

Case study



Cortis Avenue Wildlife Garden Worthing BN14 7BG

Overview

Land Owners: Worthing Homes

Project Management: Hillie Cook (Chair) &
Nathalie Hadjifotiou (Secretary)

Type: Wildlife Garden

Established: 2010

Key features

Habitats designed for wildlife

Rainwater harvesting and management

Eco-toilet

Composting and Hot Bin

Community orchard & Beehive

Disabled trail

Introduction and approach

The site was an open access grass playing field from the 1920's behind newly built Council houses. By 2000 the badly fly-tipped site was closed by Worthing Homes. In 2010 residents, with Transition Town Worthing, supported by Worthing Homes, started turning the site into a secure wildlife garden. Volunteers removed 20 skips of rubbish, installed a donated shed as an office, acquired a metal tool store, and started planting to turn the grass field into a range of habitats for wildlife.

Now, fifteen years on, there are 126 species of trees, shrubs and flowering plants, and two ponds. The garden attracts insects, birds and mini-beasts. It offers a calm oasis in the heart of Broadwater for visitors and volunteers, and a learning space for children and adults interested in the natural world.

We're open 10am - 12 noon Wednesday, Friday and 2nd/4th Saturday of month. We regularly post our activities, and nature notes



on Facebook - just Google Cortis Avenue Wildlife Garden.

Habitats Designed for Wildlife

The soil is clay with a hard flint layer 4 - 6 inches below the surface - dry 'concrete' in summer, wet and compacted in winter. Early on the focus was to plant trees and shrubs to create hedgerows for cover. Now 10-15 feet high each hedgerow is a different mix - shady border, edible hedgerow, damp border, sunny hedgerow.

Some wildflowers arrive naturally, others chosen that are good for pollinators from early March to late November - to attract Bees, Butterflies (15 species) and other insects. Mostly we use UK native plants. A few non-native species help extend the season, because they are beneficial for pollinators, or more tolerant of drought. As an experiment, we're creating a dry garden based on ideas tried at the Knepp Wildflower Garden.

Our ponds attract wildlife and children - tadpole season a particular favourite. We grow soft fruit and a few vegetables, enjoyed by visiting children. Thanks to volunteer Merry, we completed a 2-year survey of plant species in the garden, recording when they flower - for a copy email: cortisavewildlife@gmail.com.



Rainwater Harvesting and Management

We have no connection to mains water, so rainwater collection is critical. We have 6 water butts under the office roof and decant winter rain into wheelie-bins to maximise storage. Gifted a huge water tank, we installed a rain collection roof over the metal tool store, doubling our storage capacity. This water tops up the ponds in summer. The toilet hut added a further roof for water collection.

Eco Toilet

Always part of the original plan for the garden, for which planning permission had been granted, in 2019 we installed a composting toilet. Much research to find the right model for our site. A hole in the ground system was not very suitable - difficult to either empty or move the toilet as it became full.

As our usage was likely to be light to moderate, we opted for a urine-separating toilet. As long as pee and faeces don't mix, and faeces stay dry, there is no smell. Details of how it works will be explained to visitors. The toilet is a much-appreciated facility.

Composting and Hot Bin

During 2025 we replaced the original pallet-built compost bins. We separate our prunings - into dry twigs and branches for dead hedges, nettles to make fertiliser, bindweed and other nasties not wanted in the compost we spread along the fences, and the remaining clippings go for composting. In 2017 we were gifted a large Hot Bin by West Sussex County Council as part of an EU funded project. This takes all forms of food waste brought by volunteers who don't have facilities at home.

Community Orchard and Beehive

Early in the project, volunteers planted six Sussex Heritage Apple trees, sourced through Brighton Permaculture Trust. As well as conserving these old species, we have learnt about winter and summer pruning. The trees have produced fruit for the last 7 years - this year was a particularly bumper crop.

April 2019, our Beehive arrived, bringing Rachel as our skilled beekeeper and volunteer. It's a learning journey - the occasional swarm, death of the hive one very wet winter, the arrival of a new Queen by post, and lots of honey - awarded highly commended at the 2025 Findon Sheep Fair. The bees help to pollinate our apples and other plants, and visitors enjoy finding out about life inside a beehive. Depending on the weather, there may be a chance to see the bees working in the Observation hive.



Disability Access Path

Most of our paths are grassy, narrow and uneven. A challenge - how to make the site accessible to wheelchairs and mobility scooters without losing the wildlife ambience? Hard landscaping too unsympathetic, too expensive, no electricity on site for equipment, and relying on unsustainable materials. Answer - to lay 276 recycled plastic grass-grids from the front gate across the garden to the pond.

A 9-month project, finished in April 2025, coming in under budget! Our volunteer Wayne project-managed, removed turf, levelled and

laid grids, other volunteers moved sand and soil, and sifted the soil for reuse. Now reseeded with grass, the path is a firm level green route for wheelchair users to visit the pond and see across the garden.

Lessons learned

Take care not to plant trees too close to others - they get bigger! Don't give up when plants die due to drought - learn from other projects about species suitable for a resilient dry garden and start again. Don't panic if the bees swarm - they may fly off.

Nurture our volunteers and recruit some more - we're getting older and volunteers are essential to the future of the garden. Keep encouraging visitors - we have childminders and their tiny tots, home-schoolers, wellbeing groups - and special events by request.

Professionals/materials

Wildflower seeds & plug plants:

Naturescape www.naturescape.co.uk

Eco-loo:

There are a number of suppliers for urine-separating toilets: see online

Bespoke Toilet Hut:

Skidders Sheds (Findon) www.skidders-sheds.com

Recycled plastic grass grids:

A number of suppliers - we used IBRAN www.ibran.com

Thermal lining and curtain material -