



Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme Enhanced Farm Environment Plan Service

Administered by Kent County Council (KCC) through the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit (AONB).

This document explains the purpose of this scheme and how the support is accessed.

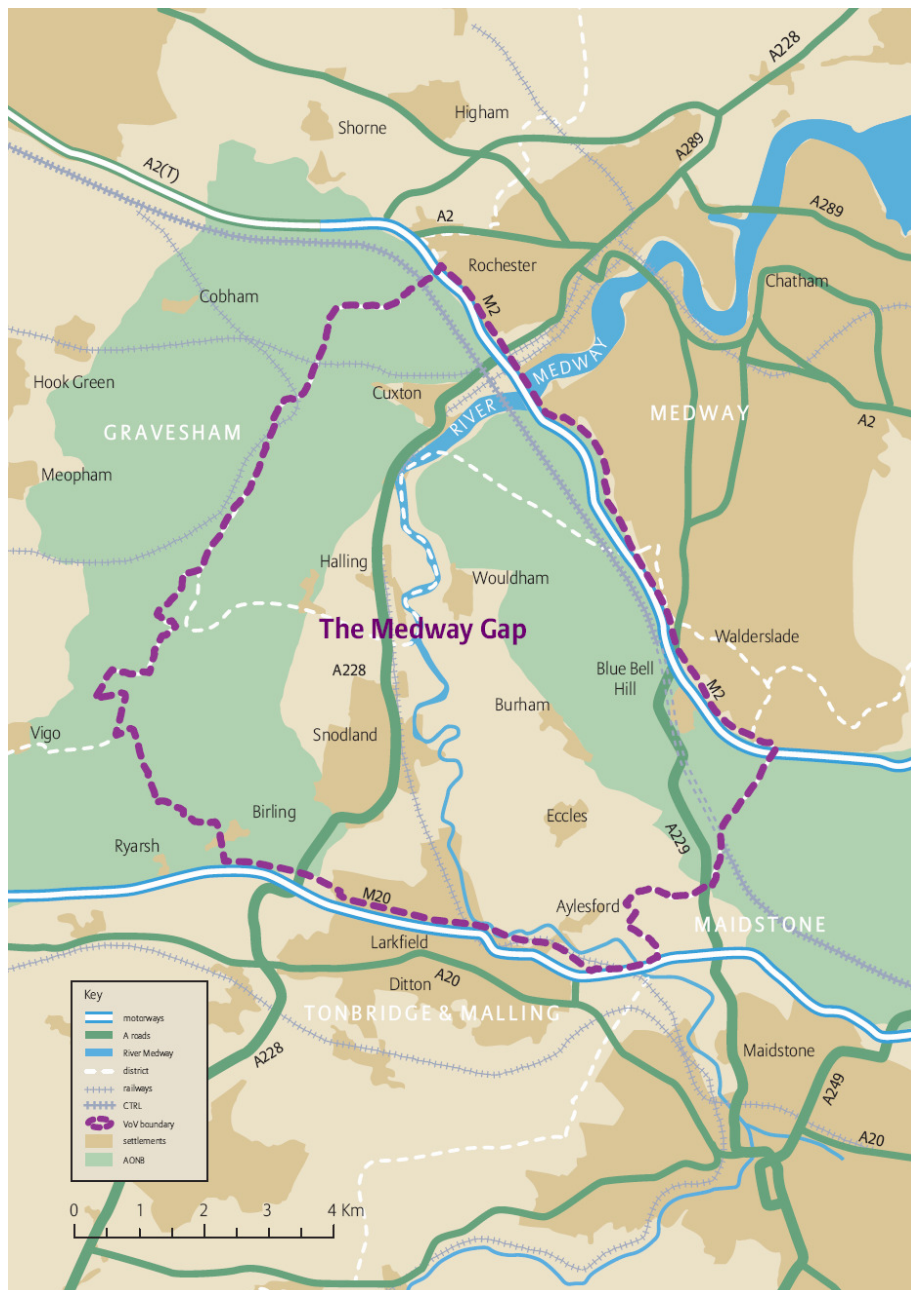
I. What is the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme?

The Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership brings together organisations from the public, private and voluntary sector to:

- Ensure that the unique character of the Medway Gap is conserved, understood and enjoyed by local people and visitors of all ages and backgrounds.
- Build confidence and capacity to ensure that residents and businesses can actively engage in decision making and management.

The Medway Gap is a distinct landscape area in North Kent that extends to approximately 25 square miles (see map). It occupies a strategic location, framing the southern portal from the Thames Gateway growth area into Mid-Kent, and forming a critical east-west link in the long chain of exceptional countryside assets that comprise the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is an area in transition and under pressure: as old industries decline, farming and land management practices change, and new housing and development expand with attendant 'urban fringe' problems. However, with change come opportunities to work with communities and businesses to protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage assets, and to engage local communities and visitors in exploring, understanding, caring for, celebrating and linking this special place.

Location of the Valley of Visions Scheme Area



Extensive consultation has shown widespread support from all sectors for an area wide, partnership approach to securing these opportunities. Through the Valley of Visions LPS a series of programmes and projects have been developed that will:

- Conserve the natural and cultural heritage through active management.
- Increase opportunities for appropriate access, both physical and intellectual, for local people and visitors.

- Raise appreciation for and understanding of the Valley, its special features and way of life.
- Improve people's quality of life through active participation and a safe, clean and quiet environment.
- Increase the capacity and businesses to actively participate in decision making and management.
- Provide support and advice to local businesses. N 454/2006 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty LSP Scheme has already provided cover for a number of these measures mentioned above.

2. What is the Enhanced Farm Environment Plan Service?

Technical support is an important means of encouraging and assisting farmers and other land managers to conserve and enhance the special landscape quality, biodiversity, and cultural heritage of the Medway Gap.

This measure in the Valley of Visions LPS includes technical support provided in the following ways:

- Bespoke detailed advice and support for target agricultural businesses on biodiversity and landscape heritage management and funding options.
- General advice to other landowners on landscape, biodiversity management.

Detailed technical support will comprise: -

- Survey of the land holding including current land use, landscape and heritage features, ecological assessment, archaeological assessment and access.
- Development of an Enhanced Farm Environment Plan in consultation with the landowner identified management proposals and potential funding opportunities.
- Specific advice on management of traditional landscapes to aid implementation.

General advice may be by phone or site visit and may cover management of traditional landscapes and grant sources.

3. Who is eligible to benefit from this project?

EU rules are applied and to comply with Agricultural State Aid businesses must meet the following eligibility conditions:

Participants must be an agricultural or land based business within the Valley of Visions project area. The business must be classified as a Small or Medium sized Enterprise (SME) in line with Annex I of Commission Regulation 70/2001 (as amended). Larger companies will not be eligible. In summary an SME:

- Has fewer than 250 employees and;
- Has either an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million, or a balance sheet equity not exceeding €43 million, and;
- Is not owned at a rate of more than 25% by other companies.

European law restricts the amount of State Aid given to businesses.

Eligible Costs

Aid will be provided in accordance with Article 15 of EC Regulations 1857/2006 up to 100% which relates to granting technical support and covers training, education, consultancy advice and support in participation in competitions and exhibitions.

No aid under this measure will be paid directly to beneficiaries. Technical support will be available from VoV project officers or their agents (such as suitably qualified advisory consultants) with the approval of the beneficiary. Whether support is given from VoV project officers or external consultants depends on where the greatest expertise lies.

Anticipated expenditure under this measure

The value of the aid allocated under this measure between 2008 and 2011 will not exceed £21,839.

Expenditure on advice is calculated on the basis of three targeted farm plans covering an area of approximately 3000 hectares with a total State Aid value of £21,839 over the three years.

4. What does the beneficiary need to do to receive the aid?

As likely beneficiaries were identified during the consultation stage of the VoV LPS, these will be approached directly by VoV project officers and invited to benefit from the service. The criteria for determining beneficiaries was based on:

- Size of land holding.
- Designations (e.g. SSSI, AONB, SAM etc) and other natural and cultural heritage features present on the farm.
- Likelihood of successful application to the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme or Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

5. When will the project commence?

This project will start on 1 September 2008 or once the summary of the grant has been in the possession of the European Commission for 10 working days, whichever is the later. It will be completed no later than 30 June 2012.