



Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee Summary Activity Report 2011-2012.

Provided to Local Authority Members of the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee to assist in reporting on the activities of outside bodies.

Statutory management planning

The Statutory Kent Downs AONB management plan, adopted by all Local Authorities with the AONB in their jurisdiction, is what drives all of the work of the AONB partnership, its detailed action plan has been overseen by the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

The Joint Advisory Committee has met twice during the year with agendas covering AONB Unit project activity in support of the management plan action plan, monitoring delivery and highlighting successes. The JAC has also considered current issues for the AONB such as AONB Boundary review, budget and activities, governance and planning matters.

Partnership projects

Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme

This year was initially planned to be the final year of this £2.4m principally Heritage Lottery Funded project operating in the Medway Valley. Through careful financial management we have been working to secure an extra year of activity, this will be focused on additional project activity and securing the legacy of the project.

Key activity delivery this year include;

Chalk grassland conservation

- Restoration work completed at Ladd's Farm. Ongoing active management regime initiated on all 27.5 ha with two Hebridean sheep flocks. A further 1.5 ha cleared in early 2012 and will be included in management regime.
- All work at five other sites (Burham to Wouldham Downs Birling Escarpment, The Brockles, Nashenden Down and Culand Pits) all completed and now in active management. Results in a total of over 140 ha of chalk grassland now in positive, long-term management.

Wetland conservation

- All programmed works completed on four marshland sites: Holborough Marsh, Burham Marsh, Halling Marsh and Wouldham Marsh. All sites, totalling 177 ha in long-term positive management.
- Restoration management completed at Aylesford Old Pit wet woodland site (5 ha) and long term management put in place.

Heritage hedgerows

- 4.5km of hedgerow planted or managed within the Medway Gap

Access

- Fully subscribed national Securing the Landscape (STL) conference held in July 2011, sharing VoV's approach to solving illegal motorised access and environmental crime issues.
- Continuing effective strategic STL approach headed by Kent Police.
- Funded PCSO role embedded with VoV team supporting physical works with enforcement and community liaison.
- Completed project planning study for Aylesford to Allington Lock shared use path – will unlock the aspiration for shared use path between Maidstone and Rochester.
- 1km of shared use path completed at Ranscombe Farm
- 800m of new permissive footpath at Holborough Marsh.
- Reprints of VoV's seven community trail leaflets due to popular demand

Events

- 30 events organised and run by VoV with approximately 450 attendees.
- A further 139 events run by partner organisations promoted through VoV

Heritage conservation

- Restoration of Bishop's Palace scheduled monument in Halling complete. Landscaping of site close to completion.
- LiDAR survey of Medway Gap undertaken to provide information on heritage features hidden by vegetation and to support monitoring of vegetation encroachment on open habitats such as chalk grassland.

Community

- Local planning projects completed in Halling and Wouldham Primary Schools culminating in presentations made to local dignitaries and community partners.
- Medway Mosaics community archaeology project established with local volunteers recruited to 'ground-truth' LiDAR results in the Birling and Burham areas of the valley.

- River Wardens scheme co-ordinated by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership now self-sustaining.
- Support of Parish Council led volunteer group to undertake biodiversity and heritage conservation at the White Pit quarry near Halling.

White Cliffs Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Kent Downs AONB Unit led the submission of the successful stage 1 application for this £2.4m scheme which will focus on landscape conservation and enhancement in the Dover and Folkestone area of the AONB, and its surroundings. Again this scheme is funded principally by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This year the project lead was taken up by Dover District Council but the AONB Unit provides detailed support and Chairmanship to the Partnership Board, a stage 2 (final) submission has been completed on time and within the agreed budget.

Landscape and Nature for All projects.

The Kent Downs AONB has provided a lead for 14 UK partners in this 4.4m Euro project which has been operating over 4 years, this year being the final year of delivery and closedown. This project has focused on the delivery of the biodiversity activity promoted through the Kent Downs AONB management plan. Outputs include;

- 23 Parish Councils involved
- 370 ha of chalk grassland conserved
- 1450 ha woodland under environmental management, covering 43 sites
- New website with woodland management advice for private landowners
- 4 new leaflets on woodland management for private landowners
- 44 events for children, families and volunteers
- 8 information panels
- 290 adult volunteers involved through awareness raising event and practical tasks
- 1575 children involved through woodland discovery and tree planting events
- 3 ha of new woodland planted
- 122 ha of wetland managed
- 70 volunteers involved in pond creation and monitoring as well as marshland monitoring
- 25 bat sites surveyed
- Action plan for adder protection and a leaflet on adder habitat conservation and management
- 110 events for various community groups
- 32 landscape enhancement projects completed, most of them in publicly accessible sites improving visitor experience; further 40 local projects delivered with community groups

The Kent Downs AONB wood fuel pathfinder project

The management of woodlands in the Kent Downs AONB has been identified as a key priority, the AONB being one of the most wooded landscapes in England. This year we have secured and established the national wood fuel pathfinder project with the support of the Forestry Commission and supported by Interreg funding, this project has been very active supporting over 80 sites, providing support for woodland owners and encouraging the potential for wood fuel demand from a number of sites including 25 schools.

Sustainable Rural Tourism in the Kent Downs – Our Land project

This year saw the ministerial launch of a sustainable rural tourism project for the Protected Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) of the south east of England. The Kent Downs AONB has provided a lead role in securing the £1m RDPE grant which supports this ground breaking public private partnership. Since the October launch 32 Kent Downs tourism businesses have signed up to 'Our Land', with 11 more in progress and an active recruitment programme. The Our Land project is all about getting tourism right in the Kent Downs AONB, so that it supports local business and services, provides a great experience for visitors and benefits the landscape. please visit <http://www.our-land.co.uk/holidays/the-kent-downs> for more information.

The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Education Project

This exciting project has focused on getting school children into the AONB – this has been described by at least one participant as 'the best school trip ever'. This year amongst many other things we launched a new website <http://education.kentdowns.org.uk/> additionally we held 12 walks which includes one with was for teachers, 324 children have participated in the walks together with 60 teachers, of which 53 have undergone training, 187 of the children came from rural areas and 117 from urban areas.

Undergrounding of overhead cables

Work has finally started on the Undergrounding scheme on the Woodland Trusts Hucking Estate, in the Mid Kent Downs; Approx. 2km of 11kV cabling is now being removed at a total cost of £352,000

Final approval for the scheme at Ranscombe Farm in Medway has been secured. 1.3km of 11kV to be removed adjacent to the North Downs Way. An estimated cost of £162,000.

Works to the scheme at Saltwood Castle are going through the final stages with UK Power Networks working on the landowner way leave agreements. Work on this scheme to start later in the year. Approx. 900m of 11kV to be removed.

AONB Partnership activity in support of AONB management plan policies

Positive Planning function

We seek to provide an active and supportive planning function to the Local Authorities, partner organisations and communities of the Kent Downs. The Kent Downs AONB is probably the most pressurised AONB from a planning point of view and we seek to be positive and professional in providing helpful planning advice from the Kent Downs AONB perspective and drawing from the management plan.

Our primary focus is to support Local Authorities in the preparation of the policy framework through development plans – we do this by engaging in the early stages of plan making and through active and thorough engagement in the consultation process, although we have also provided comment on over 40 individual applications, usually at the request of JAC members or Local Authority officers.

Overall this year we received 100 general planning requests and responded to 41 of them. In addition we have been involved in providing pre-application advice in two major development cases, responses to the Minerals and Waste Development Framework, 7 Core Strategies, 6 Wind turbine applications, 2 quarry applications and 4 pipelines. In addition we worked at the regional and national level in support of SE Protected Landscapes Planners Meetings and the National Association of AONBs response to the Draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Guidance documents

The AONB design guidance documents have been consistently well received by Local Authorities, developers, land managers and farmers along with many others who influence land in the AONB. This year we have worked to update both the Kent Downs Land Manager's pack, the landscape design handbook and we have been actively promoting the more recent Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook. We have finalised a new design guidance document in partnership with English Heritage, KCC Heritage and the Kent Design Initiative, focusing on the design of farmsteads in the landscape. The advent of the National Planning Policy Framework, with a focus on 'good design' is likely to make our design guidance more important in the future.

Farming

The Kent Downs is a farmed landscape and promoting and supporting sustainable farming which supports the landscape is a key issue. This year we have taken a new step in recognising best practice through the sponsorship of the Kent Food, Farming and Landscape Award as part of the Taste of Kent Awards, this new award received significant publicity and there were 12 excellent entries – it has been seen as a real success in providing much needed recognition for the good work which has been achieved. We have also worked on the revision of the Kent Downs AONB farm diversification tool kit.

Communications

The Kent Downs AONB web site

This year has seen extensive work updating the web site, the new site is due to go live early in 2012, and will be linked to social media, have a more intuitive layout and updated content. The existing site continues to be very well used with over 1m visits to our most popular pages and 224,000 downloads.

The Kent Downs Orchid newspaper

Two editions of the Kent Downs AONB newspaper have been published a total of 140000 papers

The newspaper provides news and updates to Kent Downs AONB communities and those who live in and around, it has a web presence on the Kent on Sunday website along with the Kent Downs AONB site and provides an important resource in support of tourism in the AONB.

Gateway signs

Already over 80 village gateway signs, signalling that the village is in the Kent Downs AONB have been installed, this year we have secured more funding and another 25 are in line for being installed.



High Weald AONB January – March Report

Publication of a new historical character video on www.highweald.org; a High Weald Victorian Garden Owner.

Launch of an updated route guide, in downloadable form, to replace the original High Weald Landscape Trail Guidebook which was published by the Committee in May 1999.

Delivery of a 2nd video workshop to help accommodation providers produce low cost videos that promote their property and the surrounding landscape.

Promotion of the newly launched 'Love our Land' campaign which is encouraging people to post what they love - in words, pictures or film - about the South East's Protected Landscapes

Support with the production of new interpretations boards and leaflets for the Forestry Commission's Weald Forest Ridge sites and archaeology-themed leaflets, boards and a video for Ashdown Forest.

Delivery of a 5th School Energy Day involving 4 schools and 120 pupils; hosted for the first time by Buchan Country Park in West Sussex.

Primary School High Weald themed Creative Workshop Programme (drama, art and songs & sounds) completed; over 5000 pupil sessions delivered in 2012/13.

'Twilight' teacher training session held for 12 teachers from 7 schools to promote outdoor learning opportunities at the Ashdown Forest Centre and across the wider High Weald AONB.

Delivery of 3 events to support secondary school and university students with learning about the landscape and careers in the sector.

Grant aid and assistance with woodland taster days to enable the recruitment of businesses and apprentices to the new 'Work in the Woods' Apprenticeship Scheme led by the Small Woods Association.

Comments and other involvement in 30 minor planning applications and other consultations.

Initiation of a ROW project to enable High Weald character assessment to be built into routeway/footpath diversion decisions within East Sussex.

A 'Discovering Sandrock' Event which brought a diverse audience together to explore the use of combined surveys: geological; ecological; and heritage; to inform sandrock management advice and plans.

National and local liaison involving NAAONB, Natural England, Defra and other protected landscapes on boundary reviews, national AONB monitoring, HLS targeting, national designation strategy, national AONB policy and national Character Area Statements.

Agreement by the JAC to the activities and timetable for the High Weald AONB Management Plan Review.

Savings of £28,700 identified and agreed to enable a balanced JAC budget for 2012/13.

Submission of a grant bid of £2million to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Battle and Brede Landscape Partnership Scheme following consultation with individuals from 67 organisations.