

West Suffolk Family Eco Centre



West Suffolk Hive CIC  
aims to create a **family-centred**  
**community** space in a **natural environment**  
to foster a **connection with nature**,  
improve **wellbeing** and  
share **skills and knowledge**.

[www.westsuffolkhive.org.uk](http://www.westsuffolkhive.org.uk)

f i t @westsuffolkhive

Community Interest Company number 12189973

## Our Vision

To bring families together in a safe space to deepen their connection with nature and each other to improve wellbeing and the environment.

## Our Mission

To create a family-centred community space in a natural environment to foster a connection with nature, improve wellbeing and share skills and knowledge.

To achieve our mission, we will focus on the following key areas:



If the company makes any surplus it will be reinvested into the company to serve the community and to care for the environment.

# Summary

West Suffolk Hive is a Community Interest Company, formed in September 2019, which aims to:

- Develop and nurture a community of families who share our values
- Create a wellbeing and educational space in a natural environment
- Find and regenerate an area of land
- Build and manage an eco-community centre

The company's activities will provide benefit to:

- Families living in West Suffolk
- Local wildlife and the environment
- Therapists and wellbeing services
- Skilled craftspeople
- Local businesses

## The Land

We are hoping to find an area of land to include woodland and access to water with either a pond or a river. The community space will bring people together to work with the land, accessing skills and knowledge from local experts. The regeneration of the land will increase biodiversity and improve air quality, as well as providing access to nature for the community. A greater connection with nature will improve the wellbeing of members of the community. We will provide opportunities to learn how to grow food as well as trees and plants and raise awareness of caring for the environment.

## The Centre

We will build an eco-community centre to include a café, shop, indoor and outdoor natural play and sensory areas, with a sensory and kitchen garden and space for group use and private courses and sessions. The centre will provide an accessible and inclusive safe space for members of the community. We will work with local businesses to supply resources and expertise. Those involved in the construction will learn about sustainable and eco-friendly building methods and energy supplies. We will improve access to holistic and nature-based services and provide a connection with nature. The café and shop will support local suppliers and provide employment and work experience opportunities. The venue will be affordable for local community groups to use for family activities, education and wellbeing sessions and a platform for independent businesses and sole traders to exhibit and sell their products.

## The Space

We will host and run support groups, training courses, workshops and educational activities. We will be encouraging a wide variety of practitioners to use the site to improve access to perinatal support, family support and mental health and wellbeing support. We will host events within the wider community to share our vision and to raise awareness of nature connection.

# Aims and Objectives

## 1) Develop and nurture a community of families who share our values

- Create a supportive network of local businesses and families to strengthen the connections within our community both online and in person by identifying and securing a site where we can host workshops, events and social gatherings.
- Host and run two Green Fairs in Bury St Edmunds each year providing an opportunity for eco-friendly local businesses and community projects to share their knowledge and skills and to raise awareness of sustainable and low-impact choices. The events will introduce community groups and conservation charities to the public, developing a stronger relationship within the community, inspiring them to reconnect with nature and the environment.
- Offer sessions and workshops with a focus on outdoor education and nature connection for wellbeing in order to promote sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle choices.
- Encourage a sense of pride in our town and in the wider region by engaging with the local community and involving them in our work.

## 2) To create a wellbeing and educational space in a natural environment

- Invite members and volunteers to assist in the creation of shelters for wellbeing and education.
- Collaborate with a variety of providers of wellbeing and outdoor education sessions and workshops to create a balanced timetable throughout the year for a wide selection of ages and abilities.

## 3) To find and regenerate an area of land

- Identify suitable sites within a radius of ten-fifteen miles around Bury St Edmunds which would fit with the vision
- Approach land owners, the council and estate agents to negotiate potential lease or purchase of land
- Obtain necessary planning permission and surveys required for building on the land
- Liaise with local conservation and land management specialists regarding the regeneration and rewilding of the site. Work in partnership with relevant authorities.
- Invite members of the community to volunteer their time to regenerate the land and learn conservation skills.

## 4) To build and manage an eco community centre

- Work with local experts in natural and eco-friendly building techniques to design buildings which are suitable for the site and will fit in with the vision.
- Involve members of the community in the building of the site with working parties and training workshops.
- Provide opportunities for work experience, volunteers and contract work during building and in the management and running of the centre.
- Develop and manage a café or kiosk serving organic locally grown and responsibly sourced produce.

# **Values**

Our work will be guided and informed by our beliefs and commitments to:

## **The Community**

We will bring members of our community together to learn new skills, meet new people and work together in the development and care of the site and the environment. We will be a safe retreat providing child-friendly and accessible facilities, committed to decreasing loneliness and creating opportunities for connections across a broad range of ages and abilities.

## **The Environment**

We will promote a strong connection with nature in every aspect of our work. We will collaborate with environmental and conservation organisations and charities who share our values. We are committed to improving biodiversity and the restoration of the land. We will aim to be self-sustainable and maintain a low impact by using renewable sources of energy and locally sourced materials, tradesmen and craftsmanship. We will use recycled, renewable and reusable materials where appropriate.

## **Improving Wellbeing**

The site will provide a variety of services and activities to enhance the mental wellbeing of the community. There will be a focus on nature connection throughout the project. Indoor and outdoor spaces will be available for group and private therapy with local practitioners. Sensory spaces and natural play areas will be provided for enjoyment by babies, children and adults. There will be opportunities to take part in nature therapy, art, music and dance sessions, as well as relaxing and reconnecting in our café.

## **Sharing Knowledge**

The site will be a place to learn, both for children and adults, including opportunities to learn traditional skills from local experts and artisans. It will provide a venue to host workshops, classes and activities and a place for local artists, crafters, writers and tutors to work, display and sell their work. There will also be a library of educational resources to share and borrow.

## **Managing the Land**

We will work in harmony with the land and the seasons, growing crops in the garden to serve in the café; using woodland management techniques such as coppicing to provide materials for building and furniture-making; digging a pond to create a natural source of clay to build with, whilst creating habitats for aquatic and amphibious species; and encouraging the return of pollinating insects such as bumblebees and butterflies with the development of wildflower spaces and natural shelters and habitats.

## **Inclusiveness and Accessibility**

We respect people, value diversity and are committed to equality. Anybody using our site and facilities will be respectful to others, regardless of their age, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, ability, race, religion or political beliefs. Abusive and discriminatory behaviour towards our members and service users will not be tolerated. We will aim to make our services affordable to many and accessible to all. Most areas of the site will be child and dog-friendly and accessible for wheelchair users. No smoking is permitted within the site at any time.