

Homersfield is 'village of the year'

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IT HAS a small population but a big heart.

Homersfield, in the extreme north of the county is this year's winner of the Suffolk Village of the Year title.

Runner-up is Levington, which also wins the Parish Council of the Year award, and in third place is **Monks Eleigh**.

Tuddenham St Mary, Hopton, Thornham Parva and Tostock were shortlisted.

Homersfield has a population of only 150 and no village hall, shop or post office.

However, it does have an excellent community spirit, a well-supported village pub and picturesque cottages, and is very much on the tourist map.

When judges arrived in the village earlier this year they found children and families, from Homersfield and surrounding villages, enjoying the new recreation area.

According to their report: "There was an obvious buzz of community spirit and a project in the vicinity of the parish church had created another beautiful amenity area for people and wildlife."

The report adds: The judges . . . were impressed by the terrific achievements of this very small community in buying land for woods and walks and creating a beautiful public space in the middle of the village.

"The villagers are committed to searching out new projects for the future, building on their success with sourcing grant aid from outside the village."

Graham Neale, parish council chairman, said he was delighted the village had won this year's title.

"It is a very small village but there is a very good community spirit," he said.

The four-acre amenity wood, referred to in the judges' report, had been purchased from a Bungay timber company and was now popular with dog walkers and wildlife enthusiasts, while the new recreation area attracted children and parents from a wide area.

Volunteers had recently been working in the churchyard, tidying up the area and erecting new fencing, said Mr Neale, who is one of only five parish councillors.

Tony Eaves, landlord of the Black Swan pub, said he was "pleasantly surprised" that the village had won the title.

"There is a very good community group here – they do a lot of work," he said.

Tourists are attracted to Homersfield by the pub and its restaurant but also to see the thatched cottages around the green and to stroll by the River Waveney.

The historic iron bridge over the river has recently been replaced and an information board put up.

On the approach to the village from the A143 road is a stunning millennium sculpture of a prehistoric man in a crude boat. It was created by Mark Goldsworthy of Bungay.

The Village of the Year competition is organised by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) and helping with the judging were officials from Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Mary Mitson-Woods, SALC chief executive, said the judges had felt the villages which entered had showed an even higher level of community spirit and achievement than in the past and they had faced a very difficult task in deciding the winners.

Homersfield will receive a cheque, plaque and certificate from sponsor, Calor Gas, together with three trees donated by Charles Notcutt of the well-known Woodbridge nursery.

Adnams, the Southwold brewer, will be providing beer for a village celebration expected to take place at the beginning of October.

Levington and **Monks Eleigh** will receive cheques and a certificate while the former will also be presented with the SALC gavel for being Parish Council of the Year.