



## **Report of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership Manager (June 2010-2011)**

This report details the project delivery by the Partnership over the last 12 months under the 5 MVCP core themes:

1. Creating, sustaining and enhancing our landscape & biodiversity
2. Developing, managing and supporting community-based environmental initiatives
3. Developing, and promoting life long outdoor learning
4. Encouraging and enhancing greater access in the outdoors and the corresponding health benefits
5. Ensuring the Partnership has the resources for effective development and operation

### **1. Creating, Sustaining and Enhancing our Landscape & Biodiversity**

#### **Giant Hogweed Control Programme** (Funded by EA, TMBC, MBC, NE, Landowners)

The Giant Hogweed Control Programme has been running for 11 years. It started in order to address hotspot areas of high abundance along the Medway Navigation from Tonbridge to Maidstone but slowly grew to be the catchment wide project which is delivered today. At present all the Medway tributaries are included and MVCP link in with several local parish councils and almost 300 local landowners to ensure as much catchment wide treatment of this dangerous invasive plant as possible. The treatment of plants in 2011 is well underway and in addition some stands of Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed are also being addressed.

If adequate funding can be sourced, we aim to expand on the project from 2012 onwards to include the West Kent systems the Darent and the Cray, thus making the project vital in the Thames Basin.

#### **Kent Free Tree Scheme** (Funded by Network Rail, Local authorities (inc. TMBC) Kent BAP, KCC, KDAONB, Quodos)

A total of 31,359 trees were distributed to 1,062 applicants across the 12 Districts and Boroughs in Kent and the London Borough of Bexley in 2010/11. Within Tonbridge and Malling 2370 trees were provided to residents in the borough.

TMBC provided £1000 towards the project (total County spend £31,076)

For the 2011/12 year the scheme has a reduced budget and will be focused on community, parish and school groups.

## **Sites within Tonbridge & Malling**

### **Dene Park**

We are working in partnership with the Forestry Commission at a site, Dene Park near Tonbridge, wholly owned by them. It is a site of some 90Ha comprising mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland. We wish to make full use of the significant conservation potential of this site which is already a very valuable wildlife habitat but can be further enhanced. The intention is that this will be achieved through significant use of local volunteer groups and young people currently outside of recognised training and employment allowing the development of life and practical countryside as well as ecological surveying skills. With further habitat improvements the site has enormous potential as a location for educational walks, as a home to a huge range of flora and fauna, and for the quiet enjoyment of wildlife, landscape and woodland archaeology.

Significant desk top survey work has already been completed, collating a wide variety of wildlife surveys already carried out on site. These include:

- Lichens and bryophytes
- Dormice
- Butterflies
- Fungi
- Flora

Consequently good contacts have been made with a range of interested groups from the local parish councils, through bat, birds, butterfly and dormice surveyors. All such groups are being canvassed as to their site management preferences both now and into the future. We have now arranged our first educational walk, a fungi foray, for November 2011, with a leading national mycologist giving their expert time for free.

We have already secured substantial funding for this project from other sources provided it can be matched, and are actively seeking that matched funding.

### **Haysden Country Park** (Funded by KCC, TMBC)

MVCP continue to support the Friends of Haysden group and the Ranger in developing the ecological monitoring activities and events on site.

### **Holly Hill Open Space** (Funded by KDAONB, V of V, TMBC)

A successful wildlife day was run by MVCP at the site last year.

### **Leybourne Woods** (Funded by TMBC,KBAP)

Initial survey work has been undertaken at the site (water vole). Further ecological surveys will be done over the coming summer which will feed in to a site management plan produced by the Partnership.

### Taddington Valley (Funded by TMBC)

Access works were undertaken on site last year.

### Tonbridge Sports Ground (Funded by TMBC)

A Biffa grant (£5000) written by MVCP was successful for Tinkers Island focussing on biodiversity enhancements and site interpretation. Work will start this year on site.

## **Interreg Projects**

### Bats on the Downs - Community involvement project (Interreg, Kent BAP, KCC, MBC, KMBRC)

Surveys conducted by volunteers are continuing into the third year of the project. Already a good coverage of sites has been made by previous surveys. The surveys will be complimented by guided walks in Bredhurst and Bluebell Hill village.

At the beginning of 2011 the Bats In Kent Leaflet was completed. It includes many bat facts as well as flight patterns and habitats of the most commonly found species in the Kent Downs AONB. It is available in paper form and to download. The leaflet will be used to hand out on bat walks led by MVCP and Kent Bat Group for participants who want some further information on bats in Kent.

### Ponds (Funded by Interreg, MBC, TMBC, KCC)

The initial survey phase of the ponds on the Downs projects has now been completed with headline findings that some 40% of ponds have been lost since the most recent ordnance survey maps were completed and that 80% of those remaining are in a poor condition. As a result the next phase of the project ties in very closely to the LBES element of the Interreg scheme, looking to create and enhance new pond projects in the North Kent Downs AONB. Three successful school wildlife ponds have been created at Eccles, Ightham and Trottiscliffe, and two more large ponds on private land are also planned for 2011.

### Adders on the Downs (Funded by Interreg, MBC, TMBC, KCC, KRAG)

The primary objective of this project is to build upon existing Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG) work in developing predictive tools for the assessment and encouragement of this declining Biodiversity Action Plan species. In addition we hope to initiate a dialogue with landowners to improve habitat and habitat linkages for reptiles (targeting areas and links for reptile dispersal). Adders can be a valuable tool in the biological control of small mammal populations. Our survey project area is within the Kent Downs AONB, where it intersects with the boroughs of Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling plus the boundary areas of the AONB immediately abutting this zone.

MVCP in partnership with KRAG have identified 30 1km squares within the project area in order to obtain meaningful statistical data. These sites have been mapped, and 27 landowners have given permission to survey for adders on their land. We have recruited 21 volunteer surveyors to carry out this task, trained them in the necessary techniques and the surveys themselves are now underway.

- Each survey site will use 10 sample points/ha, each sample point using combined tin and roofing felt refugia following Froglife survey criteria guidelines.
- Each sample point will be visited 7 times in 2011 from April to October inclusive.
- Each survey will take a few minutes and will avoid any disturbance to crops or livestock.
- KRAG will offer call out support to volunteer surveyors in case of any emergency.
- Each surveyor will be fully insured under our public liability insurance, fully equipped and carrying a letter of authority with comprehensive risk assessments provided.

Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme (Funded by Interreg, Kent BAP, KCC, MBC, KMBRC, KCC)

In 2010 one cobnut restoration, two wildlife enhancements and one pond creation project were funded by the scheme assisting community groups, individuals and schools to create and enhance their land for wildlife.

Events (Funded by Interreg, Kent BAP, MBC)

In 2011 two bird walks, one wildlife day, two bat walks and two wildlife days will be run with funding from Interreg within The Kent Downs AONB. The events purpose is to introduce sites within the Kent Downs AONB to members of the public as well as educating about local wildlife so that more people access and enjoy the public areas available to them.

**2. Developing, managing and supporting community-based environmental initiatives**

**Community Tool Kits**

Conservation tool kits have been created by the Countryside Partnerships and are available for local groups to borrow free of charge. A range of tools from spades through to loppers are available to help local community groups with their practical conservation tasks.

Each kit comes complete with health and safety information including example risk assessments, first aid kits and an instructional DVD on how to prepare for task days and how to use the tools safely. Personal protective equipment and warning signs are included, so that groups of volunteers of all abilities get the most out of the day in a safe and proper fashion.

The kits are held by each of the partnerships across Kent (For the Tonbridge and Malling Borough MVCP and KHWCP based at Bedgebury are the closest offices).

**Church Farm Larkfield** (East Malling and Larkfield PC, Lottery)

Church Farm is an area of broad-leaved woodland and semi-improved grassland found in Larkfield, bordering the M20 motorway. It comprises some 1.8 Ha (4.5 acres). Its close proximity to surrounding residential areas makes it a potentially very useful recreation and educational resource. The site can be accessed via New Hythe Lane and is not currently open to the public.

The site's potential for nature conservation and education has been under-developed. However, in order to achieve its full potential Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) has been commissioned by East Malling & Larkfield Parish Council (EMLPC) to produce a management plan for the site. This management plan aims to enhance the site for educational use by the public and for native wildlife. Steps that have been achieved so far:

- Created 10 year management plan for site.
- Helped secure £6000 funding for the parish council.
- Conducted two seasons of woodland thinning to increase light levels and enhance biodiversity.
- Enhanced woodland rides and created new internal footpaths.
- Designed, created and installed two interpretation panels, for the history and wildlife of the site.
- Built seating for school groups.
- Set out way marked trail with 'brass-rubbing' plates for education.
- Acted as a conduit with local conservation grazier, 19 Hebridean sheep now on site.
- First educational event now planned.

### **3. Developing and promoting life long outdoor learning**

**Thursday Action Group (TAG)** (Funded by EA, TMBC, MBC, KCC, PCs, Landowners, HLF)

MVCP's volunteering group, TAG was recognised for their outstanding contribution to community and environmental projects across the partnership area with the Queens Award presented in London.

Over the last 12 months 21 days (out of 48) were delivered in the TMBC area. With the number of volunteers recorded each week, the 21 task days equates to 176 volunteer days spent in the borough equating to a value of £17,600 into the borough.] Tasks have included school grounds work such as installing new features in gardens and creating nature areas. Other projects has included practical step building in woodland at Aylesford Pit and the installation of interpretation at Church Farm, to name but a few.

Funding from KCC enabled us to provide our volunteers with branded clothing and PPE as part of the Community toolkits (detailed above).

**River Wardens** (Funded by EA, Linley Shaw, (TMBC, KCC and MBC in kind)

The River Warden project has been delivered by MVCP along the Medway Navigation from Tonbridge to Maidstone for many years. At the moment we have 45 volunteers working in a variety of locations along this stretch of the Medway. 13 of these volunteers live or volunteer directly in the TMBC area.

The volunteers regularly collect litter along their section of riverside footpath and they report issues such as fly tip and pollution and record wildlife. The project links and runs adjacent with the TMBC Street Monitoring project and many volunteers double up on both.

Additional training and social events are arranged and provided by MVCP throughout the year and there is a volunteer newsletter which goes out twice a year.

**Valley of Visions River Warden Scheme** (Funded by V of V (HLF))

The Valley of Visions River Warden project, managed by MVCP, and has been running since 2009. Volunteers all work in the Medway Gap area from Aylesford to Rochester collecting litter, reporting problems such as fly tip and illegal activity and recording wildlife.

33 volunteers are currently registered on the scheme (although not all are active at present), 8 of which live or volunteer in the section of the Medway Gap which is under TMBC.

As well as individuals volunteering, additional groups such as youth groups etc occasionally get involved in larger community clean ups and these often take place in TMBC locations such as Snodland.

A volunteer newsletter is produced twice a year and MVCP arrange additional training and social activities for the volunteers throughout the year.

**River Photography Competition**

The River Medway Photography Competition (originally funded by HLF via the Riverside Communities Project) has now been running for 4 years. The project encourages recreation in the area and photographs from Tonbridge through to Rochester, of the River or the surrounding villages, are accepted. The project is proving popular with an average of around 400 people registering with the competition each year. It is entirely digital and has its own website ([www.rivermedwayphoto.org](http://www.rivermedwayphoto.org)). The competition is also supported in kind by professional award winning photographer Terry Whittaker and by Glyn Bareham of Invicta Photographic Club and from 2011 onwards the competition will be supported by Kent on Canvas.

**Tonbridge and Malling School Grounds Scheme** (Funded by TMBC)

Since the beginning of the scheme in 2007, 25 of a total of 43 primary schools within Tonbridge and Malling boroughs have benefited from the TMBC school grounds scheme. Schools have received advice, planning and practical works from the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP). The scheme has become increasingly popular throughout the years and in 2010 was so well received that the days available for the scheme were already allocated by August.

Each school that showed an interest in the scheme was visited and plans discussed, from this a detailed work plan including a budget was sent to them by MVCP which included all works mentioned during the site visit. This was then used by some of the schools to raise funds for the materials required to complete the scheme, Appendix two shows one of the plans sent to a school. In some cases advice was all the school required in others the voluntary Thursday Action Group (TAG) who are managed by MVCP staff were asked onto site to carry out works.

In 2011 already, five schools have shown an interest in the scheme and have been visited by MVCP to discuss their requirements. One school contacted us a result of

visiting another wildlife garden we had created in 2010. Already workshops for one school in Tonbridge have been scheduled and funding is being sought for a school in Burham to create their wildlife garden with pupils during after school/lunch time clubs.

**Support, Presentations and Talks** (Funded by core funders)

MVCP continue to offer a free service to communities providing advice and initial site visits. Over the last 4 months the following visits have been undertaken.

Talk to Rochester Scouts May 2011

Kings School Rochester - careers talk

Ditton Court Quarry – ongoing advice to Parish Council

West Peckham – Discussing biodiversity concerns and the impact of polytunnels with a local landowner

Detling showground – NE ELS/HLS update meeting

St James Centre East Malling – advice about woodland generation

Advice at the Kent Wildlife Trust Orchards training day at Hildenborough (Oct 10) to local orchard owners. Promotion of the developing orchards project.

Holly Hill. Site meeting with TMBC to discuss management plan options.

KWT / Biddenden – Orchard apple juice produced by MVCP from local orchards

Hadlow College – hedge laying training for students at West Farleigh site

Attended Non Native Species Conference to discuss non native plants and the highlight the work on the partnership and give advice about project delivery (4<sup>th</sup> Nov)

West Peckham – Advice given to landowner re pond and wetland management 03/11/10

Haysden Country Park – preliminary site meeting with dredging contact to discuss possible EA fisheries projects at Barden and Haysden Lakes 09/11/10

Cobnut Platt – advice given to landowner about pond creation

Attendance at Kent BAP conference in Maidstone on 26/11/10.

Aylesford – Meeting and proposal to Parish Council to deliver projects within the management plan (2005).

**Work experience, undergraduate placements** (Funded through core)

Work experience student placement one week: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2011 from Simon Stock School, Maidstone.

MVCP have provided 2 placements from Hadlow College (undergraduate) and provide the resources for practical skills training.

We have over 80 volunteers helping us to deliver community and biodiversity projects through our River Warden, TAG and office placements. Without their outstanding commitment we would be unable to deliver the range and number of projects across the borough.

**4. Encouraging and enhancing greater access in the outdoors and the corresponding health benefits**

All our projects deliver indirectly this theme. Specific projects;

**Allington to Aylesford footpath** (Funded by V of V (HLF) and KCC)

MVCP continue to feed into the access project 'Along the Waterfront' managed by the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme.

**Maidstone to Tonbridge Cycling feasibility Study** (KCC, TMBC, EA, MBC)

MVCP has secured £10,200 for a feasibility study for a cycle route from Maidstone to Tonbridge enabling in the long-term future a route from the Medway Towns through to the Penshurst section. A report similar to the 'Along the Waterfront' by the Valley of Visions is proposed.

A brief will be written by MVCP for consultation with partners to prioritise the areas to be costed and designed (funding secured will not cover the work covered in the V of V report therefore a more targeted approach is planned).

**5. Ensure the Partnership has the resources for effective development and operation**

Shared management of MVCP and NWKCP through the Partnership Manager and the new Senior Partnership Officer has enabled greater efficiencies on back office and management. The SPO post (in place April 2011) will increase the capacity for larger scale bid development and delivery.

Through the work of the Partnership Manager and Senior Partnership Officer developing projects are at the bid writing phase;

- God's Acre - focussing on closed churchyards – enhancing the biodiversity value with the help of local community groups (HLF funding)
- Traditional orchards – Community orchard restoration, training and events (HLF)
- Dene Park development
- Interreg 2 Seas – Sustainability and environmental projects (Kent Downs AONB lead)

**Website** (KCC, MVCP)

A collective website for the Countryside Management Partnerships at [www.kentcountryside.org.uk](http://www.kentcountryside.org.uk) is a new resource providing the first point of contact for organisations operating in Kent. The website details the services of the collective partnerships including a short video clip.

A health and Wellbeing video is being produced to support the CMP video detailed on the website.

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