealth of experience and skills in managing different habitats, working on a variety of projects and even building partnerships with community groups.

One project the Growth Team has been working on recently includes enhancing White Rose Lane Local Nature Reserve in Woking. The team began working with Woking Borough Council's Green Infrastructure team six years ago and through Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) funding has been improving the underused local nature reserve. The main aim of this project is to improve the biodiversity and amenity value of the site to attract more visitors, which will help to reduce pressure on the local Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).

The working partnership between the Growth Team and Woking Borough

Council has been a real success and after spending the first two years improving the site, the Growth Team now works there once a month through the summer to keep the site accessible and looking good.

Keeping invasive species at bay is an ongoing challenge, particularly the dreaded Himalayan Balsam that grows along the river and wetland areas. This has been achieved with the support of other community groups and as a result of the huge reduction of this plant, the habitat diversity has begun to improve. The newly created meadow area is a particularly popular feature and the number of compliments the team has received from visitors is very rewarding. The whole partnership has really showcased what a team of people with learning disabilities can do.

These are exciting times as there is so much opportunity out there for the Growth Team across Surrey.

The Growth Team very much looks forward to continuing the work that they do in the local area and is always keen to meet other groups that share the same interest. It is keen to be involved in other projects and would like to continue making new partnerships with other teams.

To find out more about the Surrey Choices Growth Team, visit [www.surreychoices.com](http://www.surreychoices.com) or email [info@surreychoices.com](mailto:info@surreychoices.com). Thanks to the Surrey Choices Growth Team for the images supplied.



## Upcoming events

### [Autumn Nature Walk & Talk Thames Basin Heaths Partnership](#)

11am - 1pm on Saturday 26 October 2019, Brookwood Country Park SANG.

Join the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership for a FREE autumn-themed stroll through the meadows and woodlands of Brookwood County Park.

Contact: Mike Taylor by email at [Michael.Taylor1@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Michael.Taylor1@naturalengland.org.uk)

### [Reduce, Reuse, Recycle](#)

7pm – 9pm on Thursday 14 November 2019, WWF-UK Living Planet Centre

Woking Local Action 21 is a voluntary group of individuals taking action locally on issues relating to climate change and sustainability. This year Woking Local Action 21's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is entitled 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' and will be held at the WWF-UK Living Planet Centre. Join us for an evening featuring updates on Woking Local Action 21's projects as well as speakers from Refill and Refuel, Bare + Fair, Farnham Repair Café and Joint Waste Solutions.

It's free to attend but booking is essential via Eventbrite [here](#). For more details, see [www.wokingla21.wordpress.com](http://www.wokingla21.wordpress.com).



## Tell us about your natural environment projects

If you know of some great work going on in Woking Borough to help natural habitats or to improve access for people to enjoy the great outdoors, we'd love to hear about it. You never know, we may even feature you in a future newsletter.

Contact us at [green@woking.gov.uk](mailto:green@woking.gov.uk).

## About Natural Woking

[Find out more](#) about the Council's plans for Natural Woking, including guidance on how you can make a

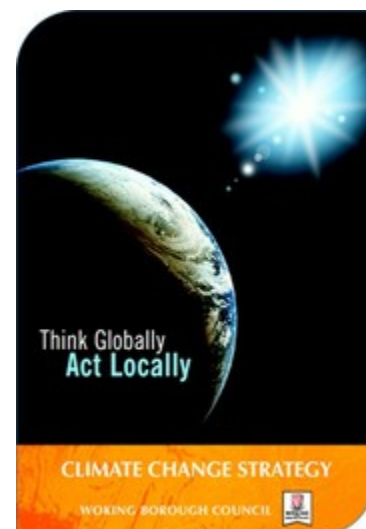
difference.

## Like the climate, we're changing...

On 25 July 2019, the Council declared a 'climate emergency'. This recognises the continued priority the Borough gives to addressing global climate change, including biodiversity and habitat losses, through strong local commitment and most importantly actions. The Council pledged to become zero carbon by 2030 across its own estate and operations.

Woking has long been committed to protecting the environment. Our first climate change strategy was adopted in 2002 (see image, right), although our efforts began much earlier in 1990. We have achieved a lot since then and much has been made possible through working together with key stakeholders, commercial partners and volunteer organisations to meet our common environmental goals.

We have developed a [Climate Change and Sustainability Timeline](#) to show key activities undertaken over the years.



[Woking 2050](#) is our current climate change strategy, adopted in 2015. This sets out a vision guiding our collective efforts to create a sustainable borough by reducing our environmental impact. The strategy is not just about carbon, it looks at our whole way of living and how it influences our environment. Balancing our environmental aspirations alongside our development and economic needs is at the heart of the Woking 2050 Strategy. As a council we have a role to bring together our combined potential to make a difference for the future.

We'd like to share news of our climate change and sustainability projects with you and so will be combining this with our regular Natural Woking updates. Watch this space for more information in the spring 2020 edition.