

# Thetford station volunteers scoop environmental 'Thetford In Bloom' award

September 7, 2022



A community project to create a wildlife refuge on a rail station platform has won an award.

The 'Friends of Thetford Station' won 'Best Environmental Project' at Thetford Town Council's Thetford In Bloom competition for the wildlife garden they have created alongside the platform at Thetford station, rainwater collection and for their efforts to protect the town's swifts and bats from habitat loss by installing nesting boxes on the old station building.

The 'Friends of Thetford Station' are part of **Greater Anglia**'s volunteer Station Adoption initiative which sees local people getting involved at their local station for the benefit of the community.

Over the years they have transformed the platform by developing an extensive and attractive wildlife friendly garden and a fernery in the old customer toilet facilities.

Recently, they received a grant and planning permission from Breckland Council to fund six specially-designed swift boxes, and worked with **Network Rail** to install them at the top of the Victorian station building.

Swift and bat populations have severely declined in numbers over the last 25 years, due to habitat loss and swifts are now considered highly vulnerable.

The group installed six 'day and night' boxes which are designed to house swifts during the summer months and bats all year round. Each box has a nesting chamber for a pair of swifts and a recess in the rear panel where bats can roost.

Alongside the boxes they also installed a solar-powered swift call emitting device to improve the chances of the boxes being found and used. As swifts are loyal to their nesting sites, the group's long-term goal is to establish a swift colony.

Lead volunteer, Fiona Rhind, said, "We recently became a Wildlife Friendly accredited station for the work we have done on the platforms, and we want to continually do more to show just what can be achieved in terms of greater biodiversity in an urban environment.

"At Thetford station we've planted native hedges, established a wildflower area and installed 15 bird boxes – which we were delighted to see become home to blackbird and robin chicks this year.

"It's wonderful that we can now provide a refuge for swifts and bats as well – as our native species need all the help they can get. We're really grateful to Breckland Council, Greater Anglia and Network Rail for supporting us in our aims to do everything we can to support our local wildlife and we're delighted to have been recognised for this work with a Thetford In Bloom award."

Councillor Terry Jermy, Chairman, Thetford Town Council Amenities Committee, said, "We are delighted to see the return of the Thetford In Bloom awards and in particular, pleased to see the addition of two new categories – Environmental Project of the Year and Environmental Champion of the Year.

"The judges were very pleased to award first place to the Friends of Thetford Station in the Environmental Project category in recognition for their brilliant work locally.

"Judges noted the maintenance of the flower beds in the vicinity of the station that have been well looked after by the volunteers and provide an important food source for bees and other pollinators. The recently added swift boxes and facilities for rainwater collection were also appreciated by the judges."

Thetford station recently received a 'Wildlife Friendly' accreditation from Greater Anglia and Norfolk Wildlife Trust to formally recognise the achievements of its team of volunteer 'station adopters' to create a wildlife haven at the station.

Greater Anglia's Customer and Community Engagement Manager, Alan Neville, said, "I'd like to thank the volunteers at Thetford for the incredible work they are doing to support biodiversity locally and congratulate them on this well-deserved recognition.

"The railway is increasingly recognised as an important corridor for wildlife and thanks to initiatives like this, stations are becoming a vital part of that corridor which helps wildlife to move around the landscape and become more resilient to the effects of climate change and habitat loss."

Rail stations across East Anglia are increasingly becoming havens for local wildlife thanks to the efforts of volunteers who last year transformed over 6,800 square metres of railway land into thriving wildlife gardens.

In a recent survey, Greater Anglia station adopters reported a wide range of creatures visiting their stations including many different types of butterflies as well as bees, slow worms, bats, foxes, deer and many varieties of birds, recording more than 200 different species.

Greater Anglia has pledged this land to WildEast, a nature recovery movement which aims to restore 20% of East Anglia back to nature by 2050 and has joined the rest of the rail industry in pledging to make stations across Britain more sustainable.

*Photo credit: Greater Anglia*