

Kent Downs Bulletin

October 2003

News and Updates from the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

New Director for AONB Unit



Nick Johannsen has recently been appointed as Director of the AONB Unit. Nick has been working as the AONB Officer on a job share basis for the last two years and has worked in countryside management in Kent for the last 14 years. A Unit Support Officer, an External Funding Officer and a Heritage Lottery Fund Project Officer have also been recruited recently. These new posts will improve our ability to ensure the future conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs landscape.

Landscape Enhancement Grants across the AONB

The AONB Unit has secured funding from the Countryside Agency and the Interreg IIIa programme to ensure that the whole Kent Downs AONB is covered by landscape enhancement grants. The grants are being managed by the Countryside Management Projects. To find out more please contact North West Kent Countryside Project (01322 294727) for the Sevenoaks or Gravesham part of the AONB, the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (01622 683695) for the Medway or Tonbridge and Malling part, the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Project (01622 221532) for Maidstone and Swale part, the Kentish Stour Countryside Project (01233 813307) for the Ashford and Canterbury part, and the White Cliffs Countryside Project (01304 241806) for the Dover and Shepway part of the AONB.

Tourism project reports...

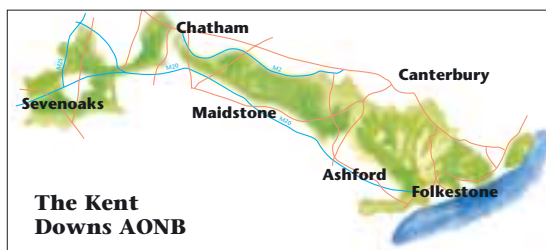
A detailed report has been completed into the sustainable tourism opportunities in the Kent Downs. This report forms the blueprint for sustainable tourism projects in the Kent Downs. For more details or a copy of the report please contact Tristan Lavender on 01892 500326.

Woodland project gets started

This is a three year project jointly funded by the Countryside Agency and Forestry Commission. Stage 1 will compile woodland information and data for the AONB, stage 2 will prioritise action in AONB woodlands for biodiversity, landscape, recreation and access, stage 3 will deliver action on the ground. For more information contact Emma at the AONB Unit.

What is an AONB?

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are designated by the Government to conserve and enhance irreplaceable areas of precious countryside. There are 41 AONBs in England and Wales. The Kent Downs was designated an AONB in 1968 and covers about a quarter of Kent from the White Cliffs of Dover to the London and Surrey border.



Village Design Statements

Rural Communities in Kent are being given the opportunity to learn how to have more say in planning decisions by attending free workshops on how to prepare a Village Design Statement. A Village Design Statement is a community-produced document that can be accepted by the district council as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This means it must be considered when any planning application affecting an area is received by the district or borough council.



Workshops were held at Trottiscliffe, Harrietsham and Kingston. More than 60 people attended. The workshops are a joint initiative between the Kent Downs AONB Unit, Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Swale Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Medway Council. The workshops have been partly funded by the European Regional Development Fund INTERREG IIIa programme.

www.kentdowns.org.uk

Transmanche Integrated Landscape Project

Following a successful application to the European Regional Development Fund INTERREG IIIa programme, rapid progress is being made spending £750,000 on conserving, enhancing and improving access to the Kent Downs AONB, and surrounding areas, and the Parc Naturel Regional des Caps et Marais d'Opale in northern France.



Work undertaken to date includes

- 106 ha land benefiting from improved landscape and biodiversity management /restoration
- 11 km of paths have been improved
- 19 Interpretation Panels installed
- 12 waymarked routes created
- Work has been undertaken in five areas of woodland
- 734 children and young adults and 2,034 adults have participated in a range of activities including guided walks exchange visits and conservation tasks
- A land cover change survey to monitor and evaluate landscape changes in the Kent Downs AONB. It examined how land use had changed between 1961 and 1999.

Annual report published

The year 2002-03 was a busy and productive one for the AONB. Particular highlights for the year include securing significant new funds for the Kent Downs, delivering action on the ground through new projects and progress on the Management Plan.

The full Kent Downs AONB Annual Review can be viewed on the website www.kentdowns.org.uk or for a copy contact the AONB Unit.

Management Plan

A successful Countryside Day brought to an end the consultation period for the draft Management Plan at the end of June. Seventy-five people attended the day which was held at Dunn Street Farm, Westwell, near Ashford. Participants enjoyed a local produce lunch and a walk around the farm which highlighted the main issues to be addressed through the Management Plan.

The final plan, taking in JAC, Countryside Agency and English Nature observations will be adopted by February 2004 enabling the final document to be produced by the statutory deadline of 1st April 2004.



Mid Kent Downs Project

The Mid Kent Downs project is supporting Detling and Boxley parish councils as they put together a funding bid to buy Horish Wood, an area of great landscape and wildlife value that has an uncertain future following development of the rail link. Another exciting development is a Local Heritage Initiative application for the Lynsted Community Orchard project to fund celebratory events and interpretation.

There are more tasks coming up at Scragged Oak and Boxley Warren, and a 'Fungus Foray' in Perry Wood on Sunday 12th October. Also, another Landscape Enhancement Grant Scheme is offering an opportunity to landowners throughout the area for small-scale conservation projects ranging from chalk grassland restoration, hedgerow planting through to orchard restoration and small-scale woodland management.

Communication

Over 100 people took part in the programme of Farm Walks that took place across the AONB throughout June. These walks provided participants with an opportunity to understand the important role played by farming in the landscape of the



Kent Downs AONB. The walks this year involved a couple of tractor and trailer rides, a barbecue, cherry tasting and the usual fascinating insight into wildlife and landscape and community history.

In the winter issue of *The Orchid*, look out for the selection of interesting articles on limekilns, the Pathway to Pluto, horse pasture management, living churchyards, important arable weeds, bats and work carried out in the CAMS area of the AONB.

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The Kent Downs Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is an alliance of 21 national and local organisations which co-ordinates policy and action to conserve the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Members – County and Unitary Councils Kent, Medway and London Borough of Bromley. District and Borough Councils Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling.

Countryside Agency, Country Land and Business Association, Environment Agency, English Nature, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, National Farmers Union, Kent Rural Community Council, Kent Association of Parish Councils.



This project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The Countryside Agency

