REFUGEE BEE-KEEPING INITIATIVE AT YORKSHIRE’S STANDEDGE TUNNEL BLOSSOMS WITH SUMMER PICNIC & PROMISE OF MEDICINAL HONEY HAUL

Historic waterways attraction the Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre was a hive of activity last week as it hosted a celebratory summer picnic for The Buzz Project – a beekeeping initiative that helps refugees and job seekers find a purpose in the community by learning how to keep bees.

The Buzz Picnic, in honour of Refugee Week, saw members and friends of the initiative gather in the grounds of Standedge Tunnel’s visitor centre, outside Marsden in West Yorkshire, to sample a fine array of traditional Pakistani, Indian and Syrian foods and learn more about the bee-keeping initiative and the importance of bees in helping the local environment flourish.

Launched with just two hives in September 2017 by Dr Ryad Alsous, a world-renowned bee-keeping expert, The Buzz Project has quickly grown and now has 14 volunteers looking after 13 hives across three sites at Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre, Armitage Bridge and Crossland Moor.

A first harvest of honey from the hives is expected later this year and Dr Alsous, who spent years researching the chemical properties of honey before fleeing war-torn Syria in 2012, believes the unique West Yorkshire terroir could provide the honey produced with medicinal qualities.

Dr Alsous said: “Some of the herbs and plants found on the surrounding moorlands – such as heather, clover and hawthorns – are known to have strong medical qualities, as such we strongly believe that some of those qualities will be passed on to the honey that the bees are producing.”

Each hive on the project is home to between 10,000 and 100,000 bees and each hive is expected to produce around 15kg of honey per year – a significant amount in a country that imports more than 90 per cent of its honey from outside the British Isles.

Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre manager Iain Weston commented: “We are very proud to have helped such a worthy project take flight at the centre. Helping refugees and job seekers further their prospects is a cause we can all get behind – and the success of The Buzz Project is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when people pull together. Members of the Buzz team are always happy to explain more about the project to our visitors, and the summer picnic was a great celebration of what has been achieved in less than 12 months since the project was founded.”

The Buzz Project, which is supported by Sanctuary Kirklees, is now looking to expand further and is appealing for volunteers, hives and new sites across West Yorkshire. The first haul of honey from the project’s hives is expected to go on sale at Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre’s gift shop later this year.