

Wild Success for Sandown Bay from Solitary Bees to South & South East in Bloom

By Claire Hector, Arc

A 'rewilding' partnership between Sandown Green Towns, Arc and The Common Space, taking an ecological approach to the planting and management of public realm, has reaped rewards and awards this year for both people and wildlife. Sandown Green Towns Volunteers won Gold as Best Small Coastal Town in this year's South & South East in Bloom Awards on the strength of its work for biodiversity and community. Arc's coastal flora restoration 'Lost Duver' sites, Sandown 'Seedbank' with its striking marram grass replacing black plastic, the Vertipools and the rewilding at Culver Parade Sea wall were key to the bid's success according to judges. Culver Parade Seawall belongs to the Environment Agency but is now being allowed to self-seed and sand, thanks to an agreement from Arc with the local authority. Over time, strawberry clover, thrift, rock samphire and Sea spurrey with a splurge of Vipers Bugloss, have brought the concrete seawall to life, a small but perfect example of how simply a piece of national infrastructure can be adapted for biodiversity.

Green Towns' excellent work on making public gardening ecologically useful includes Arc's Lost Duver mix, thrift and sea campion as well as some Artecology-style enhancements, invertebrate habitat, posts and micropools. But our favourite measure of success for this approach to wilder public edges, verges and underutilised amenity spaces in Sandown has to be the verges around Sandown Canoe Lake, particularly the 'Lost Duver' roadside verge, planted and allowed to go its own way. A mix of planting and self-seeded coastal specials include Sea mouse-ear, Yellow-horned poppy, thrift, campion, Raised knotgrass, Sea holly and Sea beet, biting stonecrop, everlasting sweet pea and wild carrot can all be found there. Meanwhile, as the plants and sandy patches spread, so dune species Leafcutter bees - *Megachile Leachella* and the Adonis ladybird have found their way there, a fantastic sight and a real reward for anyone watching the leafcutters at work, and a new kind of milestone for Sandown as kerbside amenity grass has transformed into a proper little dune!

