



wkps

Watch on
the Weald

FREE

Newsletter of the Weald of Kent Protection Society

www.wkps.org.uk

secretary@wkps.org.uk

Dec 2021

No: 168



Biodiversity Gain and Planning

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), or Biodiversity Gain (BG) as it is referred to in the recently enacted Environment Act 2021, is described in Government guidance (gov.uk) as ‘an approach which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand’.

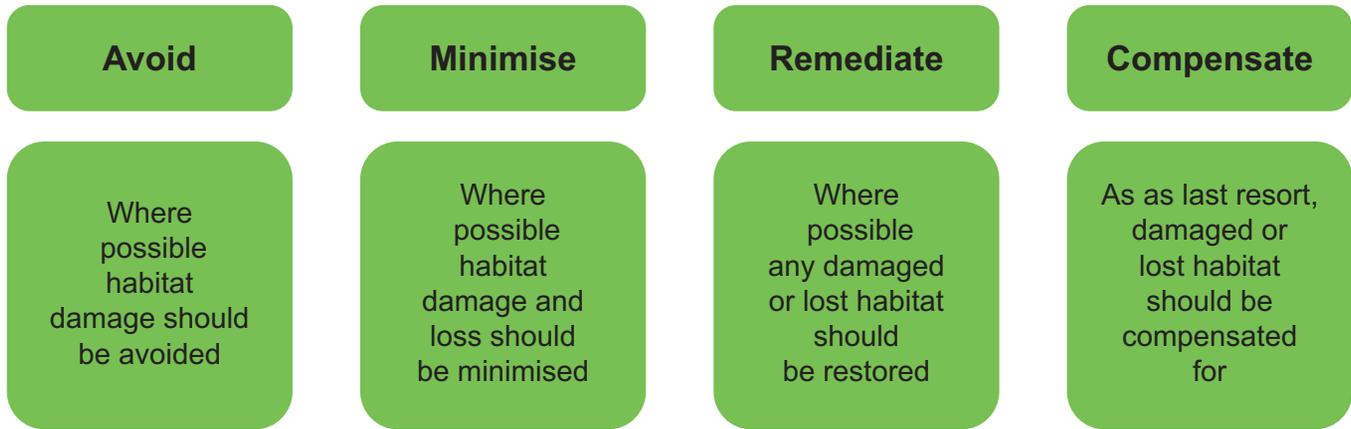
In other words, development must produce a positive impact through avoiding or mitigating harm to biodiversity, specifically in respect of habitat features, and must deliver improvements via habitat creation or enhancement.

The Environment Act introduces a requirement to deliver biodiversity gain for developments in England, but there is a two-year transition period before mandatory biodiversity gain becomes law (autumn 2023). During this transition period, local planning authorities (LPAs) are expected to increasingly apply and require the measures set out within the Act as part of their development decision making process.

Key requirements of the Act:

- Developers must deliver 10% biodiversity gain through their schemes (measured by a metric, currently Metric 3.0).
- A biodiversity gain plan will be needed to demonstrate how biodiversity gain will be delivered, on-site and/or off-site.
- Developers will have to guarantee the biodiversity gain for 30 years.
- New ‘local nature recovery strategies’ will be prepared to geographically cover England ‘by responsible authorities’; this will encourage habitat creation and enhancement in the right places.
- If biodiversity cannot be delivered locally, developers will have to buy ‘biodiversity units’.

The fundamental principles of environmental protection and ecological good practice is the mitigation hierarchy which is already in use:



The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) under paragraphs 179 & 180 refers to biodiversity net gain and promotes the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, giving guidance to LPAs in their decision making. This is current policy in England, but the approach taken by the LPAs varies. Some LPAs already have biodiversity gain policies within their Local Plans, and as a result of the Environment Act, will be preparing Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/SPG) in readiness for the mandatory requirement in autumn 2023. TWBC, for example, is progressing the policies and has a programme in place for a Biodiversity Net Gain SPD timed for adoption in August 2023.



Peta Grant
Planning Committee Secretary

The Greater Ashford Borough Environment & Land Mapping Commission

Our Chairman, Mike Bax has accepted an invitation to sit on this new body representing WKPS and two meetings have already taken place.

The Commission is established as a collegiate and forward-thinking body, independent of the Council and any other organisations to which its members are affiliated. The objective is to undertake an independent land mapping exercise that will inform and assist the Council in shaping future strategy, including the continuously evolving Corporate Plan and the important Ashford Local Plan.

Whilst recognising a need to identify suitable locations for well-designed housing, the future use of open land will be considered to ensure that rural villages are protected from merger into urban sprawl. The Council’s declared ambition is to be a green pioneer and an example to Central Government and others by showing what can be achieved.

The aim will be to protect the best of our natural environment and character of our rural villages for the enjoyment and wellbeing of current and future populations, contributing to the Local Plan process and enabling the Ashford Borough economy to grow.

There will be engagement and briefings from professional advisers and Council Officers as well as engagement with Town and Parish Councils and the community at large.

The Commission will also be required to take account of four significant challenges faced by the Borough Council.

Firstly, concerns over inadequate treatment of domestic sewage.

Secondly, contamination of the internationally protected site at Stodmarsh which is being degraded by nitrates and phosphates entering the River Stour from wastewater treatment works and agriculture.

Thirdly, the pollution risk arising from the Inland Port Health facilities recently established at Sevington. Fourthly, the obvious affects arising from climate change in relation to which many challenges clearly lie ahead.

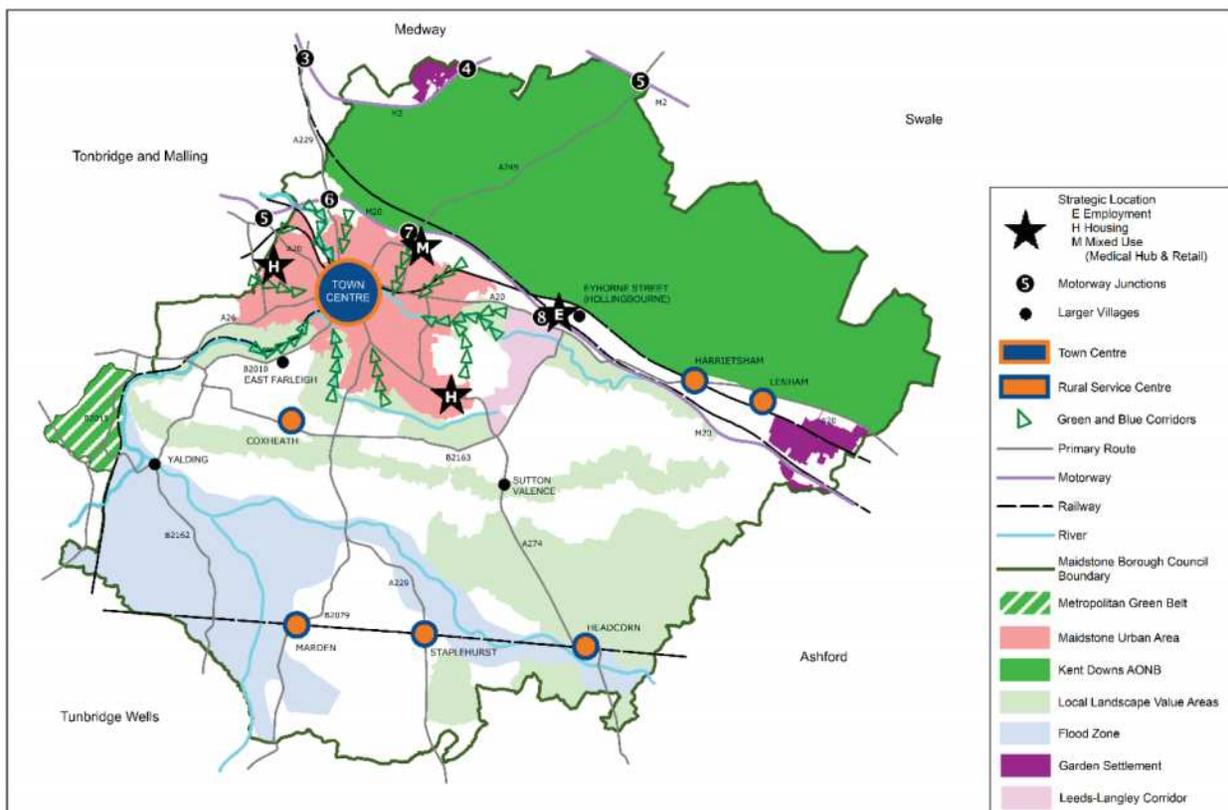
The Commission’s final report is required early in December 2022.



Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review

The public consultation on Maidstone Borough Council's (MBC's) new Local Plan ended on 12 December 2021. This Plan period is the 15 years 2022 to 2037. The Plan replaces that of 2017 to 2032.

The proposed Local Plan addresses all planning issues in its 296 pages. The big changes from the previous Plan are the increase from 883 to 1160 per annum in the Government-required number of housing units to be built and the inclusion of the two Garden Villages – Lenham Heath and Lidsing (north of the M2). Together with Maidstone Town and its environs, these three do the heavy lifting of the higher housing numbers, meaning less pressure in the remainder of the MBC area, including the Weald.



Maidstone Borough Key Diagram

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. The Maidstone Borough Council Licence No 100019636, 2016 Scale 1:140000. Produced by GIS Molkent Services.

MBC divides its development categories into seven levels, its so-called Settlement Hierarchy – see map. Each has its own policies and plans. Maidstone Town is level 1. Lenham Heath and Lidsing are level 2. The third level identifies two Strategic Development locations. The most relevant to many is to set planning restraints on the corridor which will eventually house the Leeds/Langley bypass of the rural economy.

In the fourth to seventh levels, MBC have retained the long-standing policies from the previous Plan. The policies applying at these lowest four levels of the hierarchy and their application within the WKPS area are as follows:

- Rural Service Centres: Strengthen their services and allow some housing. Applies to Headcorn, Marden and Staplehurst.
- Larger Villages: a limited amount of development. Applies to Sutton Valence.
- Smaller Villages and Hamlets: very limited development, led by local plans. Applies to Chart Sutton, Grafty Green and Ulcombe.
- The Countryside: no planned development. Case-by-case review provided the countryside is conserved and enhanced, also supports diversification of the rural economy.

The result of the application of these policies in this 5-year proposed Plan, within the WKPS area, is one development on the outskirts of Headcorn, one on the outskirts of Marden and two in Staplehurst. There are no identified development plans for Sutton Valence, the smaller villages or the countryside, except a few enlargements of gypsy and traveller sites (new sites were not forthcoming in MBC's recent Call for Sites). The policies to protect the countryside north of the railway line in Marden and Staplehurst have been retained.

The four identified development sites have each previously come before the relevant Parish Councils. Two were rejected recently by both the PCs and WKPS. Each has flooding and/or sewage disposal issues and other infrastructure problems.



David Northcroft

Hedges and Pavements - An Autumn Task

Autumn is upon us. Growth is slowing, the harvest is in and blackberries, mushrooms, hazelnuts and other fruit are available to gather.

When ploughing and other autumn tasks have been done, farmers turn their thoughts to the maintenance of hedges – and so ought every householder who has a hedge or other vegetation along the public pavement between their property and the road or abutting the road.

There is a saying that ‘ignorance of the law is no excuse’ and it is surprising how many people apparently do not know the requirement (of the Highways Act 1980) that a ‘pavement must be clear for the full width of the pavement and to 2.1m (7 feet) above the pavement’. So, an uncleared pavement is not only antisocial but illegal! Obstructed pavements hinder the passage of pedestrians, especially the disabled and those with wheelchairs, buggies, children, pets etc., and walking side by side.

The ‘full width’ of a pavement obviously varies but many pavements have kerbs or other recognisable edges of the walking surface, and all too often the inner edge especially is overgrown by a hedge, shrubs, flowers, grasses or other vegetation which it is the householder's duty to clear back to the inner edge thus allowing users their legal allowance of the full width.

It is of course not only an autumn requirement but a perpetual one. However, the householder must obviously keep aware of any birds which may be nesting in the spring or summer.

Extra rules apply if your property actually borders the highway, in which case overhanging vegetation must be cleared to a minimum height of 5m (16 feet) for buses or HGVs and, if your property is rural, vegetation should be 0.45m (1' 6") behind the road edge and clear of road signs for at least 20m.

Also, of course, if you live near a junction or inside bend of the road, consider vegetation clearance to maximise visibility for road users – including yourself! And it is surprising how many properties could easily improve sightlines for vehicles entering and, particularly, exiting their drives, thereby also reassuring passing vehicles and pedestrians.

To keep pavements clear obviously supplements the extensive network of Public Rights of Way in the Weald of Kent, thus facilitating walking within the settlements and between them and throughout the area, helping all to access our Wonderful Weald and keep it that way!



Peter Whitestone

Flood Risk in the Ashford Borough



The Borough of Ashford is located in central/eastern Kent and is a landlocked area of approx. 224 square miles. Land within the Borough drains to the catchments of the Kentish Stour, the River Medway and the River Rother/Romney and Walland Marshes.

Ashford itself is at the confluence of the Great and East Stour close to the Old Flour Mill. Some of the borough drains to the River Beult which discharges to the Medway at Yalding and the south of the borough drains to the Rother and Marsh.

The majority of the Borough is on the impermeable soils of the Low Weald but geology at the edges of the Weald includes chalk, gault clay and lower greensand.

During the 1960s and 70s there were a number of instances of widespread flooding from the River Stour as a result of which two flood storage reservoirs were constructed upstream of Ashford at Aldington on the East Stour and at Hothfield on the Great Stour.

The new Agriculture and Environment Acts promote new principles for the payment of subsidy to farmers and landowners based on the premise that if they are to receive public money, they should provide public goods in return.

Natural flood management is one of the means by which a public good can be provided and a small project is now established near Shadoxhurst to investigate how water might be retained in the landscape around the headstreams of the River Beult during periods of high rainfall.

This trial will monitor measures to restore natural processes that support flow regulation including reduction of the impact of artificial drainage, increasing retention of water within the soil, 'slowing the flow' in order to reduce flood risk downstream and alongside this to increase resilience of the environment and water supply to drought.

At Streetend Wood a watercourse runs roughly south west to north through semi-natural ancient woodland and a length of approx. 330 metres of this channel has seen intervention in two sections.

Firstly, at the upstream end, several small channels converge to pass under a culvert and several structures have been created, the goal of which is to spill water out across the land and create more wet woodland habitat.



In the second section the channel has been infilled to allow water to smoothly exit the watercourse and spill onto surrounding land.

Small ponds have been created along other sections of the channel,

creating open water habitat with a wetland character.



Depressions and other channels on either side of the main watercourse will help to store water onsite for longer, and timber has been cut and laid at right angles to the flow in order to dissipate the energy of the flow and increase residence times of water, therefore promoting water retention in line with the objective of natural flood management.

Hundreds of such watercourses run to the main stem of the River Beult, mostly manmade for the purpose of draining the Weald. If water can be retained in the landscape during wet winter weather events, villages such as Yalding may see a benefit and there will be smaller local areas where the risk of flood damage may also be reduced.

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman





Coppicing in the Weald

Those of you who have lived and worked in the Weald for any length of time will realise the significance of the belts of coppice woodland that stretch right across the area. The Weald (the word derives from the German 'Wald' or 'forest') is a patchwork of homesteads, farmsteads, smallholdings and village communities which has grown up over the centuries more by accident than design with man eking out his living against the background of the semi-ancient*, almost exclusively broadleaved expanses of woodland which characterise the area. Man has relied on these woodlands, for example, for under-grazing livestock, especially during the leaner winter months; to provide fencing and gates for his fields and protected areas; for hop poles during the heyday of the hop industry; to support the iron and ship-building industries; and for the production of charcoal. More recently, with the demise of these traditional industries and farming methods, and with the post-war removal of tax incentives, landowners have taken less interest in the management of coppice woodland; and although the current focus on climate change may provide a renewed incentive, the ceaseless pressure to develop ever greater swathes of our countryside currently provides far greater financial incentives.

The traditional coppice was established under longer-maturing standards such as oak, which would only be felled when over 100 years old. Oaks were traditionally planted for a density at maturity of 8 oaks per acre. Interplanting for a 40-year 'cash crop' was routinely of larch for the timber trade. The coppice wood in the Weald, as often as not on clay soil, was traditionally hornbeam and sweet chestnut (an ideal wood for fencing materials and valued too by joiners and cabinetmakers), with hazel either grown in its own right as platts, or along the woodland edge.

Depending on the wood involved and, to some extent, on the rate of re-growth, the coppice rotation is between 8-20 years. In any event coppicing should be undertaken before the coppice wood gets too densely into the crown of the neighbouring oak standards. Coppice areas are calculated as half to one hectare and are known as coupes or cants.

It will be obvious that the coppicing cycle (starting when the leaves are off the trees in November and finishing by the end of March) brings about marked changes to the forest floor. Immediately after a coupe has been cleared, with the coppice wood cut back to the stool at ground level (with outward-facing cuts at an angle to avoid rotting the centre), light will flood onto the woodland floor, encouraging the emergence of a wide variety of flora, such as primroses, wood anemones, bluebells, bugle and orchids, many of which may have lain dormant for a number of seasons for lack of adequate light. Bramble, nettle and low scrub will germinate and start into growth, and the cut base of the coppiced stool will sprout new growth, with about three times the number emerging as the ones they are replacing. As this new growth increases, it begins once more to exclude light from the forest floor, discouraging the species that have emerged immediately after the coppice is taken, and so the cycle begins all over again.

Very often, newcomers to the countryside, when walking through coppice woodland that is within only a few years of the coppice being taken, will comment (in a critical tone of voice) on the state of the forest floor. The word 'scrub' is often used, with a disparaging undertone. What these visitors to our Wealden woodlands do not understand is that without this so-called scrub we will not have our ground-nesting birds such as nightingales, woodcock, and various species of game birds, not to mention other animals which need the scrub for cover. It is a sobering thought that in the past 40 years we have lost 90% of our nightingales in this country, in large measure because of the destruction of their natural habitat: scrub, with wide rides to enable them to maintain good sightlines while feeding, and natural ponds, especially in Spring and early summer before their young have fledged.

The homogeneity of the Wealden landscape is one of its principal strengths and attractions. Its essence is woodland, and worked woodland is both its past and its future. Lost coppice cannot easily be replaced. We mismanage it at our peril and at a collective loss to us all.

*There is almost no truly ancient woodland left in the UK, although fragments of genuinely 'wild wood' (i.e. never man-managed) can be found, curiously, in the middle of Dartmoor and in the Caledonian forest. Semi-ancient woodland, i.e. woodland that has been man-managed but has been woodland consistently since at least 1600. As we know, the woodlands of the Kentish Weald have been man-managed for considerably longer than that.

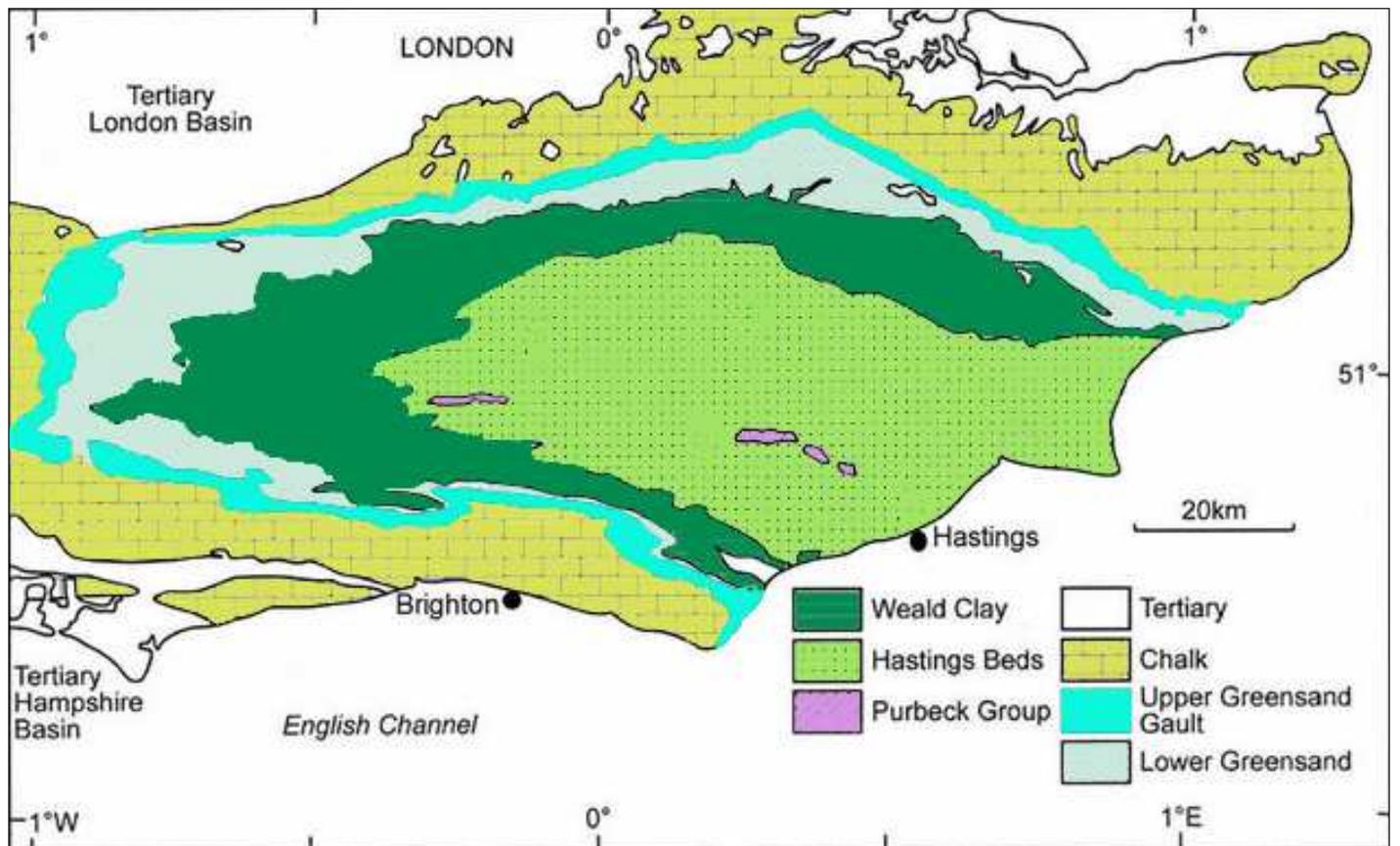


Peregrine Massey
WKPS President

The Ground Beneath our Feet

It is tempting to think of the character of the Weald as being just eight to ten centuries old, from the time we started creating Wealden buildings that we recognise today. But the character has much deeper roots, more than 50 million years. For it is the geology of the land that has determined the development of human habitation and vernacular buildings and informs our judgement. So, what is this geology and how did it influence development?

Before canals, and then railways, transformed the carriage of heavy goods, only local building materials were affordable for most people, and it was the local geology that determined what those materials were.



The map shows the so-called Weald Dome, the rather odd-shaped geology of Kent through to Hampshire. This is the result of more than 50 million years of rises and falls in the land and sea levels, of the separation of the land from France and from erosion. Crucial to both the buildings and to the Weald landscape are the different strata shown on the map.

Our Wealden area has four predominant strata, though all have ancient sandstone seams running through them. The most northern is the Greensand Ridge, the highest point. Next is the fast-draining Lower Greensand. Below that is the Wealden Clay belt. And in the centre of the map the sandstone-based so-called Hastings Beds. Each main stratum provides its own opportunities for we humans.

The most important for Weald vernacular buildings is the Wealden Clay belt, coloured dark green on the map (the BGS map).

Thanks to the clay soils on which oak trees thrive, oak was the abundant material in the Weald. So almost all vernacular Wealden buildings used oak for timber frames. They used the clay for tiles and for wattle and daub walls and clay for making bricks. Ragstone from the outcrops around the Greensand Ridge and from the Maidstone area provided masonry for plinths and walls. Farmed oak gave us close-studding and weatherboard. Hence the local geology provided all the materials for the Weald's vernacular buildings which we see today.

Some of the recent WotW articles demonstrate this: timber-framed Wealden Hall Houses, the unique Kent peg tiles and 1000 years of Marden.

But geology also underpins the broader landscape. The orchards, strawberries and hops of the fertile northern part of the Weald contributed to the Garden of England, now going increasingly to vineyards where the ground dries quickly. The relatively poor soil of the grassy sandstone Hastings Beds is used primarily for sheep grazing and contains the protected medieval landscape of the High Weald.

The historic character of the Weald we observe today derives from geology. As canals, then trains, tarmac roads and HGV's created ease of transportation, so did the opportunity to build and to build again on what had gone before.

Some of the recent WotW articles demonstrate this: timber-framed Wealden Hall Houses, the unique Kent peg tiles and 1000 years of Marden.

But geology also underpins the broader landscape. The orchards, strawberries and hops of the fertile northern part of the Weald contributed to the Garden of England, now going increasingly to vineyards where the ground dries quickly. The relatively poor soil of the grassy sandstone Hastings Beds is used primarily for sheep grazing and contains the protected medieval landscape of the High Weald.

The historic character of the Weald we observe today derives from geology. As canals, then trains, tarmac roads and HGV's created ease of transportation, so did the opportunity to build and to build again on what had gone before.

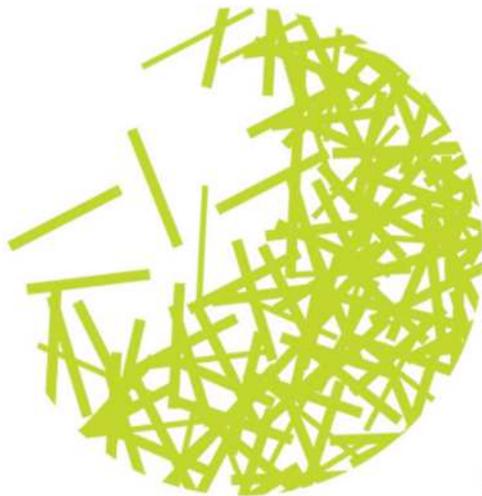


David Northcroft



what a wonderful weald

help us keep it that way



wkps
weald of kent protection society

The aim of our dedicated team of volunteers is to protect our beautiful Wealden towns, villages and countryside from the effects of damaging and unsuitable development, preserving its charm and character for future generations to enjoy. We welcome active members to help us with a range of activities, from scrutinising planning applications to organising events. If, like us, you care about the Weald, please get in touch and get involved.

find out more: www.wkps.org.uk
secretary@wkps.org.uk 07919 871543

Trees, Trees... And more Trees?

COP 26 occupied a lot of headlines in mid-November and then we had Royal Assent for the Environment Act. Amongst all this debate and discussion over climate change and net zero there are endless calls for more tree planting and we now hear of institutional purchasers buying farms in Wales simply for this purpose, with backlash from local communities questioning what will actually be achieved.

There is no doubt that well-planned tree and woodland planting is required on a massive scale, but full context needs to be understood. In most areas, the establishment of a woodland in broadleaved species will probably take 30 years or more. During those early years, actual carbon sequestration will be relatively low compared to the second and third 30-year periods of a woodland's life and it should be noted that carbon sequestration in established grasslands is actually higher than in most woodlands.

The purpose of this article is not to debate how many trees should be planted as the answer to that question is clearly 'a lot'.



But in the Weald of Kent we have some of the most wooded areas in the country, many of which have 'Semi-Natural Ancient' status and are unspoilt by the monotonous softwood plantings of the 20th Century.

Our Ancient Wealden Woodlands generally comprise a canopy of Oak with a great propensity for seed production in the form of acorns. Under the Oak there is a coppice layer of Hornbeam, Sweet Chestnut and Hazel, together with many other tree and shrub species, all of which produce seed.

These seeds are carried by birds and mammals in their beaks, mouths, gut or fur, thereby being spread far and wide along the hedgerows and over open farmland.

The clay soils of the Weald are moisture retentive and when grassland is only lightly grazed or left alone for a period of time, the rate of natural regeneration or natural colonisation is remarkable.

Natural colonisation will never establish the tree numbers that come with ranks of nursery grown saplings, planted in straight lines for timber production or carbon sequestration, but the biodiversity outcome is very likely to be better.

Supplementary planting can be used in advance of or in response to initial colonisation to enrich species composition and speed up the development of a woodland structure. By the same token natural colonisation can also be included where it develops among planted trees. Combining methods could ensure successful establishment and capitalise on the benefits of each method.

The benefits of natural colonisation include the fact that trees successfully established are likely to be well matched to current site conditions. Local genetic diversity and associated adaptive capacity are promoted. The biosecurity risks associated with plant movement are eliminated, and so on.

Drawbacks include unpredictable timescale for establishment, which may continue over several years, and limited control over stocking density. Scrub might be the short to medium term habitat, but scrub is generally good for wildlife.

So, in our Wonderful Weald, let's question the strategy of blanket planting and see if there are parts of a site suitable for natural colonisation from our remarkable semi-natural ancient woodland seed factories.



The Evolution of Archaeology: Gentlemen Diggers to Commercial Units, and what it means for you

Many of us drive through Kent and often witness housing developments or infrastructure projects in full flow. Deep scars can be seen in the landscape, cut by plant machinery and driven by workers wearing fluorescent jackets and hard hats. But what if this development site was thought to have harboured potential archaeology? Would the developers know and, if so, who might be addressing this critical issue? All potential development sites are researched as to their archaeological potential. If that potential is deemed worthy of further attention, a commercial archaeological unit often investigates and reports the findings while working alongside those plant machinery workers.

However, ensuring that all archaeology encountered is preserved or recorded for current and future generations is a relatively recent practice. Archaeology was long considered a purely amateur pursuit. From the earliest antiquarians bringing artefacts back to their country estates to amuse and impress their 'cabinet' friends to wealthy aristocrats digging on their land or land they acquired in search of the next Sutton Hoo.

Of course, these antiquarians didn't have access to plant machinery and wouldn't be expected to shift tonnes of topsoil, subsoil and overburden themselves, but employed local muscle to do the bulky excavations saving their energy to scrape and brush away at the first sign of an interesting potential feature. The techniques developed by antiquarians to dig, record, describe and catalogue excavations were primarily borrowed from other disciplines. Archaeology is one of the more recent 'sciences', and there is little merit in re-inventing the wheel; many of the recording techniques were adapted from the geological sciences, as were the descriptions of the soil types, stratigraphic sequences and the 'law of superposition' that interpret and phase archaeological layers.



Many accuse those early antiquarians of vandalism, and much of what they removed out of context does leave us with more questions than answers. However, the techniques employed by some of the 20th century's most eminent archaeologists, many of which were developed by Howard Carter at Tutankhamun's burial in Egypt, are still in use today. We have them to thank for some of the most incredible discoveries. Augustus Pitt-Rivers was a prolific digger and one of the first to collect artefacts that held no intrinsic value and instead helped narrate the story of the context; Mortimer Wheeler first adopted stratigraphical sequencing into the archaeological discipline invented the box-grid method. He went on to found the Institute of Archaeology, now under University College London, regarded as one of the top educational establishments for studying archaeology in the world.

Archaeology was established in the planning process with the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance Notice 16 (PPG16) in 1990. This meant that potential archaeology was to be considered on every planning application submitted to a local authority along with ecology and other environmental implications. This eventually became the National Planning Policy Framework, which gives local authorities guidance on safeguarding our historic environment by conserving heritage assets and monitoring any impact on archaeology. The policy is also known by its colloquial name; the 'Polluter Pays Principal', whereby a professional archaeologist monitors any development that potentially affects the historic environment. Various archaeological conditions can be imposed to either mitigate or 'preserve record' the heritage assets. The potential is evaluated by a County Archaeological Officer, an experienced archaeologist, using resources such as the Historic Environment Record (<https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.ExploringKentsPast.Web.Sites.Public/Default.aspx>) which, in Kent, is free to access and details find-spots, listed buildings, previous archaeological discoveries and marks out conservation areas and scheduled monuments. PPG16 has seen the establishment of several archaeological units whose role is to ensure that the archaeology is recorded or preserved where appropriate. Suppose a development site is considered an area of archaeological interest. In that case, conditions will be imposed as part of the planning process. An archaeological unit will be appointed to carry out these conditions, and the developer must pay for everything. If the conditions are not met, the developer does not receive the final sign off on their development, and it cannot occur. If any developer fails to carry out the conditions, they are subject to sanctions.

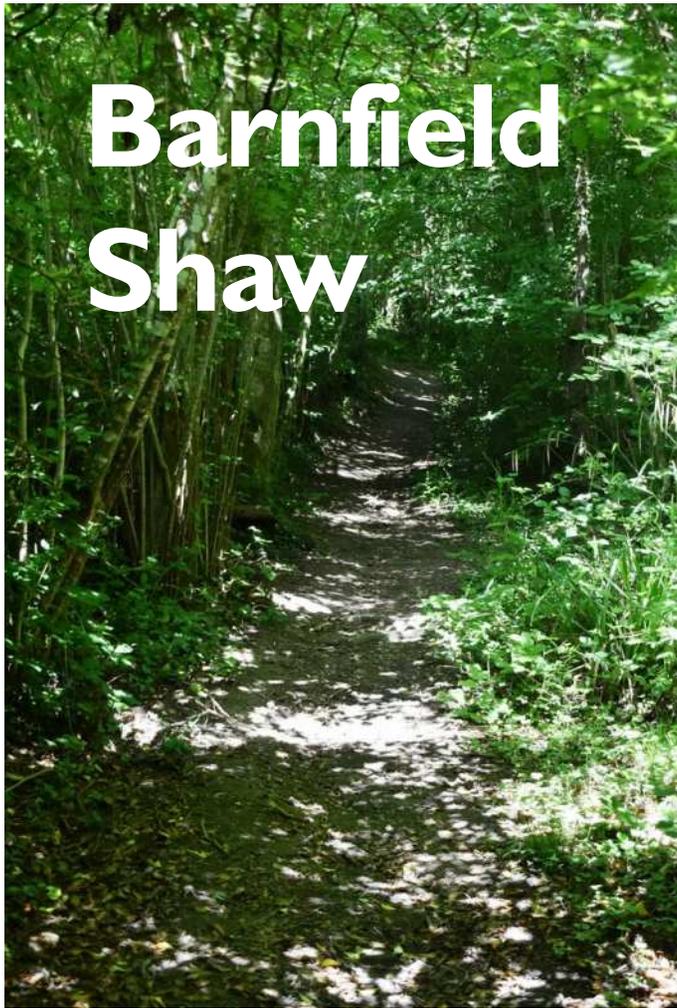
What does this mean to supporters of organisations such as WKPS?

Significantly few developments are halted due to the discovery of archaeological remains. The purpose of PPG16 is not to prohibit development but to ensure that assets are correctly recorded, preserved in-situ where possible, and the record of those features is made available in the public record. Occasionally, significant discoveries require a site to be protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument where no development is permitted. However, these are rare. There are occasions when a development is not financially viable due to the cost involved in on-site archaeological potential; some archaeological conditions can cost developers over £1m to mitigate, even in semi-rural locations.

One might ask how people concerned with developments in their area can preserve their local heritage? The answer is by participation in archaeological projects, local history projects and joining your local society. The Historic Environment Record can be populated by anyone who submits their archaeological or historical discoveries, and they can be verified. Be it a metal detecting find through the Portable Antiquity Scheme, a volunteer dig with a local group, or a chance discovery, evaluating it and verifying its significance helps record our illustrious history and enables the County Archaeologist to advise a potential developer further. Remember that heritage belongs to everyone, but the practice of archaeology is a privilege and a responsibility. Archaeology may have become a professional discipline, but it maintains a foot in the volunteer and amateur practitioner field. Organisations such as the Kent Archaeological Society and Sussex Archaeological Society are always willing to engage with potential Mortimer Wheelers and Augustus Pitt-Rivers'. Indeed, many professional archaeologists are leading members of such organisations, both county and local, and are often happy to offer advice and guidance about excavating and recording whilst maintaining the industry's professional standards that have evolved. Developments are with us for the long-term, as is our heritage; it's about achieving a balance and working together to ensure our children have somewhere to live and continued knowledge of the past.

***Fred Birkbeck & Richard Taylor of Darnley Archaeological Services
and the Great British Dig***





Barnfield Shaw

So far in these woodland musings, I've written about woods that are, if not well-known, at least graced with a sign and a place within the estates of the National Trust or the Woodland Trust. These are not always the woods that are dearest to us, though. When I was small, I dreamed of a secret wood, a place half-Narnia, half-Kirin Island, where I could run and camp and hide and climb far from the adult world. Now I'm no longer young (if not yet old), I've found it. My favourite wood, the wood that comes into my mind when I think of the word (and I often do) is the one I visit almost every day of my life. Lying on a rise of land between the village of Sandhurst and the River Rother, it's a modest area of woodland, some ten or twelve acres in size, but it's incredibly precious to me and, I would imagine, to many others.

On the OS Map, there's a slightly hesitant inscription in the heart of the wood: Barnfield Shaw. Shaw comes from the Old English sceaga, and denotes a wooded thicket or copse. Apart from this name, there is little to identify the wood from others in the area, but it is this wood, not others, that I know and love, this wood that sustained me

through lockdown, when it took a central place in our family walks, its distinct seasons and rhythms working their way into our lives. It is Ancient Woodland, meaning that the wood has been here since at least 1600, although it feels much older than that, the sort of place that druids would have walked through, or elves, perhaps: sacred, silent, green-souled. It's maybe something about the fact that it's a wood of birch and hornbeam that gives it the feeling of a leafy cathedral. These are lofty fastigate trees, and they rise as the hill beneath them rises, so it feels as if the soft green space ahead of you is opening up as you enter. The trunks of these trees are thin and pale, so delicate that they might almost not be there at all, but make themselves known most by the glowing green ceiling above you.

It is not always green, though, and just now the trees are being buffeted by the tail end of Storm Arwen, and the last of the russet leaves, whose beauty is a quiet beauty, are falling. In winter, the trees are like bones and the wood becomes a skeletal place, haunted by creaking branches and owls. But even in the December gloom there lives here the memory of spring softness, of the anemones that carpet the wood in April, the drifts of bluebells in May. Always there is the sound of running water from the stream that flows down one edge of the wood, always the calling of birds, always the bell of the clocktower in the village, those of the church on the next rise and, far in the valley below, the toot of the steam train. Even in the iciest winter there is life in this wood.

But in spring... in the spring it is overflowing with the songs of blackcaps and wrens, chaffinches and nuthatches. The leaves are not just green, but seem to shine with a green light, or lights of a million different greens that all outpace our efforts to describe them. When you leave the wood, coming out onto the last ridge of land before the Rother, the skies seem very wide, the world suddenly precarious away from the close companionship of the trees.

Let us cherish all our woods, then, even the unnamed and unremarkable spinneys, the copses that we hardly notice. For each of them means as much to someone as Barnfield Shaw means to me.

Alex Preston



Nature Notes

2021 has been a 'late' year with plants flowering late, crops ripening late and migrant birds arriving late. The Fieldfare is a case in point with first major arrivals reported by the British Trust for Ornithology down the east coast during the week of 15 November – about two weeks later than the normal year.

Fieldfares are large colourful Thrushes and spend the winter in the UK in flocks of anything from a dozen to several hundred strong. Their call sounds like a throaty chuckle and they will be seen in numbers on Hawthorn hedges with berries and seeking invertebrates in grass and arable fields.



It is estimated that up to one million Fieldfares cross the North Sea each October and then move south, as their food resources become depleted. That may take a Russian Fieldfare to the Weald of Kent in one year and to the Ukraine in another.

Fieldfares gradually disappear over the course of the first four months of the year, with the last birds returning across the North Sea by the end of April.

A cold spell should bring them into the Weald – so standby!



In these troubled times WKPS have been unable to hold any fundraising events, but thanks to generous legacies from members we continue to financially weather the storm. WKPS now has a link on the homepage of its website to make it easier to accept donations directly. We also hope that you consider a charitable bequest to WKPS when you plan your estate.

Dates for the Diary 2022

Nightingale Tour
Shadoxhurst
Wednesday 4th May



Wild Flower Meadows Tour
Shadoxhurst
Tuesday 7th June

WKPS Annual General Meeting
Tenterden Town Hall
Wednesday 15th June

Wealden Literary Festival
Boldshaves
Sat 25th & Sun 26th June



Vineyard Tour & Wine Tasting
Woodchurch Vineyard
Thursday 14th July

Boldshaves Event
Woodchurch
Friday 23rd September



If you have any suggestions for future events WKPS could organise please get in touch with secretary@wkps.org.uk or call 01580 861246

WKPS now has a link on its website to make it easier to accept donations directly. We also hope that you consider a charitable bequest to WKPS when you plan your estate.

**WEALD OF KENT PROTECTION SOCIETY
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP – CHARITY NO 261992
Membership runs from 1st April – 31st March**

Personal details: (Please use block capitals)

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Telephone _____

Email _____

I/we enclose a cheque in favour of Weald of Kent Protection Society for £15 Single/£20 joint subscription or I/we have paid by bank transfer to A/c 01754514, sort code 30-90-28 (please clearly state your full name as reference)

Please send to WKPS Secretary, 5 Castle Hurst, Bodiam, East Sussex TN32 5UW
Email: Secretary@wkps.org.uk

GIFT AID

I would like the Weald of Kent Protection Society to recover the tax on my annual subscription or any donation that I have made since the date below, or may make in the future. I confirm that the income tax/capital gains tax I pay in the appropriate tax year will be at least equal to the tax reclaimed on my subscription/donation(s).

Signature _____ Date _____

STANDING ORDER INSTRUCTION TO _____ Bank Plc

Address _____

I authorise you to pay Lloyds Bank, Tenterden 30-90-28 now and on 1st April each year The Weald of Kent Protection Society Charity 261992 (A/c No 01754514) the sum of £ _____
Until further notice my A/c No _____ Sort code _____

Signature _____ Date _____



Another fantastic way you can help support the work the Weald of Kent Protection Society does. Please go to smile.amazon.co.uk, the first tab is supporting, go into this and enter the name of your chosen charity as Weald of Kent Protection Society. Then every time you shop with Amazon please ensure you go to the Amazon Smile page and 0.5% of all your purchases will go to WKPS. Thank you!

Disclaimer

The views expressed in the articles reflect the author(s) opinions and are not necessarily the views of WKPS. The published articles and all other content is published in good faith. Watch on the Weald cannot guarantee and accepts no liability for loss or damage of any kind caused by any content. Content may not be, either partially or in whole, reprinted or reproduced without written consent.



wkps

The Weald of Kent Protection Society

Registered Charity: 261992

President: Peregrine Massey

Chairman: Michael Bax



Society Secretary: Fay Merrick

secretary@wkps.org.uk

Tel: 01580861246 / 07919 871543

Planning Secretary: Peta Grant

planning@wkps.org.uk



Article submissions & letters please send to Society Secretary