



Respecting the past, shaping the future

Press release from
Suffolk Preservation Society
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Award winners announced

The outstanding contribution which some of Suffolk's most exciting projects have made to the environment has been recognised at a prestigious awards ceremony designed to showcase the very best which the county has to offer.

Suffolk Preservation Society presented its coveted Awards for a Better Environment during a ceremony at Haughley Park Barn on Thursday (5 March).

Launched last year, the awards celebrate projects which make an outstanding contribution to the county's environment and sustainability. Entries were shortlisted by a panel of independent judges, with the winners each receiving £2,500.

During the ceremony, the River Rat Meadows community wildlife project at the Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket, was handed the EADT prize for exemplary work to manage, protect or enhance the countryside or coastline.

Elsewhere, the National Trust's restoration project at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds won the Duke of Grafton Prize for exemplary work to protect or enhance the historic built heritage.

Richard Ward, society director, said: "These awards are designed to celebrate those outstanding projects which have made a huge difference to the special environment we enjoy here in Suffolk.

"The entries we received show what can be achieved when an holistic approach is used to develop schemes with care, sensitivity and imagination. We are delighted to be able to recognise the significant contribution these projects have made to preserving and enhancing our environment and heritage."

In Stowmarket, the River Rat project has seen 35 acres of wetland around the River Rattlesden cleared, replanted and opened up to give people access to a range of important wildlife habitats.

Led by staff from the Museum of East Anglian Life, the two-year community project saw volunteers, day release prisoners and people from vulnerable groups work together to manage the landscape organically.

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As well as improving the environment, the scheme has shown museum visitors how the countryside shaped the social and economic history of the area, which has a strong basket-making past because of the osier beds which ran alongside the river.

“The River Rat project is an excellent example of how organisations can work with the community to make a major contribution to managing Suffolk’s precious landscape and countryside for everyone to enjoy,” said Mr Ward.

“As well as preserving a lot of important wildlife habitats, the scheme has also helped us learn more about the area’s history by drawing a link between the osier beds and Stowmarket’s basket-making past.

“The project is a perfect example of lots of small projects combining to have a major effect. We hope that others will be inspired by its success, which shows we can all play a part in helping to keep Suffolk special.”

Tony Butler, director of the Museum of East Anglian Life, said: “This is the first time we have won an award for the work we have carried out on the landscape around the museum, and we are absolutely delighted.

“The project has been a real community effort, and has added another important dimension to the museum by allowing us to show people how the landscape influenced the area’s economy.”

The scheme at the grade I listed Theatre Royal has seen the building restored to its Georgian splendour, with its original decoration and layout reinstated. A contemporary extension, housing a foyer and bar, has also been added to provide 21st century facilities for the comfort and benefit of modern day audiences.

Mr Ward said: “The Theatre Royal restoration project is a magnificent example of how a building can be returned to its original use with care and sensitivity, in turn preserving our heritage for the future.

“The attention to detail which has gone into the work is truly striking, while its well thought-out design has also brought together the old and the new, successfully marrying the Georgian building with a contrastingly contemporary extension. As a result, audiences at the theatre are now benefiting from the best of both worlds, enjoying modern facilities and rich history at the same time.”

Colin Blumenau, theatre director, said: “It needs no saying that the Theatre Royal is a building of invaluable historic and theatrical importance on both a regional and national scale. The restoration has ensured a bright future for this unique Regency gem and enabled us to undertake a project of international significance to restore the lost repertoire of Georgian drama.

“It is also, quite simply, one of the most beautiful playhouses in the country and it is wonderful that it has been preserved it for generations to come.”

Ends

Note to editors: If you would like a photograph of the Theatre Royal or River Rat project, please contact Liz Hearnshaw at Zenith Public Relations on 01284 760025.

The awards were supported by all of the county's district and borough councils, including Waveney District Council which provided financial assistance towards the scheme.

SPS, founded in 1929, originally worked to protect the county's buildings and landscape. Today, the society has broadened its focus to help shape Suffolk's future, largely campaigning for sensitive and appropriate development, more and better quality affordable homes and to ensure sustainable infrastructures are in place to support the county's communities.

For more information please contact:

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