

- The HE sector owns more than 11,400 hectares of land in England alone

HIGHLY COMMENDED

The University of Hertfordshire - Embracing biodiversity

As part of their policy commitments, the past year has seen the University of Hertfordshire embrace biodiversity on its College Lane campus. The aim has been to improve the habitat quality and species richness of the campus, and also to raise awareness of biodiversity and wider environmental and sustainability issues.

Biodiversity and environmental specifications have been integrated into the grounds maintenance contract. There are new specifications to increase biodiversity by using native species, and by providing food and nesting sites for wildlife. There are also requirements to make the overall grounds maintenance practice more sustainable. This includes reducing synthetic chemical use, adopting organic practices, using sustainable sources of peat and mulch, composting green waste, and recycling litter.

An initial biodiversity plan for the College Lane campus has also been prepared. As part of this, the management plan for the 10 acre Hazel Grove Woodland which lies within it has been reviewed and updated. One element was a coppicing (regularly cutting back trees), which was undertaken in 2005. Also, the 76 tonnes of wood produced from the coppicing has been used to produce charcoal - a product which is often sourced from hardwood rainforests in south-east Asia and Brazil.

A traditional mowing regime has also been adopted in an area of existing grassland. In just one year, this has allowed a wide variety of wildflower species to flourish. Smaller areas are also managed for bee orchids, and a lawn area will be converted into wildflower habitat in 2006.



Michelle Dixon

Regular monitoring of trees, plants, birds, bats, butterflies and moths shows that these measures are increasing biodiversity. Environmental interpretation is also well used in wildlife areas. This explains what is happening on the site, and raises awareness about biodiversity and the University's Environment Team.

Michelle Dixon, the University's Environmental Advisor, believes that "biodiversity is often left off the environmental management agenda at universities and colleges. By including it as a key part of our Environmental Policy, the University is demonstrating its commitment to sustainable development, creating a better place to work and study, and playing its part in improving the environment for our neighbours."

Judges' Comments on Innovation (continued)

One of the most successful student projects at Bradford was on the important topic of biodiversity, which is a neglected topic in many institutions. The University of Hertfordshire's initiatives on its College Lane campus provides a vibrant exception, with a sustained and comprehensive commitment to increasing biodiversity through both special areas such as woods and wildflower areas, and mainstream grounds management practices. Their experience also shows that the relatively modest costs can be offset by financial savings, as well as creating great intangible benefit in better relationships with neighbouring communities.