



**TMBC Projects 2013-14 Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
April 2013-February 2014**

The Partnership's Objectives:

- 1. Creating, sustaining and enhancing our landscape and 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**

Project work is delivered by the Partnership team; Mark Pritchard (MP), Mary Tate (MT) and Ben Collins on Maternity leave cover (BC) supported by the Manager Caroline Drewett (CD). Seasonal staff are recruited as stewards for Oare Gunpowder works managed by MVCP as part of the Kent Countryside Management Partnership's contract with Swale Borough Council.

The majority of projects are funded through a number of partners thereby increasing the value for each partner financially.

A Steering Group of representatives from the Environment Agency, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (Mike Harris), Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council steer the Partnership through quarterly meetings and a MoA.

Creating, sustaining and enhancing our landscape & biodiversity

Giant Hogweed Control Programme (BT)

In 2013 the project again covered 200km of riparian habitat through liaising with landowners and organisations to deliver a coordinated control of Giant Hogweed. The Scheme covers the Medway catchment and the River Cray in the London Borough of Bexley. In specific areas Himalayan Balsam (for flood defence purposes) and Japanese Knotweed is also controlled.

Over 400 landowners are in contact with the scheme (some carrying out their own control) with over 20,000 plants treated in the 2012 spray season by our spray contractor. The scheme provides advice and where needed practical support in the control of the non native species in a coordinated catchment approach. The latest annual report can be provided upon request.

Woodland Walk Coppicing (MT)

MVCP are working with the woodland walk committee and TMBC officers to undertake a coppicing regime along woodland walk in Tonbridge. Two Thursday Action Group Volunteer days have been scheduled to start work on the coppicing in February 2014.

Rivers Work (MT)

The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) came into force in December 2000 and became part of UK law in December 2003. It provides an opportunity to plan and deliver a better water environment, focusing on ecology. It commits European Union member states to achieve good qualitative and quantitative status of all water bodies in the long-term.

To achieve 'good status' both the ecological and the chemical status of a surface water body need to be at least 'good'. Ecological status refers to the quality of the structure and functioning of aquatic ecosystems of the surface waters.

River Basin Management Plans written by the EA provide the framework for working with partners and local communities to deliver improved status of our water bodies. The Partnership is leading on the development of local action plans supporting communities to look at their rivers in terms of the strengths, threats and opportunities. These local action plans will help prioritise project work in the short and long-term and will in turn inform the River basin management plan for the Medway Catchment.

The Partnership is working with the South East Rivers Trust to secure project delivery funding in the future for the waterbodies in the catchment. Although a European directive, this is a great opportunity to get some real actions for the rivers in the Medway catchment. We are currently focussing on the River Len, Beult, Ditton Stream and Bourne where we have set up working groups and carried out local consultation with landowners, organisations and the wider community. Site visits are underway and action plan are being drafted for consultation in the next two months.

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33362.aspx>

River Bourne Working Group (MT)

The inaugural meeting of the River Bourne Working Group will happen in late February/early March to gather as much information about the river as possible to be able to draft the action plan for the river. The meeting will be held at Hadlow College at a time and date to be confirmed shortly.

Ditton Stream Working Group (MT)

The Ditton Stream Working Group has been set up and a draft action plan has been sent to members for consultation. The next meeting of the group has been scheduled to take place in late February where actions will be discussed and adopted by the group.

Dene Park (MT MP)

2013 was a busy year at Dene Park following the Veolia funding with practical work (rhododendron clearance with the help of TAG), interpretation, events and Hadlow College sessions undertaken. A range of events and activities were held on site;

- Historic landscape character assessment of site 17/02/2013. In association with Kent County Council Country Archaeologist a group of seven led by MVCP assessing woodland historic landscape archaeological features.
- Hi-tech treasure hunt and butterfly event sponsored by the British Ecological Society
- Fungi walk .
- Dormice surveys
- Amphibian survey
- Butterfly survey
- GCN assessment

Leybourne Lakes Wildlife Management Plan (MT and MP)

A draft management plan has been produced as an active working document for staff and volunteers on site. Comments have been made by Leybourne Lakes Rangers and TMBC Officers with a second draft underway.

Clare Lake Enhancement Project (MP)

De-silting and de-fishing of the lake to restore its biodiversity and use as an educational resource working in partnership with the East Malling School, local volunteers, Councillors and East Malling & Larkfield Parish Council. An initial £5k of funding has been secured.

Good Woods (MP)

Some 40 site visits were made to woodland owners in North and West Kent embracing more than 1,000 Ha of woodland. Of these visits five were held in the borough of Tonbridge and Malling at both privately and publically owned woodlands. The Good Woods project focuses on reaching out to owners of under-managed woodlands. It promotes the benefits of woodland management planning; helps to strengthen links between communities and woodlands; builds forestry skills, and aims to develop markets for woodland products.

Four advice visits have been held in TMBC borough encouraging and advising landowners (including the Borough Council) as to how to get their woods back into active management.

Church Farm (MP)

Ongoing woodland thinning and meadow establishment on the site owned by East Malling and Larkfield PC.

Save our Magnificent Meadows

A recently secured project, part of a national Plantlife HLF programme to restore grasslands through England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. MVCP are leading on the Kent aspects which focus on advising and restoring grasslands in the Low Weald and Sevenoaks and Tonbridge Weald. A f/t Partnership Officer will be recruited to deliver the project (£290,000 over 3 years).

Developing, managing and supporting community-based environmental initiatives

Beat Project East Malling (MT)

The Partnership has continued to advise and help develop the wildlife garden with the Beat project.

St Philips Church (MT)

Plans for the garden and play area have been approved and finalised, MVCP and St Philips Church are working together to find funding for the garden project following an unsuccessful bid to Nineveh charitable foundation. Grants from Coop and CEMEX are currently being investigated.

Thursday Action Group

Supporting the Partnership through the TAG programme is our valued team of volunteers undertaking practical project work with us. So far in the 2013/14 financial year 530 practical volunteer days have been spent in the Tonbridge and Malling borough through TAG.

Examples:

- Hedge laying and coppicing Priory Wood x 3
- Coppicing at Woodland Walk to improve light levels. Materials then to be used for in-stream enhancement at Leybourne Lakes Country Park.
- Coppicing and woodland thinning at Haysden Country Park

Trees to Treasure

Through the project 880 native trees were provided to groups, parishes and for public open spaces in the borough in 2013 with 60 volunteers carrying out the planting. An additional year of funding has been requested to the Big Tree Plant for the final year of the BTP scheme. If successful a number of trees will be available for schools in the borough/ public open spaces.

Kent Orchards for Everyone Project

Pippa Palmar (our new part time Kent Orchards for Everyone Orchards Officer) will be delivering the HLF project (4 years) focussing on priority orchards across the Faversham and Greensand fruitbelt). Macey's Meadow and Plaxtol are two within the Borough alongside New Ash Green receiving training, support for orchard restoration and advice.

Developing, and promoting life long outdoor learning

Snodland Wildlife Garden (MT and MP)

The Partnership has been working with Snodland Town Council to promote and use the site to run events for the public and with the local primary school. Site management has been ongoing with the MVCP TAG team every year.

TMBC Playscheme (MT)

MVCP have been approached by TMBC to be involved with the planning and some delivery of the Summer Playscheme. Details to be confirmed following an initial meeting with Borough Council Officers and MVCP staff.

Encouraging and enhancing greater access in the outdoors and the corresponding health benefits

Haysden and Leybourne Lakes Country Park events (MT)

Dates and themes for events at Haysden Country Park in 2014 are being finalised. Currently a minibeast hunt during national insect week in June and a bat walk in August have been scheduled. The Leybourne Lakes events will be finalised with support from MVCP.

Ensuring the Partnership has the resources for effective development and operation

A significant role of the Partnership Manager and Senior Partnership Officer is to develop projects and subsequently secure funding for them to meet community needs in the coming year/s. The finances are managed on a day to day basis by both with forecasting and budget management by the Partnership Manager.

The partnership is supported by Kent County Council's HR and Finance teams.