

EVALUATION

NATURE INFORMATION POINT

Naturezones Wildlife Education Trust

By Director Angela Hewitt

INTRODUCTION

On April 7th 2007 Founder Director of Naturezones Wildlife Education Trust acquired 10 acres of over improved land including a neglected woodland. This was the start of a dream becoming a reality. That 30 yr dream was to create a wildlife centre and nature reserve for the Isle of Wight community. In fact it became the biggest learning curve of her life. She embarked upon a programme of consultation with various people in the community. Land managers, foresters, other charities, the Forestry Commission and educators. The word grants was bandied around. She quickly realized that there was a need to formalize the project and so she set up the trust. On October 24th 2007 Naturezones Wildlife Education Trust was formed.

Angela says ..

Never having done anything like this before I applied for a small grant from the Tree Council, got involved with the D of E and involved the local school in the planting of what is now an established silver birch copse. Confidence gained in applying for grants I approached the Heritage Lottery Fund. I phoned their head office and explained what I wanted to do. Advice received I set about our first application. By now I had involved quite a few people in the project all eager to help. This first application was declined. However, the lottery grant manager Hannah sent me a comprehensive letter as to why I had failed and encouraged me to try again. The letter included a long list of things to do. To ensure the HLF would find it impossible to refuse the next application I did everything the HLF advised to do to the letter. It was like doing a university degree. I had policies coming out of my ears, education policy, health and safety policy, acquisitions policy, child protection policy. I asked advice from the many people I had networked with when I was an elected County Councillor 1998—2001. I also read lots of books on conservation, managing projects and volunteers and involving the community. What I didn't know wasn't worth knowing. Not quite true. I have learnt a lot more on the journey towards 2020

I also develop a long term goal. It wasn't written down but it was as clear as day in my head and I told everyone involved. It was important that they felt they were on the same journey. I formed a small informal committee and steering group which met weekly over coffee and biscuits after doing some conservation work. I enthused and encouraged them and made them feel they could achieve anything. Not so much in words but in deeds. If I can do it so can you. It is with thanks to these volunteers and of course the HLF that Naturezones is where it is today.

Heritage Lottery Fund

The HLF has guided us along the way. In fact held our hand.

In the first 6 years we did two large practical projects. Young Meadow Makers and



then Plant Native. Always being a bit ahead of our time. These two projects helped us develop the Field Study part of Naturezones which is still the major part of our aims and objectives.

Before submitting a lottery grant application my advice is this. Do your research. Don't be hasty, they aren't going away. Have a clear direction, know what you want to gain as well as achieve—don't waste the opportunity you are going to be given by being sloppy. Most of all don't be afraid to ask advice. Ask yourself "Will this plan work?" if not how can we make it work or should we alter it. And, don't be afraid to ask for the right amount of money that you need. At Naturezones we pride ourselves in getting good value for the public's money. We learnt right at the beginning that some contractors will add a bit on if they know the project is being funded by the lottery. We subsequently made it clear that our budget was very tight and there was no extra.

In that first application by the time everything was covered that was required of us we realised that in fact we had not asked for enough money so when we submitted the second application we increased the amount of grant required.

Things don't always go according to plan. When things go wrong it is easy to fret and stress over it. Don't. Speak to the lottery, tell them the problem, have a well thought out solution and put it to them. Remember they are there to help. They want you to succeed.

It is essential that the community is heavily represented in any project application. So in our first project we really need equipment that was "our" gain. The HLF gain (outcome) was that the project involved lots of workshops for schools, colleges, DofE and volunteers in need of support. Our gain in the second project "Plant native" was to strengthen relationships with communities. This was a plus for both us and HLF.

Our third project application was rejected but again strong advice was provided. HLF had begun to change the way they were doing things and we had to change with them. HLF arranged for me to meet with one of their grant managers who came down from London to talk to me.

I was excited to be meeting with an HLF manager. I felt that this meeting was going to be a major turning point. I turned up with a plan in my head. This meeting was not going to be wasted.

The Grant options had changed. I was advised to look at sustainability and funding for ourselves. That 4 hour one-to-one meeting was for us a game changer, so to speak. I could see that this was going to be a significant step towards our ultimate goal. That being to create a Wildlife Education and Field Study Centre for everyone to use. I couldn't wait to report back to everyone.

Mr HLF virtually told me how to write the application. He stressed how important outcomes were. So I did as I was told. I wrote nearly 6,000 words on outcomes. He also told me to send the application to him before I submitted it. He wanted us to succeed.

It needs to be remembered that the HLF have to report back to their own trustees, they need to show that the projects they choose to support is money well used. They demonstrate this by showing the success of OUTCOMES for each project that they fund. How, who and what have benefitted. I stress, in your application you need to elaborate on your outcomes and keep this in mind throughout the project. And they need to be genuine.

We applied for a resilience grant which included a consultant. The consultants report would be the catalyst for this last big project "Nature Information Point". This is what we called our consolidation grant. This project is about what we can do for nature and



people on a regular basis. The two have become inextricably linked. We look after nature and nature looks after us.

12 years ago health, wellbeing and nature were barely mentioned. There was the Green Gym which concentrated on physical well being. It wasn't until a few years later that it was noticed that a mental health crisis was on the way. Health used to be and still is about physical fitness but the word wellbeing was added. Nature became the focus for the less fit. Just sitting in the natural environment was a health benefit. Nature suddenly had a worth while role that the majority could relate to.

This last project "Nature Information Point" involved one expenditure that took up almost half of the grant. The Pavillion. We did a lot of research and spoke to several builders and suppliers before deciding upon who we wanted. We decided upon a contractor who was using timber from an isle of Wight Forest.

OUTCOMES FOR NATURE

This was our main objective.

We provided further and improved habitats for wild life and information about nature, wildlife and how we should help to protect it. We also provide information about Isle of Wight nature and where it can be found and leaflet display for other natural history organisations and areas to promote their projects.

Conservation

The dry stone wall (recycled broken concrete blocks in our case) is still relatively new looking but over the coming years it will become inhabited by insects, reptiles and small rodents. Plant life will also evolve. We built a double sided wall so that it had a cavity for wildlife to make a home. We have built in a couple of entrances at the base for creatures to get into the cavity, hopefully, as seen in a recent documentary about a family of stoats taking over a dry stone wall we can encourage our stoat family to do the same. This was on the way to being completed. Lock-down meant we had no volunteers to assist in the building. So the project manager built it.

The rejuvenated woodland. We have planted over 500 trees suitable for a Carr woodland. We were given these tree by the woodland trust. When we got them we thought they looked rather weak so we potted them up and grew them on into sturdier plants. We then planted them out into the woodland. Species planted are rowan, alder, willow, hazel, birch, oak, holly, crab apple and hawthorn.



QUOTE

My five-year-old son and I have been members of Naturezones for three years. It is a place we enjoy going together to recharge and safely explore this picturesque reserve. My son loves the pond dipping, we have seen tadpoles, dragonfly larva and many others. We have had some wonderful times exploring the various ponds, walking through the beautiful and ancient woodland, where we even saw a barn owl once! It is always a pleasure to visit and see all the many changes as each season passes. Angela and Laura are always so very welcome, and the café is always a joy to eat in and sample the cakes!

Carol Yates



The trees are flourishing. The 2018/19 wet winter helped them along.

We collected bluebell seeds from a nearby woodland so that we had local provenance. We will have to wait a while to assess success rate because bluebell seeds take a long time to germinate. By which time the newly planted trees will have grown and brambles will be reduced allowing more light for the bluebells to flower. We have created an outdoor interpretation panel about succession both primary and secondary

Water vole - bank habitat.

The digger cleared the large fallen trees but the constant rain prevented us from doing further work. Then we noticed signs of water voles and on three separate occasions. Volunteers actually spotted the water voles in the area. We decided to be more careful in our approach. And complete the management by hand. The disused railway bank has woodland on each side of it and several fallen trees. We have cleared the fallen trees and where light naturally floods through the woodland we have developed clearings and grassy areas we were pat way through this part of the project when we had to lock down. However, as with all conservation projects this is a long term plan as it will have to be managed on a regular basis for years to come..



Information Point

Because we are committed to education and giving the important message that nature has to be conserved, protected and enhance. It is equally important to explain why and to encourage a love and interest in the natural environment.

The Discovery Pavilion now enables us to show regular natural history films and to have a study/working area and there is a nature cabinet. We can to run nature inspired workshops and much more for instance renting the space out to the community.

Around our 10 acre nature reserve we have installed a considerable amount of interpretation. Covering basic information about species, habitat interpretation and "Helping Hands Club" panels. We have aimed to install interpretation in appropriate places i.e fly agaric interpretation is next to where they grow.

We have also produced leaflets and quiz sheets.

We think this provides a considerable amount of benefit to natural heritage by encouraging human participation and learning in a wonderful natural environment.

Interpretation

Interpretation panels: as well as being sited around the nature reserve we have installed extensive information on one wall of the pavilion as well as murals. We devised quiz sheets linked to the interpretation to encourage young visitors to slow down and read the interpretation. Children on school visits were asked at the end of their visit to complete a day diary and create a design sheet explaining something they have learnt during their visit.

When planning interpretation as well as information it is important to consider how it is going to be supported. The support was made by the volunteers which saved on costs. This saving proved to be useful because we had clearly not estimated sufficient costs as this part of the project grew. The benefit is that volunteers learnt how to make and install supports.



Things like screws, glue, postcrete, paint etc added up. It made us search harder for better prices. For example. We had designed an “abacus” style interactive interpretation. Wooden cubes threaded onto an aluminium pole that rotated. The 4 sides of each cube would have some nature information. We found a reputable company on the mainland that could make 12 cubes with holes for £900 plus £90 delivery. It seemed a lot so we searched more locally and found a local wood yard that could make them for under £200 and even better using local timber. We would strongly advise applicants pay a lot of attention to all that is required to support their interpretation. In the end we had twice as much interpretation and support by making it ourselves.



OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES.

We are the only Natural History visitor centre on the Isle of Wight. A place where communities on the Island can visit for pleasure and learning. Small community groups such as WI’s schools, after school clubs, art groups and volunteers who want to help, learn and improve their health. With the recent health crisis much of our work was curtailed. But we have introduced systems to re-open and we are offering local schools the opportunity to pay an educational visit in small bubbles

This visitor centre is of significant benefit to the Island community. Alternatively they would have to journey by ferry to the mainland. With both cost and time constraints.

We had noticed a considerable increase (60%) in families visiting Naturezones since we opened the Pavilion. TV presenter Nick Baker performed our Grand opening on the 30th June 2019 and did an amazing job networking with the guests. He created a real feel good factor and many people have returned since the opening. We invited local residents, two local schools that had been involved in the project with their families and “Friends of Naturezones” . We have now made the 30th June our regular neighbours day. All neighbours are invited to a day at Naturezones, talks and workshops and a cream tea free of charge.

Our bookings increased enormously (80%) from June 2019 to January 2020. Small groups, couples, workshops and families. We had made plans for several events in 2020 working with other communities and charities. We were heading for a bumper year sadly curtailed by Corvid-19. But when we re-open we have several hundred regulars waiting to visit and get involved in our events.

Many visitors just come to wander and relax, others come to learn, pond dipping, photography, completing quizzes or orienteering.

Because of Corvid-19 we have lost this year’s income to cover general running costs. We also needed to make some changes to protect visitors, staff and volunteers and to set up a new system of service to our visitors.

We looked at what the Arundel Wildlife and Wetland Trust were doing and their plans were much along the lines we aimed to take. It does mean that we will need to make changes to the way we run and changes to our website so that visitors can book on-line.



Prior to Covid-19 the pavilion had allowed us to run more workshops for adults. Art groups, yoga group that also use the outside setting. Anxiety café, WI ladies, ramblers groups and cycle groups. We are also a regular stop off for cycle groups from the mainland. Coming via red funnel to Cowes and Sandown.

Training Opportunities

We wanted to provide training at our local college. Unfortunately by the time we reached September, the start of the Isle of Wight’s college year , those interested had moved on. Offering training was full of good intentions. We confirmed that there were people interested in the training before we asked for it to be funded. In retrospect



timing is everything. In hind site it is best not to offer training too far in advance. Work out when courses commence and does the timing fit in with when you expect to receive the grant.

However, we have the in-house knowledge to provide training for volunteers on land management and conservation at Naturezones.

It goes without saying that Corvid-19 has had a significant impact. Like many other organisations we are having to make changes and re-asses how we work in the future.

We have also had to cancel our 2020 bookings but we are sure they will come back when it is safe to do so and 2020 will now become 2021 with plans already in place.

The Pavilion – Discovery centre

We wanted to get this major part of the project completed immediately. This was the catalyst to everything else. Also it meant we could offer indoor facilities which we were eager to do.

Frankly even we were amazed by the speed of delivery. By April the building was complete. Electrics were installed soon after. Volunteers panelled the walls.

How We Evaluate

Throughout this project we have discussed the projects progress, changes, improvements and ideas on a weekly basis with volunteers, directors (trustees) and workshop leaders. Such discussions have assisted in the smooth running of the project. We are very proud of our volunteers who have done a sterling job. They have been very hands on.



We would strongly recommend regular discussions with those directly and indirectly involved. New ideas and approaches are often expressed and should be welcomed and can be beneficial if any snags arrive. It also gives volunteers a sense of ownership and something to be proud of.



QUOTE

To whom it may concern

Having been a volunteer at Naturezones for approximately two years the granting of lottery funding has had immense benefit to me, the wider public who visit and to the founder, Mrs Hewitt. Funding to build the pavilion has seen major enhancements to the educational side of Naturezones as we all have access to resources to allow us to learn whilst carrying out our volunteering role and undertaking tasks such as building the dragonfly area, upkeep of the plant centre, path clearance and the many other different types of upkeeping work. What has been created at Naturezones is inspiring and amazing and it is such a peaceful place to enjoy volunteering work.

Without lottery funding the improvements at Naturezones would have been much slower in being achieved, or maybe not happened at all. It is great to see this facility used by people of all ages and abilities.

Also, in this changed world, significant work has been carried out in considering all users and introducing revised procedures to operate in a Covid safe way, thereby ensuring as far as possible that everybody is kept safe.

Mandy Fielding

24th September 2020

Statistics and who has benefited

Immediate Local Community (our neighbours) —they were invited to our Celebration day and they have been encouraged to visit their local Nature Reserve on a regular basis. Although we now have restrictions in place. That being a bookings only system we exercise our common sense regarding admitting local neighbours into the nature reserve. We are planning a neighbours free entry pass for next year.

Activities, Events and Workshops

We ran nature workshops every weekend throughout the year X 96
Thursday Community open days x 48

Specific workshops, Art group, creating a wildflower areas, and guided tours in meadow and woodland creation.

Easter Scurry— Find the missing Rabbit with egg prizes - 1 week

Yoga Group sessions in the meadow x 3

Wild Food Fayre, May 1st and October 4th

Halloween— find the missing pumpkin

Christmas Barn Week—winter walk with mulled apple juice and mince pies

Grand Opening 30th June

Art Workshops etc.

Drawing with Confidence 4

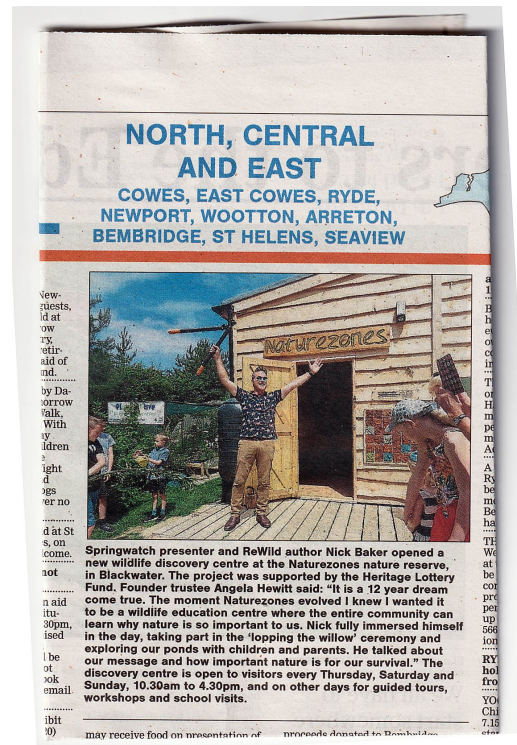
Watercolour master classes 8

Meadow Makers work shops 6

Anxiety Café visits 2

Monday Art Group 22

10 school visits



Dry stone (broken concrete) wall



One of 3 rain gardens



One of 4 mobile cube installations



We have sold 300 Day Passes and 95 Annual Friendship Passes (Singles, couple and family, but mostly couples)

Volunteers regular conservation hours 61/week x 48 wks.
We have a work book that reports weekly what volunteers have done and how many attended.

Weekly informal meeting with everyone to discuss progress, ideas, any improvements or better methods of doing things. i.e. This included much discussion on positioning of water butts in the rain garden/s volunteer professional 10 hrs/week The Project Manger also did many extra volunteer hours.

Children were given a day diary to complete at the end of their visit. This has proven massively successful for both us and the teachers. It is a clear and fun evaluation of what the children learnt during the visit. They took them away to complete in school.

Visitor numbers April 2019—Dec 2020

We have a book that records visitor numbers. In 2019 our visitor numbers almost doubled.

Adults and family weekend and Thursday visits 3,600

Children school/group visits 330 (2020 visits have been cancelled)

Marketing—5,000 primary school child received our new brochure advertising who we are and what we do. Every primary school teacher received a copy of our workshops brochure which is compliant with the curriculum.

Future Planning... We have to be flexible and able to adjust to new legislations as they occur. We assess a slow build up to the re-establishment of our regular activities and indeed some new ones.

During the first lockdown we received some extra financial help from the Heritage Lottery Emergency fund. We used this money to change the way we operate. As well as creating a wide range of new rules regarding health and safety we set up a bookings only system. Why haven't we done this before we kept asking ourselves. It made a massive difference to the way the public perceived us. We were at risk of just becoming a café stop. Now people visit for a couple of hours watch a video, bring their camera, take time discovering the interpretation. linger on one of the seats. A quietly watch nature. Our conservation work over the years has now made us a red squirrel hot spot and this as well as the pond dipping trail has become a real draw.

2020

Like everyone else we were forced to close. We applied for an heritage lottery emergency fund. This helped us to reopen with the new guidance in place. We put in a bookings only system on our web site and promoted it on various community face book pages, paid advertising,

We decided to operate for three days. There were just two of us prepared to run the sessions.

Two of the days were for over 60's only. We felt there was a strong need for the older people in our community to know that we were a safe place for them to visit. We also restricted numbers to avoid too many people arriving at the same time.



The other day we opened was on Sunday. We called it Lazy Sunday and it was for all of the family (max 6 including toddlers).

This proved to be more successful than expected
Numbers prior to second lockdown
Over 60's Tuesday and Thursday x32 sessions
Lazy Sunday x16 sessions

Small conservation organisations V The Big organisations.

COMMENT

We feel something must be said about this. It is natural human behaviour to want to be part of something big. The RSPB have over 4 million members. Most of those members will also be members of WWT, Woodland Trust and one of the Wildlife Trusts. The various prestigious reputations make these large bodies more attractive to volunteers. When someone boasts to being a volunteer for the RSPB everyone knows what it means. It doesn't sound quite so special to say they volunteer for a less well known organisation. The same with becoming a member of an organisation. This is an issue that presents itself to many small organisations including our own. Whilst last year we gained 96 new paid up members— it is nowhere near the 350 that we need to cover our basic running costs (although this was set to increase prior to Covid-19)

It is also easy for these big organisations to obtain grants. They have the money to fund project applications and because they are big they win big. They also have huge marketing budgets.

However, the voice of these organisations often become formulated and less radical where as new up and coming



NATUREZONES
Wildlife & Field Study Centre



Giving nature a helping hand

**Nature Reserve
 and
 Discovery Centre**

WWW.naturezones.org.uk

Supported by
 The National Lottery
 through the Heritage Lottery Fund