

## Case Study

# Meon Valley Beekeepers –

the importance of education and community outreach in saving the honeybee.

### Background

Globally there are more honey bees than other types of bee and pollinating insects, so it is the world's most important pollinator of food crops. It is estimated that one third of the food that we consume each day relies on pollination mainly by bees, but also by other insects, birds and bats.<sup>1</sup>

Bees are in danger of disappearing from our environment. Farming practices disturb both the natural habitats and forage of solitary and bumble bees, at a rate which gives them little chance for re-establishment. The honey bee is under attack from the varroa mite and it is only the treatment and care provided by beekeepers that is keeping colonies alive.<sup>2</sup>

There is a long heritage of beekeeping in the UK and more locally within the Meon Valley. The Meon Valley Beekeepers Association (the Association) was formed in 1932 and has enjoyed support from local enthusiasts to the present day.

In 2015 under the leadership of new chair, Fleur Bassett, the Association began moving in a new direction which involved more community engagement and outreach.

The Association realised the importance of education to break down fear and misconception through providing knowledge and facts, inspiring people to help by supporting local producers, planting bee-friendly flora in their gardens and communities, and becoming advocates for farming practises that support wildlife.

1. [https://www.sustainweb.org/foodfacts/bees\\_are\\_important/](https://www.sustainweb.org/foodfacts/bees_are_important/)  
2. [https://www.bbka.org.uk/kids/importance\\_of\\_bees](https://www.bbka.org.uk/kids/importance_of_bees)



### The project

In order to deliver the extended community engagement and education programme the Association needed to expand its operations by:

- providing practical training and education facilities for new and improving beekeepers,
- providing swarm collection and quarantine facilities,
- attending schools, events, and groups.

In order to meet this need, on-site storage facilities had to be improved and an observation hive was essential for both education purposes and exhibiting at various country shows and community events.

Funds were raised from a variety of sources to meet the estimated project cost of £9,000. Recognising the importance of the work of the Association and its contribution to the South Down National Park the Sustainable Communities Fund supported the project with a £2,000 grant. Other supporters included a District Councillor grant, the Waitrose local charity scheme and the Co-op. The Association also provided cash match-funding and 'in-kind' contributions collected from the time spend by volunteers in delivering the project activities.

With funding in place the Association purchased and built a storage shed and five new hives, while adding an observation hive, new suits, and other beekeeping equipment to their stock.

The observation hive, which is fully sealed, safely transports the bees to local schools and events for educational purposes. While the new beekeeping suits in a variety of sizes allows all, young and old, big and small, to experience beekeeping first hand.

“The grant has massively helped our Association. It helped us get our new association apiary up and running. This facility will not only let us teach new members the craft of beekeeping but also help to get the community more involved. I started keeping bees two years ago while still at school and enjoy meeting and talking to the public at shows.”

## The outcome

The additional equipment has increased the Association’s capacity to carry out all of its activities which has led to an increased membership and sustainability.

The Association now has over 80 full members and 30 associate members.



The Association has diversified its income streams to include providing training courses and charging to collect swarms and then selling them on. At the Bereleigh site the Association now has eight colonies of approximately 50,000 bees, plus some swarms that will be sold on.

The Association is currently developing formal learning resources and is increasing the number of school visits to a target of 10 per annum.

The Association advocates that beekeeping can be used to deliver many key messages to all members of the wider community in a way that feeds into bigger issues and conversations – attitudes to bees must change and a new generation needs to be educated about the value of bees and the threats to their existence.

**The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19** sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

**This project contributes to the following PMP outcomes:**

Outcome 2 – There is an increased capacity within the landscape for its natural resources, habitats and species to adapt to the impacts of climate change and other pressures.

Outcome 3 – A well-managed and better connected network of habitats and increased population and increased population and distribution of priority species now exist in the National Park.

[southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf](http://southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf)

## The future

The boost that this project has given the Association has empowered it to be even more ambitious in terms of future growth.

The Association is working closely with the South Downs National Park Authority to sow wildflower meadows adjacent to the Bereleigh site, which will improve the local biodiversity and honey production.

The Association is also currently fundraising to purchase a storage trailer that will further increase its capacity to engage with communities.

For further information please visit:

[meonvalleybeekeepers.co.uk](http://meonvalleybeekeepers.co.uk)

For more information about the Sustainable Communities Fund please visit:

[southdowns.gov.uk/scf](http://southdowns.gov.uk/scf)



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