Press Release

People pick a proper pocket park!

UK's smallest pocket park opens in Stoke Albany

When the residents of Stoke Albany took up the challenge of establishing a pocket park in their village, in response to a wildlife conservation initiative which was invented by the Environment Directorate of Northamptonshire County Council and has now been adopted country-wide, it seems they took the term 'pocket' quite literally!

The 0.1 acre (0.4 hectare) park, which was officially opened by Sue Paice, head of the County Council Pocket Park network and Sheila Mellelieu Chairman of Stoke Albany Parish Council, on Saturday, is the smallest of the 73 such parks dotted around the county – but is no less valuable a community asset because of its size.

The park, which was formerly a privately owned but neglected piece of land situated adjacent to the village green and village hall, has now been acquired by Stoke Albany Parish Council, cleared and replanted with wild plants, shrubs and trees, and 'given back' to residents of, and visitors to, the village.

Pipistrelle Bat, Little Owl, Hedgehog, cowslip and primrose are among the residents of the park and there are seats upon which villagers and visitors can sit and contemplate and simply enjoy the natural surroundings that have been created in this tiny corner of the beautiful Welland Valley.

"This is a wonderful facility and exactly what we were aiming for when we launched the Pocket Park initiative in the mid-1980s," said Sue Paice. "It is managed *by* local people

for local people, it helps wildlife and landscape conservation and provides access to the countryside and to nature for residents of the village and visitors to Stoke Albany.

"We are delighted to have helped bring this project to fruition and everyone in the village and surrounding community should be grateful to the team of dedicated local people who have worked so hard to make this happen. To see the transformation of this small area from overgrown neglect into a fantastic environment for wildlife and for people to enjoy, has been a highlight as far as we are concerned and we hope that this park will be maintained intact for future generations."

Mrs Sheila Mellalieu, who has led the Stoke Albany Pocket Park initiative with unwavering help from Eric, Christine and Anthony Prince, Neville and Christine Wells and many other volunteers from the village, said:

"It has taken a great deal of work from many people in the village to get to where we are now but the feedback and appreciation we have received from villagers and visitors alike has made it all worthwhile. Everyone from youngsters to some of the oldest residents of Stoke Albany have contributed to the Pocket Park and we are delighted that the County Council has recognised their achievements.

"We will do everything we can to ensure that this 'oasis' in an increasingly stressful world, will be maintained for everybody to enjoy in the future."

Northamptonshire County Council's Pocket Park network, headed by Sue Paice, encourages other villages to follow the lead of Stoke Albany - and 72 other villages or towns around the county. Their criteria centres on the provision of a natural parkland facility which is owned and maintained by local people and they offer expert advice, training, practical help and funding for any interested parties.

"Every town or village can take part in this initiative," said Sue Paice. "We have Pocket Parks ranging in size from 87 acres (at Ringstead in Northamptonshire) down to, well,

Stoke Albany's 0.1 acre – and all have been received enthusiastically by local residents. Any initiative which promotes wildlife, access to the countryside and community endeavour has got to be a good thing and we are here, willing and able to help."

Sue Paice can be contacted on 01604 237222.

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For further information please contact:

Mark Conway
Tel: (office) 0121 454 9707
Mobile: 07776 297 452
E-mail: markconway@hroc.co.uk