



The countryside charity
Sussex

Countryside Awards 2017

The winning projects and enterprises

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2017 Countryside Awards Winners

Breaky Bottom restoration project, Northease. Peter and Christine Hall winning a New Sussex Landscapes Award

Breaky Bottom is a well-known, but also well-hidden, gem of the Sussex countryside; a successful vineyard hidden in a deep coombe in the heart of the South Downs. The project under review was in two parts, one was to conserve and restore a traditional flint threshing barn in such a way that internally it could function as a key component of the wine making operation, but externally would still have all the features of an early 19th century flint agricultural structure. This has been successfully achieved. The second part was the creation of a flood defence scheme for the farmhouse that would not look like a flood defence scheme! The sensitive way this was completed and the use of appropriate materials show this was also successfully carried out.

What was special about this entry was the passion shown by Peter Hall not just in his commercial enterprise but most importantly in the wider environment of his South Downs valley, its ecology and wildlife and how these two projects were a manifestation of his enrichment of the local landscape.





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Littlehampton Rain Garden, Maltravers Way. Angela Tester, Terry Ellis and Danny Surridge winning a Making Places Design Award

Littlehampton has had recent experience of damaging flooding, but not as would at first be expected from the River Arun or the English Channel, but as Downland dip-slope runoff. Intense building development south of the A27 on the north side of the town has created an impervious urban surface preventing excess rainfall to be naturally absorbed; this has created flooding problems in the older part of town. The Rainwater Garden is a scheme to capture rainwater along a busy east-west urban highway by creating an attractive and innovative well drained garden strip, the length of the highway, which absorbs excess flow in an ingenious design.

It is a scheme which requires little in the way of expensive infrastructure and can be largely maintained by volunteers. The scheme could be readily adapted to other areas and is a low input, low cost solution to a problem which, with changing climatic conditions and increased storm events, will be ongoing in many built-up areas.



Big Parks Project, Piddinghoe Avenue, Peacehaven. Christopher Bibb and Michael Kaner winning a Making Places Design Award

The Big Parks project has used development funding from large Peacehaven housing schemes to create a new landscape on reclaimed land north of the town, land that had been in industrial use as part of the Southern Water waste water plant recently completed close by. Peacehaven has not had a good environmental history in the past, thus it was extra special to see here what could be done by imaginative thought to create a leisure space for a range of activities and age groups and interest groups.

The newly created land is on chalk rubble spoil from the tunnelling work involved in dealing with Brighton & Hove's new sewage disposal plant. Playing fields, a skate park, children's adventure playground, a modern cafe [with educational panels] sensitive parking areas and a community 'Hub' are all part of this Big Park venture. Thought has been given to future urban growth and a planting of elm trees and an orchard will shield the Big Park from a planned housing development on the north.



Oak Community Project, Durrington and Goring. Chris Hughes and Peter Whish winning an Environmental Education Award

The Oak Community project works with people who have experienced a range of challenges. Utilising the natural delights and possibilities of ancient and old established native woodlands, the team work at woodland conservation on sites in the West Worthing area at Durrington and Goring.

Much woodland has traditionally been coppiced in the past, as the processing of cutting down, but not grubbing out, native hardwoods creates long straight regrowth. This provides raw materials for a wide range of traditional industries from charcoal burning to fencing materials and tool handles. Now these practices are no longer a major part of woodland economy, much woodland has suffered without the thinning and opening up of the cover. The Oak Community team work with Community Park Rangers from Adur & Worthing Borough to improve the habitat at woodland sites; this not only benefits the species within the woods, flora and fauna, but most importantly benefits the participants who receive training in use of tools and in the results of their activities, increasing both physical and mental well-being by working in the open air on an important conservation project.





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Bridge Cottage, Uckfield. Mick Harker winning a Making Places Design Award

Bridge Cottage is the oldest secular building in Uckfield, saved from demolition in the past; it suffered greatly in Uckfield's severe flooding of 2000 owing to its location by the River Uck. The listed building was difficult to modernise for 21st century usage but a sympathetic extension has enabled access difficulties to be overcome and has also been brought into the digital era with a comprehensive cabling for digital technology, heated with a ground heat source pump.

Restored to a very high standard using traditional building techniques and materials, sheep's wool insulation and wattle and daub work, it now functions as a local hub, in use as a museum and study centre, with a café and a community garden and has recently been licensed for weddings. In a community that does not have a very visible historic fabric it serves as a reminder of Uckfield's long history of settlement, as well as exemplifying all the features of an historic Wealden hall-house, but one brought successfully into the 21st century.



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Re-creation of Salt Marsh, Rye Harbour. Dr Barry Yates, winning a New Sussex Landscapes Award

The project for the recreation of the saltmarsh at Rye Harbour is a partnership between Sussex Wildlife Trust, The Environment Agency and the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, under the management of Dr Yates. Rye Harbour Nature Reserve is one of the most important conservation areas in Britain, and one of the most popular. In 2016 it was voted Britain's favourite nature reserve, clocking up 300,000 visitors a year. In August 2011 the sea was allowed to flow back into the area, creating further saltmarsh, saline lagoons, grazing marsh and reed-bed habitats. It is now the most biodiverse reserve in Sussex with a species list exceeding 4,300, more than 200 of which are considered nationally rare. Beetles alone number 946 species. Access to this extraordinary site was always a problem but now, with the creation of the new circular path, visitors can view more than 90 species of nesting birds and an extraordinary number of rare plants and animals. There are five bird watching hides dotted around the site. The site provides sanctuary for vulnerable and rare ground nesting birds – a springboard, perhaps, for future enlargement of the site, that will one day give these species and their associated plants yet more space to colonise. And who better to do that than the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve?





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Franklins (Optimist) Beer. Andrew Cooper, Steven Mednuik and Anthony Priory winning a Rural Enterprise Award

The Optimist Beer Co - a partnership between Franklins Beer Co and the bagel makers, Bagelman - is such a lovely idea: make beer from bagels that haven't been sold. There will always be leftovers however closely you try to analyse sales, so how do you make a positive out of what can be a problem? How do you link leftover bagels with craft beer? The partnership discovered you can use waste bread to make amazing beer. We waste around 15million tonnes of food annually in the UK and much of this is bread. So this is an astonishing and imaginative enterprise to address waste reduction.

The final by-product of the beer-making, known as the "brewer's grains" (or perhaps, more accurately the "bagel grains") are then fed to cattle on the farm where the micro-brewery is based. There is a famous saying in bagel lore "The optimist sees the bagel, the pessimist sees the hole." Thus the name Optimist was born – the craft beer that is greater than the sum of its parts. This innovative local product marries two growing businesses together using a really cool solution for a 21st century problem.





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Forester's Cottage, West Dean. Ian Graham, Mandy Ross and Alex Barron winning a Making Places Design Award

This Grade 2-listed 'Arts and Crafts' cottage, originally built as the West Dean estate office and head forester's cottage, has been transformed into a well-designed conversion for student accommodation for the college. It sits in the heart of the South Downs National Park so it was always going to be tricky getting the right mix of modernisation, change and sustainability. West Dean has always been at the forefront of providing sustainable energy from the estate's woods. Next to this building is their brand new woodchip store and boiler house allowing renewable heating to flow straight to the cottage.

The cottage now has six bedrooms, all with ensuite shower or bathroom. The attention to detail on the external walls and roof-scape is commendable, especially considering the budget constraints within which the college is required to operate. A local specialist has repaired the old Crittall windows with only one iron frame needing to be re-cast. Internally, the conversion has been planned so that most of the changes are reversible, keeping the integrity of the building intact.



Weald Smokery, Flimwell. Andrew Wickham and Hilary winning a Rural Enterprise Award

This delightful shop and smokery has been going for 30 years and now they have added a café. It is a genuine delight to find such a wonderful place, on the edge of a small village, where you can revel in local produce, knowing that just out the back an artisan smoker is producing award-winning products.

The new café, with accompanying loos, is incorporated into the shop so the café-goer feels very much part of the whole enterprise. There are areas where you can view the whole smokery process. Weald Smokery has won numerous awards for their produce over the years and they employ 25 people all of whom live in or near the village. The café keep to a simple menu, use local ingredients where possible, and know where every single fish, cut of meat and round of cheese comes from. The menu changes with the seasons but, produce smoked on site, remains at the heart of it. The Kiln Room is part of the newly refurbished shop, where you can also buy the full range of Weald Smokery products.



Egrets Way, Southease Bridge. Neville Harrison and Wendy Brewer winning a Rural Enterprise Award

The Ouse Valley Cycle Network is a community project run by local people to build a safe, off road, route between Lewes and Newhaven. The pathways, which include established bridleways and quiet lanes, are built to blend with the landscape and have minimal impact on the beauty and wildlife of the Ouse valley. The project aims to create a network of safe paths in the lower Ouse Valley in the South Downs National Park (SDNP) to link Lewes Newhaven and the villages in between and includes a link to the Youth Hostel in the area. Local Parish Councils, owner consent, planning permission and funding, together with the help of the SNDP Authority and Sustrans have enabled three phases of the network to be built. Central to this network is Egret's Way, a route which runs along the west bank of the River Ouse. The Environment Agency's commitment to maintain the banks of the Ouse has made it possible to build this riverside path.

This wonderful project involves much integrated work and commitment from many dedicated local groups. There is clearly great economic, recreational and tourist potential in the creation of such a network of pathways to connect villages and coastal towns in this area.





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South Downs Yarn, Rustington. Louise Spong winning a Rural Enterprise Award

South Downs Yarn is the only company to specialise in the making of wool from the fleeces of the South Down sheep which are bred, shorn and shepherded across the South Downs.

The yarns which are named after registered flocks currently Duncton, Nepcote and Ridings are sold both in their natural colour and in hand dyed shades. The coloured dyes, which are made from plants grown in Louise's garden, are inspired by the Downland landscape. The wool, which is 100% British is spun, washed and carded in a Cornish mill using traditional methods. The mill, the Natural Fibre Company, is one of only a handful of mills worldwide that processes yarn in small quantities for smaller businesses. The wool is sold both online and at local events such as Findon Sheep Fair and the East Sussex Guild of Spinner and Dyers biennial exhibition and sale in Lewes. They make their own knitting patterns and work with independent knitwear designers across the UK and Europe.

South Downs Yarn's admirable aims are to promote and celebrate the Southdown breed and its native habitat. They want to tell the story of wool and the method of turning sheep into shawl to those who may not understand farm practice and to encourage makers and craftspeople to use sustainably produced natural materials.



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Noble and Stace Chocolatiers, Easebourne. Mike Noble winning a Rural Enterprise Award

Mike Noble is an artisan chocolatier making small batches of high quality chocolates by hand in a converted garage next to his home. This inspirational small, niche business works with a variety of local producers to incorporate their products into his own and now has seventeen core partners. These include Langham Brewery in Lodsworth, South Down Water in Southbourne, Edgcumbes Coffee Roasters in Arundel, Chilgrove Gin, Brighton Gin and various Sussex vineyards.

Mike Noble delivers by hand each day and supplies bespoke chocolates to the Spread Eagle Hotel in Midhurst, Cowdray House and Ockenden Manor in Cuckfield. He will also make to order for the local Farmers Markets. Noble and Stace were recently chosen to be one of three grand finalists in the Sussex Food and Drink Awards 2017 and shortlisted by the Sussex and Business Awards in two categories "Startup" and "Small Business". Mike Noble's aim is to expand the business with a grant to enable him to enlarge the building, create a new website and install a machine for 'tempering'. Mike Noble intends to link up with one of his partners to run courses in the art of chocolate making.





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Ostlers Field, Brede. Karen Hillhouse, Hastoe Homes Winning a Making Places Design Award

Hastoe Housing has built thirteen affordable homes on the edge of a village for local families at Ostlers Field, Brede, a small rural community where the average property costs over £300,000. The site presented a number of challenges including proof of ownership of the unregistered land, awkward terrain on a steep slope and an established badger sett. Rother District Council bought the site in 2007 but it was not until March 2015 when Hastoe Housing took over the project that it was able to be built.

Thirteen local families are now able to stay in their communities, in new houses that are well designed and not only affordable in tenure but also inexpensive to live in through their energy saving features. In line with Hastoe's 'greening' strategy all houses have photovoltaic panels and include low energy lighting, solar heating and water saving devices. Hastoe was able to make the scheme financially viable by securing grant funding of £460,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency and Rother District Council.

The site is very popular as it is close to local amenities and is easily accessed. It is set back from the road in keeping with adjacent properties is well designed with well-maintained gardens.





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SoSussex 'Schools without Walls' Caroline Fleming winning an Environmental Education Award

The So Sussex programme 'Schools without walls' managed by Caroline Fleming places the countryside right at the very centre of engaging educational experiences for children, many of who may not ordinarily be able to access it. They positively exploit the many experiences that the countryside has to offer by making learning about our landscape and environment good for both the *hearts and heads* of young people. Many of the schools they work with are in urban or suburban environments and the primary age of pupils often means they do not get the opportunity to roam the countryside even if it is nearby.

So Sussex moves children out to the countryside through activity days mountain-biking or canoeing - but they also bring the countryside in to the schools by co-creating interesting outdoor spaces for the schools such as making greenhouses from waste materials and willow shelters. The Schools without walls programme has reached many hundreds of school pupils ensuring that through positive experiences young people have an equal opportunity to interact with the rural landscape and are able to reflect on their relationship to it and impact on it.



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Arlington Bluebell Walk, Bates Green Farm. John McCutchan winning the Rural Enterprise Award and the overall Peter Brandon Award

The Bluebell Walk exemplifies how one of our most iconic natural wonders can be leveraged to generate tangible value for diverse members of a community. John M^cCutchan and his team charge visitors to gain access to their ancient English woodland that plays host to a particularly magnificent display of spring bluebells. By investing in a range of methods, accessibility has meant that tens of thousands of people have been able to engage with this fantastic countryside spectacle. The *really* clever bit is that a huge range of local charities on rotation jointly share the café and stalls that service the many visitors. 24 this year alone and over 50 in total with funds raised fast heading to the million pound mark. Thus the woodland directly provides very real benefit to a huge range of people and needs. The idea is ingenious - simple and incredibly effective and the project has sometimes been a victim of its own success with traffic and car park congestion as one of the problems faced with the onslaught of eager visitors. But improvements made to the site are far ranging and all seek to maximize the value for people whilst being sensitive to the natural environment. It is amazing to see how both the woodland and the prospects of local charities can be transformed in just 5 short weeks every year in response to our unique countryside.





Twineham Timber Ltd. Robert Worsley winning a Rural Enterprise Award

In a time when we are struggling to meet targets for carbon emission agreements and seeking methods to manage our resources sustainably, Twineham Timber has embraced these concerns and made them into opportunities that are afforded by taking an ecologically conscious approach to rural enterprise. Material extraction, transportation and processing in the process of manufacturing the 'stuff' that surrounds us all potentially pose issues to our environment. Robert and his team embrace the opportunities offered by considering how to literally 'work in the round'. What they call their 'total wood utilisation' method means that nothing is wasted in the transformation of locally grown timber into sustainable material resources. Using renewable energy from the sun to enable the chipping of waste to feed biomass boilers, the whole system of transformation is considerate of how to minimise the impact of our incessant need for materials. The facility is dependent on, and therefore considerate of, the management of the local landscape and planting strategies that are helping to nurture biodiversity and aid flood mitigation. A great correlation between our needs to utilize the landscape for the sustenance of both human and wildlife populations.





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Hendall Manor Barn. Peter and Nicola Young winning a Rural Enterprise Award

Hendall Manor Barn is an impeccably presented restoration project carefully and sympathetically nurturing what was a derelict collection of farm buildings back into a feature property and setting. The barn and adjoining buildings now provide a venue for a range of corporate and private events and functions acting as a catalyst for the local economy with the many wide-ranging list of suppliers and trades benefiting from the barn's success as an enterprise. Peter and Nicola also work enthusiastically with anyone wishing to organize a charity event or not for profit purpose at much reduced rates.

Judges were struck by the care in which the needs of a modern event space sympathetically enhanced rather than conflicted with the historic, listed building. Contrast of materials coupled with a resourceful and creative recycling of slate and stone from the site all inter-relate with stunning level of finish and appointment. Modernisation and conservation enabling the diversification of a derelict farm into a thriving business.





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Courtlea Housing Development, Petworth. David Seaman, Seaman Partnership winning a Making Places Design Award

This new housing project offers an insight into the discussions as to what constitutes the design of our 'local' building vernacular and how buildings can be 'of their place'. Whilst there will always be different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on what constitutes 'good design', this development offers a viewpoint that is undoubtedly driven by carefully reflecting the past whilst considering the needs of the day. The visual form and material language is at times an uncanny reflection of the existing, historic terrace housing *on the other side of the street*. However consideration of how to integrate the modern amenities such as the realities of multi-car ownership and communal spaces in dense housing schemes has been sympathetically considered at Courtlea. The consideration of *space* and the feeling of *place* that had been created on a condensed site impressed judges. Aside from rigorous attention to detail in the building work, we were struck by how the design of the communal areas and car park provided areas of peaceful contemplation with the need for vehicular access and parking. The development beautifully references neighbouring existing conservation buildings and actually increases our awareness and appreciation of them.





Saddlescombe Farm. Roly and Camilla Puzey winning a Rural Enterprise Award

Saddlescombe Farm sits within the stunning down-land landscape and in many ways personifies the romance, charm and majesty of the countryside of Sussex. The farm occupies an enviable location nestled in the rolling dean and presents itself as *the very picture* of rural life. However, the farm and its tenant family face the very real challenges of sustaining a modern, rural, livestock business, coupled with the role as custodians of a Site of Special Interest and rural heritage. Undeterred by these significant and sometimes competing demands, Roly presented judges with boundless enthusiasm to embrace the need to provide an income to sustain their family by means of championing traditional farming practices but also by enabling public access to them. Roly and Camilla impressed the judges with the way in which they were engrossed with the need to interrelate their lifestyle with an economic model bound to the landscape and its ecology. Roly spoke particularly passionately about this reveling in how to best form a workable model that integrates the huge complexity of concerns. Over 4000 people including guests from a local mental health charity visited last year and were invited to engage with the workings of the farm and to experience the different habitats meticulously maintained for the benefit of both livestock and nature. Their pioneering 'shepherd for a day' highlights the sophisticated way Saddlescombe Farm encourages appreciation of the traditions of down-land farming.



Thank you to our esteemed Judging panel 2017: from the left:

Lady Egremont, Chair of Judges, Petworth Estate
Nick Gant, Principal Lecturer, School of Architecture & Design,
University of Brighton
Margaret Moore, Vice President, CPRE Sussex
Dr Geoffrey Mead, Landscape Lecturer
Sir Charlie Burrell, Knepp Castle Estate (*not present in photograph*)

