



WARWICKSHIRE
Country Parks

Annual Review 2024





Introduction

I have great pleasure in presenting the 2024 Annual Review of Warwickshire's Country Parks Service. The importance of our green spaces has become increasingly apparent over recent years, with more and more people appreciating the benefits they bring to their health and wellbeing. We are proud to welcome visitors from across Warwickshire and beyond our borders, and we strive each year to improve and develop our offer to cater to the educational and wellbeing needs of all our visitors, young and old.

Managing our sites to improve biodiversity and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change is also at the forefront of our efforts, and this report showcases the fantastic work achieved in these areas. This includes the identification of some exciting new species; a good indicator that our conservation endeavours are working.

From school groups and family holiday activities to wellbeing walks, fishing, and hosting corporate volunteering groups, 2024 has been another busy year for country parks. We have welcomed some fantastic new partners to our sites, including Farmers Fayre Café at Ryton Pools and Pit Stop Coffee Shop at Pooley Country Park, both of whom have transformed the spaces into vibrant hubs with fantastic food and drink offers for our visitors. We also have a new cycle hire at Stratford Greenway and have installed our first roof-mounted solar panels at Ryton Pools, improving our contribution to our environmental objectives and providing cleaner, greener energy.

I hope you enjoy reading about our country parks successes and look forward to welcoming you to our sites over the coming year.

Cllr Heather Timms
Portfolio Holder for Climate, Culture and Environment at Warwickshire County Council.



Cllr Timms celebrates Pit Stop Coffee Shop launch



There are
around a million visits to
our green spaces
each year.

Warwickshire Country Parks Service operates five country parks, three greenways and two nature reserves, covering over 1,300 acres of the county's finest and varied countryside.

We welcome around a million visits to our well-managed green spaces each year, which include areas of woodland, wetland, grassland, recreation areas, footpaths and built facilities. During 2023-2024, we continued to build upon our varied programme of events and activities for people across the community, undertook numerous conservation projects to protect wildlife and boost biodiversity, and introduced some exciting new commercial ventures at our parks.



Our GREEN SPACES

Our green spaces provide a haven for Warwickshire's residents, businesses, and visitors, as well as for the abundant wildlife that they attract and nurture.

Covering over **600 acres**, Kingsbury Water Park is our largest and most popular site and provides the widest range of concessionary offers and clubs. Our staff headquarters is based at Kingsbury, with offices for our southern sites at Ryton Pools, our second most popular site.

1. Pooley Country Park
2. Kingsbury Water Park
3. Hartshill Hayes Country Park
4. Ryton Pools Country Park
5. Burton Dassett Hills Country Park
6. Offchurch Greenway
7. Kenilworth Greenway
8. Stratford Greenway
9. Ufton Fields Nature Reserve
10. Stockton Cutting

Our PRIORITIES

The Warwickshire Country Parks Service is ideally positioned to help deliver Warwickshire County Council's Council Plan 2022-2027 priorities.

This review highlights and celebrates some of our achievements, and outlines our intentions for continuing and improving our service offer and successes.

The priorities we contribute to most include:



Create vibrant places with **SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES**



Deliver our Child Friendly Warwickshire strategy - **HAPPY, HEALTHY, SAFE CHILDREN**



Tackle climate change, promote biodiversity and deliver on our **COMMITMENT TO NET ZERO**



Through education, **IMPROVE LIFE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN**, young people and those with special educational needs and disabilities



SUPPORT PEOPLE TO LIVE HEALTHY, HAPPY AND INDEPENDENT LIVES and work with partners to reduce health inequalities

Our PEOPLE



We have a **40-strong team** which includes:

Senior Rangers, Countryside Rangers & Assistant Rangers – the friendly faces of our Country Parks, the ranger teams (you'll spot them in green!) work hard to welcome visitors and to manage and maintain our sites.

Specialist Habitat Rangers – Woodlands, Wetlands and Grasslands – these experts focus on our unique habitats, ensuring we create and carefully manage biodiverse grasslands, hedgerows, trees, lakes, ponds, and rivers, whilst also generating income to support the running of the service.

Education, Communities & Health Rangers and Assistant ECH Ranger – this team develops and delivers our outdoor education sessions for school groups and focuses on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of visitors to our green spaces.

All the above are supported by:

Visitor Assistants – they provide a warm welcome at our visitor centres at Kingsbury and Ryton which are open to the public on weekends, bank holidays and throughout school holidays.

Woodworkers – they make the benches, picnic tables and signs, and just about anything else the team needs from wood!

Caretakers – help with opening and locking and keeping our facilities clean and welcoming.

Volunteers – they help us maintain our sites, without whom we would struggle!

The team also includes officers who deliver marketing and communications, commercial and operational management and back-of-house support.





Our VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play a vital role in maintaining our green spaces. On both an individual and corporate basis, they carry out a multitude of tasks across the sites, from habitat management to equipment installation.

Over the past year, we've expanded our volunteer opportunities, including a new team at Ufton Fields Nature Reserve. This team has been restoring overgrown areas and carrying out essential conservation work on this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

We've also seen an increase in corporate volunteer days at Kingsbury Water Park, Hartshill Hayes, Ryton Pools, and Burton Dassett Hills. Led by rangers, these groups have completed tasks such as pathway repairs, managing invasive species, fishery improvements, and bridge construction.

Volunteering offers Warwickshire residents the chance to develop skills, boost their physical and mental wellbeing, and contribute to the enhancement of valuable community assets.



What's NEXT?

Continue to build on our corporate volunteering offer, giving local businesses the opportunity to support with a wide range of maintenance and conservation tasks.

Celebrate and thank our volunteers through our marketing channels and through staff-led initiatives, highlighting the importance of their contribution and encouraging further recruitment.

Our VISITORS

During 2023/2024, we welcomed just under a million visitors. People came from Warwickshire, the West Midlands and beyond to enjoy the rich opportunities for leisure, fitness, education and so much more. Our parks make a valuable contribution to the local visitor economy, and we are proud of their history and heritage, both of which help to tell the Warwickshire story to the many tourists that visit these green spaces.

Our visitors include people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds who use the parks in many ways: dog walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, runners, wheelchair users, school children, toddlers, families, corporate groups, volunteers, eventgoers, anglers, nature enthusiasts and individuals who just want some peace and quiet in the beautiful surroundings of a country park!

Income generated from parking charges is vital to managing and maintaining the parks and service.

What's NEXT?

Use customer surveys to help inform how well we are doing, in terms of customer service, quality of facilities and cleanliness. Continue to maintain a high standard and make improvements so that all our visitors feel welcome and comfortable at our sites.



1047
VOLUNTEERS
12,043
HOURS OF
VOLUNTEER
WORK!



Outdoor Education

Country Parks are excellent educational spaces and can provide critical support to achieving the objectives laid out in Warwickshire County Council's Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy.

During 2023-2024, 3,504 primary-aged school children participated in our engaging outdoor learning sessions. We also hosted a family fun morning for 350 people from Wembrook Primary School at Hartshill Hayes Country Park, with a variety of ranger-led activities followed by a campfire cooked jacket potatoes.

We continued to build on our relationship with home educators, offering more outdoor learning sessions and increasing our links within the community.

Outdoor learning can have a highly beneficial impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, as well as helping them to learn new skills, build confidence, connect with nature and learn about environmentalism and sustainability.

Events and Activities

During 2023-2024, we have enjoyed welcoming visitors to a wide range of activities and have been developing our events programme to offer a broader variety of experiences to people of all ages. Events and activities we have delivered this year include:

- **Kingsbury Dining Club** – we welcomed over 3,000 visitors to the Kingsbury Dining Club in Summer 2023. The multi award-winning events and venue operator, known famously for the Digbeth Dining Club, has turned unique venues across the Midlands into vibrant street-food destinations.
- **Kingsbury Water Park food festival** – 50 food and drinks stalls and a stage with live acts performing throughout the day, we welcomed over 3,000 visitors to the new Kingsbury Food Festival. This was a free to attend event for all Country Park visitors.
- **Children's Birthday Parties** – 922 children attended our popular weekend birthday parties.
- **School Holiday Events** – Over 2,500 children came to enjoy a ranger-led holiday activity.

What's NEXT?

Continue to develop our outdoor education package, ensuring different options to suit a variety of needs and age groups are available to schools.

Provide regular sessions for families who home educate.

Health and Wellbeing

As part of our events and activities program, we have been dedicated to enhancing our offerings to specifically support the mental health and wellbeing of our visitors. In recent years, the significance of well-managed, safe, and accessible green spaces in promoting public wellbeing has been increasingly recognised.

Some of the activities we delivered in 2023/2024 in this area include:

- **Wellbeing Wednesday Walks** – these free-to-join ranger-guided walks provide visitors with an opportunity to immerse themselves in nature and leave behind the pressures of day-to-day life. We have welcomed people of all ages to enjoy a relaxing stroll with company and the opportunity to meet new people.
- **Toddler Trundles** – weekly Wednesday morning sessions at Ryton Pools for pre-schoolers with parents and carers, focusing on different educational and engaging themes each week. These sessions often provide a welcome respite for grown-ups trying to keep their little ones entertained.
- **Active Travel** – whilst we are reliant on income from car parking charges, we welcome and encourage people to walk and cycle to our sites. Most of our extensive network of paths is suitable for cycling, running, walking, wheelchairs, mobility scooters and buggies. We have bike hire concessions at several sites and also host weekly Park Runs at Kingsbury. In 2024, The Stratford Greenway was resurfaced, further enhancing accessibility.
- **Connecting with Nature** – launched in 2024, this new event series offers regular activities for all ages designed to help people learn new skills and connect with the natural world.

What's NEXT?

We are looking at new ways to attract those that would benefit most from spending time in our green spaces by engaging with partners, including public health.

We will grow our events programme, putting wellbeing at the forefront of our plans and ensuring our offer is accessible to all demographics.

During 2023/2024 we:

SOLD
1,808 DAY FISHING TICKETS

and
162 ANNUAL PERMITS AT KINGSBURY WATER PARK

INTRODUCED
79 CARP WEIGHING APPROX. **3-16LB** EACH

TO BOOST FISH STOCKS IN MULTIPLE LAKES

WELCOMED OVER
470 PARTICIPANTS TO FISHING COMPETITIONS AT KINGSBURY WATER PARK

OBTAINED
£5000 IN FUNDING FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY'S ANGLING IMPROVEMENT FUND

OPENED THE RIVER TAME AT KINGSBURY TO ANGLERS FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, MAKING OUR FISHERY OFFER EVEN MORE DIVERSE



Angling

Our waters provide rich opportunities for angling at both Kingsbury Water Park, which we run in-house, and Ryton Pools, organised in partnership with the Leamington Angling Association. We offer day tickets and annual fishing permits, as well as the chance for families to fish for the first time via our partnership work with the Angling Trust's 'Get Fishing' award.

We are working to create a balanced, natural, and sustainable fishery at Kingsbury Water Park, which brings huge benefits to native biodiversity, as well as to the wellbeing of anglers of all ages who take the opportunity to be socially and physically active outdoors, learn new skills, or simply to unwind in blue-green spaces. The biggest fish we know of caught in 2023/24 were a **38lb 10oz (17.5kg) Carp** from Canal Pool and a **37lb 8oz (17kg)** from Broomey Croft, both caught by our night fishing permit holders.

What's NEXT?

Complete maintenance and conservation projects including the installation of coir rolls around lake edges to support aquatic plant growth and improve water quality.

Review and expand our fishery offer, including a new online booking system to make it easier to purchase tickets and book pegs.

Our ENVIRONMENT

Warwickshire's Country Parks and Greenways provide a natural habitat for thousands of species of plants, animals, and fungi. A wealth of conservation projects from across our sites continue to boost biodiversity and protect and promote wildlife, while educational activities and communications raise awareness within the wider community.

In 2024, we launched the first Warwickshire Country Parks Photography Competition, encouraging park visitors to share their favourite images capturing nature and wildlife across our sites. The winning photos feature on our new 2025 Country Parks Calendar, which was sold in our visitor centres.

Key highlights from 2023/2024 include:

Ufton Fields Nature Reserve:

- Identified populations of all **15 Warwickshire bumblebee species**, including three rare British priority species.
 - Priority Bumblebee species: *Bombus ruderatus*, *Bombus ruderarius*, and *Bombus humilis*.
- Commissioned Entomologist Steven Falk to survey invertebrates.
 - **55 species** with national conservation statuses.
- Began work on restoring vital limestone grassland, supporting a rich array of rare species.

Kenilworth Greenway:

- **Planted 500 native trees**, creating a diverse hedgerow habitat for wildlife.

Hartshill Hayes Country Park:

- A slow worm was spotted. Actually a type of legless lizard, this snake-like reptile is protected in the UK and a Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.

Kingsbury Water Park:

- *Bee Orchid*, *Bittern*, and *Sand Martins* recorded.
- **Installed 240m of coir rolls** around three lakes, enhancing bankside habitat and water quality.

What's NEXT?

Look at further Biodiversity Net Gain potential and Countryside Stewardship Schemes to ensure all our sites are managed effectively.

Additional survey work to allow for meaningful and accurate practical management to be implemented.

Work with partners to identify further funding streams for habitat work.



Did you KNOW?

AT RYTON POOLS, **14** NEW BEE SPECIES



WERE FOUND BRINGING THE SITE TOTAL TO

96

RYTON POOLS IS THE BEST SITE IN WARWICKSHIRE FOR SPIDERS



2ND PLACE UFTON FIELDS

3RD PLACE POOLEY COUNTRY PARK

RYTON POOLS, RECORDED

51,868

MOTHS OF

650

SPECIES IN 2023, THE BEST YEAR ON RECORD



Pooley Country Park

- Completed woodland management projects including 'halo thinning', where Silver Birch are thinned to create more space for the Great English Oak.

Ryton Pools Country Park:

- Completed the second phase of the soil inversion project on Pagets Bank at Ryton Pools Country Park, turning over soil to expose the old quarry seedbank and restore unique flora. Three new plant species were recorded from last year's experimental plot, with hopes for more from the new plot.
- Created a new scrape pool and **planted 2,000 native trees** over the winter.
- **Installed 135m of coir rolls** to enhance waterside vegetation alongside Feeder Pool.
- Biodiversity recording projects took place, supported by university placement student Abi.

UFTON FIELDS NATURE RESERVE **2665** INVERTEBRATES OF **951** SPECIES RECORDED.

KINGSBURY WATER PARK **SPINED LOACH AND PREDATORY WATER FLEA POLYPHEMUS PEDICULUS** FOUND.

RYTON POOLS SITELIST STOOD AT **2733** SPECIES IN MARCH 2024. **361** NEW SINCE MARCH 2023.

Our COMMERCIAL SUCCESSES

We have worked hard over the past year to build our commercial partnerships; to enhance the visitor experience and to generate vital income to make our country parks and the service we offer the best they can be.

Our parks and greenways host a wide range of concessionary businesses, including various food and drinks caterers, ice cream vans, bicycle hire, and 'pay to play' bouncy castle and trampolines. We have several leases including café businesses at Ryton Pools, Kingsbury Water Park, Pooley Country Park and Stratford Greenway, The Camping and Caravanning Club, Tamworth Sailing Club and Echills Wood Railway at Kingsbury, as well as several livestock graziers alongside other clubs and societies.

In March 2024, we were joined at Ryton Pools Country Park by the hugely successful and well-renowned local business, Farmers Fayre, who became our new café operator. The café has been transformed into a more inviting and welcoming space, both indoors and out, and offers quality locally produced food and drink and excellent customer service. We have seen a **26% increase** in visitor numbers at Ryton Pools since the café started operating.

The Pit Stop Café opened its doors at Pooley Country Park in summer 2024, quickly becoming a popular family hub for local people in North Warwickshire. The family-run business chose the name as a homage to the rich mining history of the site, with the café further preserving a sense of community and heritage by proudly featuring donated mining artefacts. Since opening, **visitor numbers have increased at Pooley by a staggering 50%.**





What's NEXT?

Further enhance our concessions and commercial opportunities, bringing the combined benefits of providing opportunities for local businesses to grow while drawing in additional visitors by offering vibrant attractions within our parks.

We also welcomed a new bike hire business, Mercia Cycles, at Stratford Greenway, offering a variety of bikes and carts to enable visitors to explore the greenway and the local area.

We installed our first ever roof-mounted solar panels at Ryton Pools, on top of the café and toilet block. The thirty Photovoltaic (PV) modules are expected to fulfil 20% of the park's energy needs and save around 2.63 tonnes of CO2 emissions each year. This project is supporting the council's ambition to build a sustainable Warwickshire and to meet the target of being a net zero organisation by 2030.

These activities bring in vital revenue to help sustain and develop the Country Parks service, as well as contributing to supporting the local economy and our objectives around health and wellbeing and climate change.



Our PARTNERS

External Partnerships

The Country Parks service has strong links with a wide range of partner organisations, from district, borough, town and parish councils to wildlife organisations, community groups and hobby and interest bodies. During 2023/2024, we:

- Hosted the Midlands 'Spring into Fishing' event with the Angling Trust, teaching new anglers safe, sustainable fishing.
- Commissioned Entomologist Steven Falk to complete survey work at Ufton Fields Nature Reserve (SSSI) with voluntary support from Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire and Entomologist Richard Wright.
 - Volunteers from Butterfly Conservation also helped launch "Let's Create Wild Spaces" projects at Ryton Pools, with 19 mini projects supporting specific moth and butterfly species.
- Collaborated with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and RSPB on Willow Tit conservation training at RSPB Middleton Lakes.
- Friends of Kingsbury Water Park sold 4,002 bags of duck food, funding park improvements.
- BioBase (water sonar) surveys conducted at Kingsbury Water Park by the Environment Agency informed effective fishery management.
- Supported the Local Nature Partnership with Warwickshire's Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Worked with Leamington Angling Association on Young Anglers Sessions at Ryton Pools.
- Delivered biodiversity projects at Ryton Pools with funding from Highways England and Dunsmore Living Landscape, including wetland creation, coir rolls, and soil restoration.





Internal Partnerships

We work closely with colleagues across Warwickshire County Council to maintain, develop and deliver our sites and services. We have been strengthening some of these important relationships throughout 2023/2024 and will continue to build on them to ensure that our parks deliver the Council's key objectives in a coordinated and efficient manner.

Some of the teams we have been working with include Ecology, Historic Environment and Landscape, Forestry, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS), Public Health, Education, Adult Social Care, Libraries and Heritage, Transport Planning, Finance, Legal, Property (including Warwickshire Property and Development Group), Health & Safety, Economy & Skills, County Highways, Parking Management, Trading Standards, and Community Safety, amongst others.

- We partnered closely with WFRS on various training and safety initiatives, including a two-day search and rescue training at Kingsbury Water Park, water safety training for the Country Parks team, and training exercises at Ryton Pools after WFRS used their equipment to drain our flooded wetland scrape.
- We collaborated with Public Health to incorporate health considerations across all policies, building a partnership focused on maximising the health benefits of green spaces.

What's NEXT?

Build and develop our existing partnerships and identify new partner opportunities to help us deliver our priorities around communities, education, health and climate change.

Our COMMUNICATIONS

Following a successful refresh of our Warwickshire Country Parks branding, we continued to use a range of methods of communication to reach and engage with our visitors.

The Country Parks website received over **312,233** unique page views in 2023/2024. We launched the first Country Parks newsletter in July 2023, sending a monthly update to subscribers sharing the latest happenings at the parks, including conservation projects, maintenance, and upcoming events.

The service operates some of WCC's most followed and engaged-with social media channels, providing the perfect medium for sharing messages relating to health and wellbeing, climate change, biodiversity, and education and skills, all whilst keeping visitors and Warwickshire residents up to date with activities, events and news from each of the sites.

We continued to enhance our media presence with coverage across regional TV and radio, alongside significant attention from local and countywide press. We issued news stories celebrating and highlighting various activities and achievements within our country parks, including the discovery of rare species, engaging school holiday activities, and public safety messaging. This robust media engagement has played a crucial role in driving public awareness and participation.

In 2024, we launched the first Warwickshire Country Parks Photography Competition, encouraging park visitors to share their favourite images capturing nature and wildlife across our sites. The winning photos feature on our new 2025 Country Parks Calendar, which was sold in our visitor centres.



Hebridean Sheep at Ryton Pools feature on BBC Countryfile as part of a segment on biodiversity offsetting



48,927
FACEBOOK
PAGE FANS

1.8m
FACEBOOK POST
IMPRESSIONS

8m
PAGE & PROFILE
IMPRESSIONS

3.1%
POST ENGAGEMENT RATE

Contacts



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The Kenilworth Greenway

www.facebook.com/KenilworthGreenway

The Stratford Greenway

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Kingsbury Water Park Fisheries

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