



THE WEG

The Worcester Environmental Group



Volunteers take a break to observe their beautiful surroundings. Source: The WEG

Wild about Worcester Way: Creating a city where people and nature thrive

An opportunity to help Worcester residents explore, and protect, green spaces 2022

Overview

- Worcester Environmental Group, in collaboration with ONSIDE, are proposing to establish a way-marked route around Worcester, helping residents to explore green spaces in the city, learn about nature and to improve their physical and mental health. This route would also act as a 'wildlife corridor', promoting an increase in biodiversity and protection of the environment.

Disconnected

Worcester is the place that many of us call home, yet some of us are disconnected from the fullness of what this city has to offer.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced people to interact with their local surroundings in new ways. Many people took up exercise, having the opportunity to explore new parts of the city that they hadn't before. In May 2020, a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the RSPB found that 79 per cent agreed the Coronavirus outbreak has highlighted the need for more accessible nature-rich green space near to peoples' households¹. Though, research from the Ramblers showed that only 57 per cent of adults said they lived within five-minutes' walk of green space² and this figure fell to 46 per cent for those with a household income under £15,000. People have an increased desire to get out into green spaces and explore nature, but having the confidence to do this and knowing where to go can be barriers. Our beautiful city has so much to offer but for many remains unexplored.

Green spaces are not just beneficial to wildlife but to our mental and physical health too. One in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year³ and exercise can play a key role in alleviating symptoms and helping people to cope with the stresses of everyday life. In 2017/18, according to the Sport England Active Lives Survey, the percentage of adults in Worcestershire estimated to be overweight or obese rose to 65%. This is higher than the England value of 62%⁴. Without accessible and easy ways for people to get out of their homes in the city, mental and physical health suffers.

¹ Recovering Together
https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf

² The grass isn't greener for everyone
<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/latest-news/2020/september/the-grass-isnt-greener-for-everyone.aspx>

³ Mental health facts and statistics
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/>

⁴ Joint Strategic Risk Assessment, Worcester County Council

“Technology is miraculous, but so too is the living world, including the everyday nature with which we share our everyday lives. And this aspect of the world’s wonder seems presently at the margins of many children’s experience,” says naturalist Robert McFarlane.

Children growing up today are more likely to be able to identify Pokémon types than real animal species⁵. A survey by Hoop in 2019 found that half of children cannot identify stinging nettles and 83 per cent did not know what a bumblebee looks like⁶. Spending time in nature can support child development, promoting creativity, responsibility and appreciation for how the world works. With biodiversity loss increasing and the climate crisis already having massive impacts around the world, it’s more important than ever for children to know about the natural world and to grow up to be people who fight to protect it.

There’s a disconnect between people and nature, and it’s harming us both. We need to create a city where both people and nature can thrive again. Can you help us?



View of the river Severn towards Worcester cathedral. Credit: Caitlin Wakefield

How will this project make a difference?

What we do not yet know is whether the changes brought on by lockdown, of people exploring their local areas and exercising more, will be a temporary trend, or a new way of life. The large majority of adults agree that ‘being in nature makes me very happy’ with 74% taking more time to notice and engage with everyday nature, such as listening to birdsong or noticing butterflies⁷.

⁵ Badger or Bulbasaur - have children lost touch with nature?

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/30/robert-macfarlane-lost-words-children-nature>

⁶ Half of British kids can’t tell you what plant this is

<https://news.sky.com/story/british-kids-cant-identify-a-conker-or-a-bumblebee-11784960>

⁷ The People and Nature Survey for England May 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-m>

As the UK emerges from the pandemic, there is an opportunity to keep the momentum going and ensure people remain engaged with exercising, learning about nature and exploring their surroundings. But we can't do it without you.

The Worcester Environmental Group (The WEG) is passionate about making Worcester a beautiful city for everyone to enjoy. Our vision is to **protect biodiversity** in Worcester, **educate** residents about local biodiversity and, with ONSIDE, **improve** the mental and physical wellbeing of residents by enabling them to connect easily with the local environment in the city.

There are many footpaths and cycle paths around the city but we have an opportunity to create a circular route that links these together, providing residents with easy to follow instructions and way-marks. This route can be used by residents, either walking or cycling, to access places to exercise and to immerse themselves in the green spaces that our city has to offer.

Known as "Wild about Worcester Way", the purpose of the route is threefold:

- 1) To create a wildlife corridor around the city
- 2) To get people out in nature to improve their physical and mental wellbeing
- 3) To help people learn about, and be more connected with, our environment and our heritage



For Vanessa (pictured left), a volunteer with The WEG, wildlife plays a big part in her emotional well-being. "It's almost like a meditation, like mindfulness" she said whilst volunteering to take care of a community orchard in Worcester.

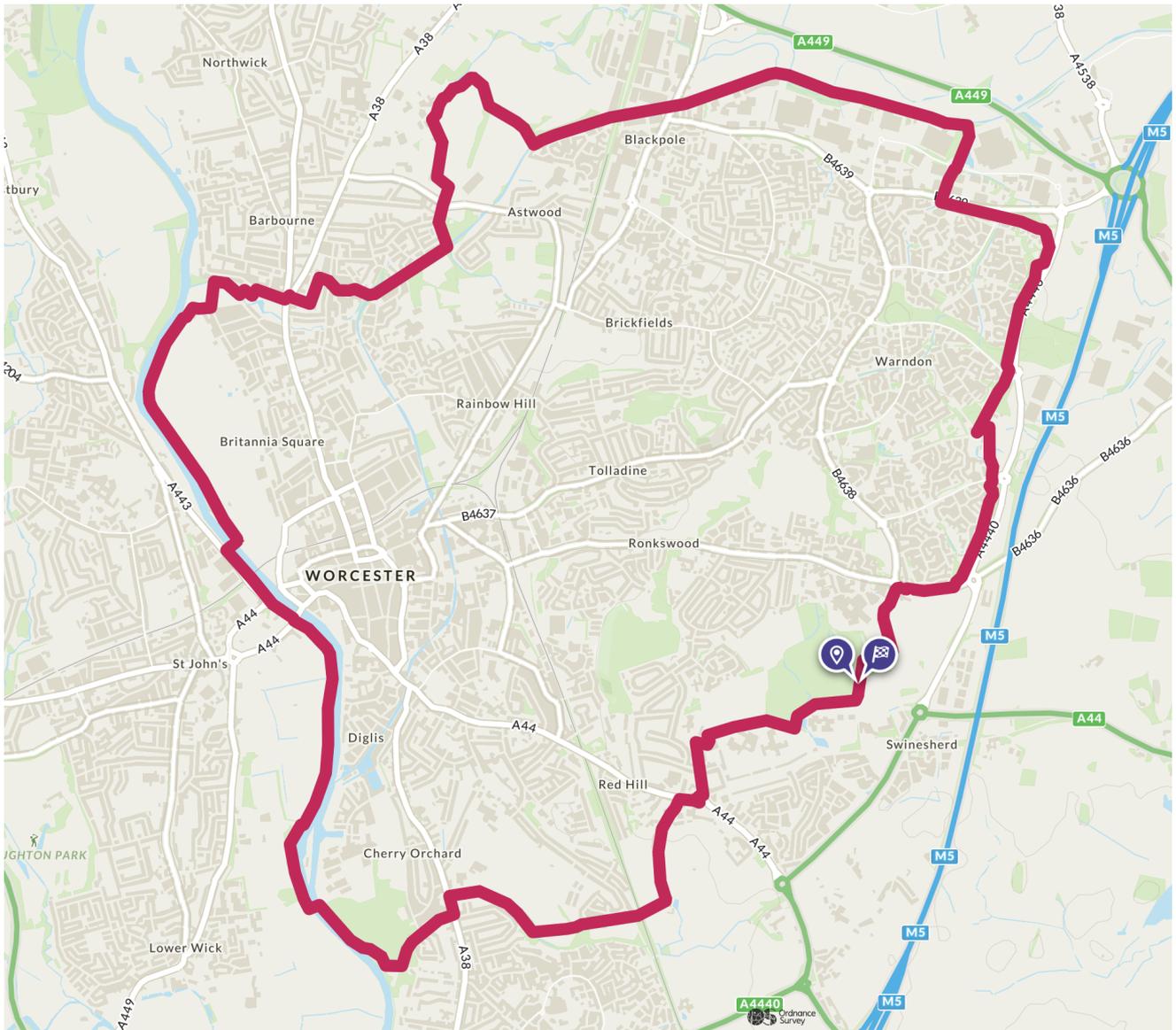
The WEG is committed to working with local residents, businesses, government and other charitable organisations to improve biodiversity and increase access to green spaces for people in Worcester. With your help, we can create a 12 mile route which showcases the beauty that the city has to offer and makes nature accessible to everyone. A summary of the key activities that will make Wild about Worcester Way possible can be viewed below.

Phase one:

- In consultation with local residents and The WEG volunteers, a 12 mile circular route will be planned around the city. The route will link up as many green

spaces as possible, giving residents the opportunity to join the route at a place convenient to them. It will have options for walkers, runners and cyclists, as well as be accessible for people with disabilities where possible.

- Once the proposed route is drafted, local stakeholders, such as the local council, will be identified and briefed on the project. Permission will be obtained to place way-makers on land around the city.
- A local artist will be identified and commissioned to draw a map of the route in a way that is easy to understand and is visually appealing. A pamphlet and posters will be designed using the artist's illustrations. These will be printed locally and distributed to local businesses in the city to raise awareness about the route. The map will also be available on The WEG website and on the AllTrails app.
- Tributary routes will be planned connecting the Wild about Worcester Way circular to other areas of interest both in and out of the city, for example linking up to Monarch's Way. This will enable people to explore different places that they might not have known about and give options for people who may not be able to, or wish to, walk the whole 12 miles. The variety of routes on offer will encourage people to start hiking further afield starting from where they live with no need to use a car or bus.
- Organisations and local businesses will be identified in each section of the route. The WEG will brief them on Wild about Worcester Way, ask for their ideas and if they are interested in being involved. This could involve activities such as a local business holding litter picks with staff, or asking an organisation for some facts about the area which could be added to an information board.



Proposed Wild about Worcester route

Phase two

- When permission has been granted to create Wild about Worcester Way, it will be promoted through different channels, such as social media, helping the general public to know about it. Other organisations such as the NHS or Worcester Tourist Information Centre will be given flyers about the route. The WEG will also raise awareness at other local events and fairs in Worcester.
- Once the route has been established there will be an opportunity to improve the green spaces that Wild about Worcester Way passes through. Volunteers will be mobilised to take part in activities that enhance biodiversity such as planting trees (including fruit trees) and wildflowers along the whole route where possible. This will improve the mental health of volunteers, giving them the opportunity to be out in nature and helping them to learn new skills which will boost their confidence.



- Information boards will be placed along different stretches of Wild about Worcester Way. There will be something of interest for everyone. Historical information about different areas will help people to see patterns from the past and try to understand what the future might bring. There will also be signs drawing people to pick and eat the fruit from the fruit trees⁸ and 'spot the species' giving people the opportunity to identify plants and wildlife in the environment around them.
- To improve wildlife conservation and protection, bird boxes, bat boxes and bug hotels will be placed in appropriate places along the route. This will encourage wildlife to the area to increase biodiversity in Worcester.
- Native trees, hedges and flowers will be planted around the city. As well as being visually appealing to those walking past, these will enhance biodiversity and ensure Worcester has more plants for absorbing carbon dioxide.
- There will be activities for children such as natural play areas and child-friendly information boards. To maintain the interest of children whilst doing a walk with their family, there will be signs showing different things to look out for or challenges such as collecting different leaves.
- Research and scoping will take place for identifying a potential green space on the route to establish a visitor centre. This centre could be a place where further information would be available about biodiversity in Worcester and the work of local organisations focused on environmental protection could be showcased. At the visitor centre, workshops could be held for schools and other groups helping them to engage with environmental action and learn about nature. There could also be the option for setting up a cafe which could encourage people who usually drive into town to enjoy a walk and meet at a cafe out of town instead.
- Feedback from local residents about Wild about Worcester Way will be gathered and used to inform the maintenance and further development of the route in the future. Surveys conducted will be used to continue to raise awareness about the initiative and stories will be submitted to local news and other outlets.

How can you help people and nature thrive?

By creating Wild about Worcester Way, the city could become a beacon showing other local areas what is possible. The process and impacts can be shared with other cities helping them to improve access to nature so that a ripple effect is created throughout the West Midlands and beyond.

Wild about Worcester Way brings opportunity to residents to get to know the green spaces in the city, for people to learn about nature and for different species to have a space to thrive within this 'wildlife corridor'. This has the potential to improve environmental literacy and inspire local people to take action on protecting biodiversity in Worcester for future generations. Your participation could help a young child learn about types of insects or help someone suffering from poor mental health to find comfort and solace in nature. Together, we can create a city where both

⁸ Child takes an apple at an orchard managed by The WEG.

people and nature thrive. We would very much welcome your ideas on how you can participate in this exciting project. Can you help?



WEG volunteers lend a hand by mulching around newly planted saplings in Diglis Fields. Source: The WEG

Thank you

We'd love to tell you more about our vision, over the phone, or whilst walking a proposed section of Wild about Worcester Way together. Please get in touch!

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