



wkps

Watch on
the Weald

FREE

Newsletter of the Weald of Kent Protection Society

www.wkps.org.uk

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Autumn 2023 No: 172



What a Wonderful Weald
Help us keep it that way

The Ghyll Streams of the Weald

In our Watch on the Weald edition of Spring 2023 we published an article entitled 'Rainforests of the Weald' and during the summer we have been considering how to provide shape for this initiative.

On Saturday 25 August, Eleanor North kindly hosted a visit by Stephen Lemon to look at some ghyll streams to the south east of Benenden and a most interesting reconnaissance was carried out which demonstrated the hidden treasures of these natural features.

Not only were we shown a number of ferns, mosses, liverworts and lichens that occupy the ghylls, but we also found slag in the stream beds which would have been generated by the local iron industry several hundred years ago, as well as the fossil of molluscs dating back millions of years.

We will now develop a simple plan for this project. At this stage we are looking to increase community awareness of the remarkable diversity of the Wealden environment which surrounds us, ranging from its ancient buildings and woodlands through the rich habitats which exist alongside those and about which we know too little. The ghyll streams of the High Weald are a good example and of course we are also highlighting the beautiful Wild Service or Chequer trees which flourish unnoticed in our area.

Hopefully we can embark on a journey which will open more eyes on the wonders of the Weald.

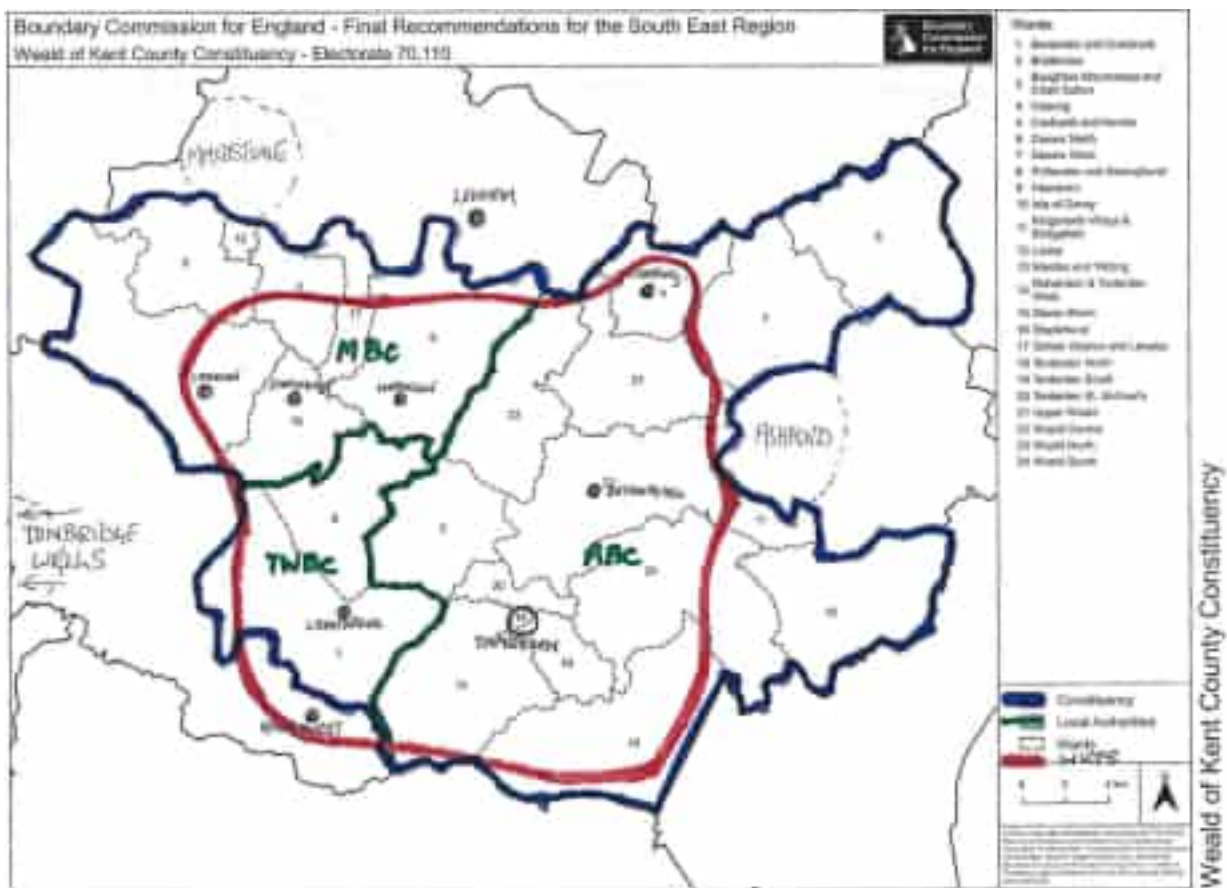
Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman

The New Weald of Kent Parliamentary Constituency

At the next election to appoint Members of Parliament, the area of the Weald of interest to WKPS will be almost entirely within one brand new Constituency, named Weald of Kent. Apart from Hawkhurst, WKPS will be dealing with just one new MP rather than four at the moment – Damian Green, Greg Clark, Helen Grant and Helen Whately.

The map shows in blue the boundary of the new Constituency. The boundary of the WKPS area of interest is shown in red. The map also shows the boundaries of the three Local Authorities with which we deal – Ashford, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. These are unchanged, of course.

The map shows how well our area of interest fits the new Constituency. The only significant piece of our area not under our new MP is Hawkhurst which remains with the MP for Tunbridge Wells.



The invention of the Weald of Kent Constituency is part of the Boundary Commission's 5-year update of Constituency boundaries to ensure that the population of each is similar, in this case within 70-77,000 each. The Commission formed the revised Constituencies by moving wards between adjacent Constituencies. There is a significant degree of change this time due to updating the base population data to the electoral register of 2 March 2020. Broadly speaking there are fewer Constituencies in the North and Midlands and more in the East and South-East.

Under its rules of process, the Commission published its initial recommendations for public consultation without reference to interested parties – political parties, Local Authorities etc. It received responses and published a second revised set of proposals. This time there were few responses. The Commission published its Final Recommendations, and this is the version that is set to go forward for parliamentary approval.

Where WKPS has reason to enlist the help of our local MP, life going forward is likely to be simpler.

David Northcroft

Farming Lessons from the Past

In trying to farm more sustainably, we read widely on the subject, perusing cutting-edge science. We learn that yellow meadow ants can help our meadows become more biodiverse, they are essential to species-rich grassland. Companion crops (to deter pests from commercial crops) and cover crops (to protect bare soils in winter) are a couple of modern techniques for cereal growers.

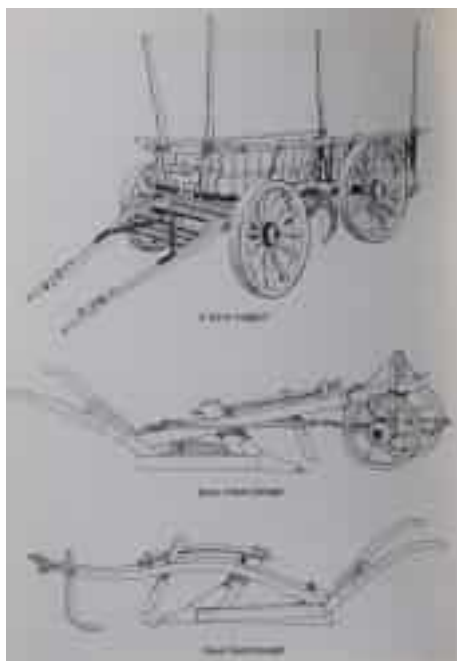
I recently looked at some Marden farm records from 1886, these show that sustainability is nothing new. Instead of a modern plastic bag with a stated formula, fertilisers took several forms. Along with the 'bird manure' that the farm bought, it also had regular deliveries of shoddy and feathers. Shoddy, waste from the woollen industry, was a slow-release, moisture-retentive mulch that would have been the envy of today's regenerative farmers. Even back in the 1960's, I remember feathers being used on our farm, which came in large bags made of mattress ticking, and which were spread on the hop gardens. In the 1880's all waste sacks and rags were chopped and spread as a mulch. Reuse, Recycle, Repurpose? So 1880's!



In amongst the 21 crops grown in 1886, were tares (vetches) and Trifolium (clovers). Probably, these would have been hayed as animal feed. In the 21st century, herbal leys, also vetches and clovers, are a modern way of improving depleted arable soils. Another lesson relearned.

Woodlands were a source of fuel, tools, and building materials, as important to farms as any other fields. We have to keep our woods healthy, as we might need them in the future.

We can't look back at 1886 with rose-tinted spectacles though. With top-earning farmworkers struggling to average 2/6 per day (12.5p), no health service or pensions, life was hard. Part of the reason why farms mechanised and modernised is that food is a bulk, cheap commodity in a global market. We can't revisit the romance of the past without reflecting this.



The final lesson I gleaned came from the 1980's not the 1880's. The source of this article was the book written by my mother Phyllis Highwood and others and published in 1986 [A Wealden Village Marden]. At that time, I thought my parents were potty doing all the research, writing and drawing. The pen and ink illustrations shown here were drawn by my father. Now I'm older, and the past seems more immediate, and the farming information genuinely useful to me. So, a very belated Thanks Mum!

Lou Carpenter

Upper Beult Farmer Cluster

→ visit beultfarmers.co.uk

Farmer Clusters are being established all over the country and in the WKPS area the Upper Beult Farmer Cluster was formed in November 2019 followed by the Marden Farmer Cluster in 2022.

Farmer Clusters are groups of farmers brought together by shared interests, working collectively to benefit soil, water and wildlife at a landscape scale.

There is increasing recognition that collaborative working in a geographic area can achieve more than working in isolation i.e., the sum of the group is greater than its parts.

Farmer Clusters are an effective forum for sharing best practice, and for trialling innovative farming techniques. The groups set their own programme of learning events and workshops – all of which are free to members. A farmer cluster helps to signpost

funding opportunities and to shape future funding policy from organisations such as DEFRA. Becoming part of a farmer cluster can be a crucial element to accessing future subsidy payments for the provision of ‘public goods’, through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which is currently being

Kent Wildlife Trust, in partnership with Southern Water, are working directly with the farmers of the Upper Beult catchment in the establishment of a farmer cluster to assist farms with the protection and improvement of water quality, soil health and biodiversity. Members of the cluster help to shape and inform the catchment scheme and will have access to funding as scheme initiatives are launched.

The objectives of the Upper Beult Farmer Cluster can be tailored to its members’ needs, but the

overarching aims of the group are to:

- Support efficient sustainable farming practices at a landscape scale.
- Protect and improve water quality in the River Beult, particularly from pesticides.
- Improve habitat connectivity and biodiversity across the cluster area.

Participants in the cluster already represent well over 5000 acres around the Upper Beult and its headstreams and the cluster’s application to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund has been accepted. Other initiatives are also in hand including a pilot project supported financially by Southern Water investigating the scope for retention of water in the landscape to alleviate downstream flood risk.

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman



Marden at the House of Lords



Four members of Marden Wildlife/ Marden Farmer Cluster attended Natural England's Parliamentary Reception at the House of Lords in July. Natural England wanted to showcase the partnerships between their expert farm teams, farmers and local communities which are working to such good effect in the Weald.

Peter Hall, founding member of the Farmer Cluster, delivered a speech describing how our model of food production in harmony with wildlife conservation works. He described how the Cluster was conceived during a chance meeting between the two of us outside the village butcher some years ago, and how our now MW Chair Ray Morris's agile brain hatched the concept of Marden Wildlife later, based on this early collaboration.

Peter explained that the Cluster farmers have no financial ties but are simply a loose association of farmers with a shared objective of farming that addresses today's problems of climate change and species loss, as well as food security in an uncertain world. He described how the Low Weald's ancient landscape of small fields, woods and water has an extraordinary diversity of species, which he said includes 'all the hidden bio-stuff that drives the planet – absolutely everything in fact that makes an ecosystem work in harmony'.

Peter then addressed the reason we were there, to show how farmers and NE can work very positively together, and how popular the results are in our community. He praised our local NE team led by Ben Thompson, who was with us on the night. Like any farming, nature-friendly farming is much harder than it

looks. We all owe a debt to the skill and advice of the NE team, so we were happy to tell those in power how essential they are to our project.



Peter spoke after both Tony Juniper, Chair of NE, and Therese Coffey, Secretary of State for the Environment. His speech was very warmly received, and the audience were keen to learn more about Marden by speaking to us all during the evening.

At the time of the Lords event, Natural England were coming under fire from the housebuilders for standing in the way of concreting over all of our beautiful countryside. Jacob Rees-Mogg called NE a 'fatberg in the system'. To me, better fatbergs than fat cats. So, I raise my glass to all those who sail on the fatberg and say – cheers!

SAVING THE PLANNING SYSTEM FROM ITSELF

It is clear that the current planning system is overstretched and under-resourced and the one successful innovation in recent years has been the introduction of Permitted Development Rights which have allowed investment and change in certain situations.

The natural environment is an area which is receiving close attention at present as various public bodies develop strategies for operation of the Environment Act. But we don't need strategies, we need action as we hear of more and more tragedies in the natural world arising from climate change.

In another part of the country a farmer wanted to create two environmental ponds, one measuring 3m x 3m and the other 5m x 8m. A full planning application was required and this fell in an AONB which, among other things, required a Dark Skies Assessment, a Relative Tranquillity Statement, a Soil Management Plan, a Landscape Character Appraisal and a Biodiversity Statement. You have to ask what the planning system is doing when it so badly fails on the big issues but expends such effort and time that at worst might be neutral but would probably develop benefit. A complete lack of perspective and proportionality.

Then there is the Medway case of the Cuxton Winery which would create a tourist attraction, jobs, and a significant contribution to the local economy. An irresponsible local campaign derailed that, and we mustn't forget that the growth of the wine industry in Kent is on the back of an opportunity which has arisen due to climate change.

So, we are now in a world where successful planning applications seem to have become a matter of how much effort and money an applicant can afford to throw at a case – and the applicant will still require a good deal of luck to succeed.

Of course, the planning system was developed over 70 years ago designed to make considered judgements about competing land uses. That system is now strangled by local politics, with protagonists who are averse to development. Planning authorities have depleted staff numbers and all too often have to leave responsibility to the appeal system. With all these pressures, authorities are now expected to wrestle with Nutrient Neutrality, Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery strategies, and are expected to put the work into their development and application. Everything is so fragmented, and it is very late in the day as many farming and landowner groups are already making progress and headway with pilot schemes in Nature Based Solutions and innovation under the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

Anything that can be done to increase and improve the availability of permitted development rights is welcome. PD rights effectively grant national planning permission for defined developments, subject to limitations and conditions and remove much trivia from the system whilst supporting the delivery of public policies, as shown by increased rights for telecoms installations to improve connectivity.

Classes Q for residential and R for Business Use were introduced in 2014, and the size of permitted agricultural buildings was increased to 1000m² in 2018. We therefore have a twin-track planning system with a formal regime hindering development while PD rights enable flexible change to be easier. In seven years, PD rights have been used to create over 90,000 dwellings, some using Class Q and others through rights to convert offices, shops and other commercial uses that might achieve High Street regeneration in the planning system.

This is all particularly critical for the development needed for climate change, environmental matters and farming productivity. Public policy becomes self-defeating if planning unreasonably frustrates renewable energy, habitat creation and the rest. Failing to manage this change well at this stage, simply stores problems for the future.

Fragmentation of the regulatory authorities means that there is often interaction with several bodies, adding cost, delay and uncertainty. We need regulatory reform to streamline this, not to lower standards but to simplify, clarify and speed up processes. The planning system should not exist just to stifle the local economy whether by direct refusal, or as a result of applicants' frustration at the complexity, cost and delays inherent in the process. This overloaded system needs thorough and imaginative change if we are to meet the challenges we face.

SIR JOHN URE KCMG LVO

It is with real sorrow that the death of Sir John Ure on 19th September was noted recently. Sir John was President of the WKPS from 2005 - 2013, following on from Lord Deedes.



Sir John had a distinguished career in the foreign service culminating with tours as Ambassador to Brazil and Sweden. As well as being a noted member of the Foreign Office, Sir John was also a successful author of travel and adventure books. We were delighted when he agreed to be the Society's President. He lived near Hawkhurst and had a deep love and, perhaps, reverence for the Weald. He carried out his duties as President with aplomb including hosting Ann Widdecombe MP when she addressed the members in 2008. He was well versed with the challenges which faced the Weald, in particular the threat to Tenterden and our villages in the loss of small shops such as butchers, bakers and village stores. We send Lady Ure and his family our sincere condolences.

Finding the Ghylls of the Weald



During months to come readers will regularly hear of our study of Wealden Ghyll Streams which are numerous in the High Weald and also occur in the south western corner of the Low Weald. Studies as to the significance of these Wealden Ghylls are relatively few and far between and WKPS is taking the initiative in spreading the word about these fascinating features of our home area.

We would like you to let us know if you own land through which a ghyll runs or if you simply know local ghylls from walking and enjoying your local area.

The complex geology of the High Weald – which includes varied soils, gradient and aspect means that a wide range of trees and plants can grow in woodlands across the area and within a single wood. The “rise” of the High Weald was created about sixty-five million years ago when layers of sedimentary rock were lifted by earth movements which also created the Alps. Over the following twenty million years the Wealden Dome was eroded, revealing a

varied geological structure including sandstones and clay. Erosion then left a terrain of ridges and valleys with deep sinuous ghylls draining into them.



Wherever you see a stream cutting steeply through a Wealden woodland, you are looking at a ghyll. Wooded, Wealden ghylls are of national and international environmental importance because of their unique mosses and liverworts, humid microclimate, and sandstone outcrops.

These magical streams and ravines support rare plants and in springtime, it is not unusual to find 50 to 70 separate plant species growing in these damp gullies.

A key feature in the Weald is not only the proportion of land that is wooded – but the way in which small woods are connected to one another by historic features such as ancient hedge banks, sunken lanes, shaws and our wooded ghylls. This connectivity creates an attractive patchwork landscape but also provides “wildlife corridors” which are vital to current efforts to promote conservation at scale.

So – we are asking you to focus on these special landscape features and we will be seeking to open your eyes to the limitless potential for you to enjoy, coexist and learn about this remarkable living legacy which is all around us.

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman

Nature Markets

A Framework for Scaling Up Private Investment in Nature Recovery & Sustainable Farming

Farmers and land managers will soon be obliged to meet the challenge of delivering net zero and nature recovery. To achieve this, the Government needs to scale up the flow of private finance to nature, so that farm businesses and the growing pipeline of nature projects have access to the investment they need to grasp the opportunities of the transition to a nature positive economy.

Nature is key to our wellbeing and to sustaining livelihoods and vibrant local communities. Many of the services that nature provides such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, clean water, and natural flood management, are still systematically undervalued in our economy. The nature markets framework seeks to accelerate the development of high integrity markets that enable firms to finance the provision of ecosystem services.

The Environment Improvement Plan was published in January and sets out to reverse centuries of decline in nature around England. The Government's Green Finance Strategy sets a goal to grow annual private investment in nature by at least £500M every year by 2027 in England, rising to more than £1Bn by 2030. The investment and business sectors are already considering their risks, dependencies and impacts on nature and are seeking straightforward financial instruments to support nature recovery.

The nature markets will enable private investment in nature, through creating units or credits that can be bought and sold. Alternatively, the private sector may invest in nature in other ways, by providing repayable finance for projects, direct investment in benefits to a company's operations or by philanthropic funding of nature restoration projects.

Nature markets may be voluntary – driven by companies wanting to meet environmental and climate targets or goals or to invest in projects that will bring them direct business benefit, such as a company seeking to achieve net zero.

Alternatively, nature markets may be driven by regulatory obligations – where companies are required by law to deliver environmental improvements (for example a developer who needs to ensure that a housing development delivers biodiversity net gain).

Markets take time to develop and scale up responsibly. The framework represents a commitment from the Government to support the development and operation of high integrity nature markets building on the principles outlined above.

It will be fascinating to see how these policies are expressed in the manifestos of the political parties during the run-in to the 2024 General Election. Ask your parliamentary candidate how they stand. And note that the goalposts very often move in politics!

Brewing Up - Chequer Tree Update



Thank you to everyone who's responded to my earlier article on chequer trees. It's clear that the tree is loved by those who either plant them in their gardens, or as a commemorative tree, or who simply come across them in a woodland or hedgerow in the Weald.

My most prolific correspondent so far is John Dutton, who was inspired to explore the area around Frittenden. Well done, John! And please keep searching. There are more out there, we just have to find them.

The most beautiful specimens I've come across so far are Louise Day's ancient twin trees at Great Cheveney in Marden. I saw them in full bloom, they were magnificent.

Rod Smith sent me pictures of the

chequers in bloom at the Weald of Kent Golf course. Hopefully the open conditions there will ensure they flower and fruit well as they age.

Thank you too to Howard Lilley, who told me about the chequer planted in memory of his son in 2018. Rereading Howard's moving email inspired me to visit my father's memorial chequer in Marden churchyard. It's looking splendid and covered with fruits – a potent symbol of renewal and hope that's a comfort in grief. My only regret is that this was a 'bought-in' tree, rather than a sapling from our own wood.

Finally, Peter Whitestone reminded WKPS that there is a chequer in Biddenden High Street, planted by WKPS for their Silver Jubilee in 1985.

There's still plenty of time to look for chequers in our area. Most trees are loaded with fruits this year, which will make them visible as they go into autumn. Their leaves colour bright red or purple very early on, and the leaves drop early.



I'm hoping to exploit this year's crop of fruits. We're going to try harder to raise new trees from local seed, also to experiment with making chequer liqueurs. It would be great to return the chequer back to its original use in Kent. Anyone got a family recipe?

Lou Carpenter

Chequer Tree Safari

Moat Farm, Church Lane, Shadoxhurst TN26 1LY

Saturday 28th October

10:30 – 12:45

Walk to learn Chequer Tree ID (1½ hours)
(Wellingtons essential)

Collect Chequers (seed / fruit)
Discuss propagation techniques
Discuss processing possibilities
Enjoy Chequer autumn colours
Wine and nibbles at the end

(Chequers are an indicator of the
Ancient Woodland of the Weald)

A voluntary contribution of £10 a head would be appreciated

Spaces are limited so please contact secretary@wkps.org.uk to
book your place



Wonderful Wetlands

Storing Water for Wildlife & People

On the clay soils of the River Beult, wetlands should naturally occur across the landscape. Wetlands are important for a rain fed river like the Beult because they store and slowly release water and keep the river flowing. Small head water wetlands are found around the sources of small streams and have a strong influence on the whole river system. Sadly, many of them were lost when the landscape was drained for agriculture. Wetlands drained by artificial ditches can no longer support river flows or store water to protect against flooding.

- Kent's water use is growing because there are more people living in the area. At the same time climate change is making rainfall more unpredictable and droughts more likely. Loss of wetlands and soils that naturally store water makes this problem worse. Restoring wetlands is one way of addressing this problem — a 'Nature Based Solution' to water shortages.

At Moat Farm, Shadoxhurst, two head water wetlands are being restored — in the Harp Meadows and Streetend Wood. The artificial channels that were draining them have been filled in, allowing the water to move across the area freely and be stored for longer. Woody material on the ground will further slow the speed of water passing through and these 'Leaky Woody Dams' will hold water back for longer, so that natural wetland habitats can develop over time. This helps to reduce flood risk downstream, providing a more secure water supply, storing carbon, and assisting with the improvement of water quality.

Mike Bax
WKPS Chairman

A Young Man's Vision

Tenterden Wildlife is a recently formed charity, working with community groups, schools, councils, landowners and other wildlife organisations to halt and reverse the decline of priority habitats and wildlife species in the Tenterden parish and beyond it. Here's what its youngest member, Graham Pont aged 11, has to say about why he's joined it:



Wildlife. Just think for a moment and ask yourself your opinions on it. Vibrant June butterflies, graceful, majestic deer, playful otters swimming down the river. I love all of it, and pity anyone who does not.

Birds are my favourite creatures. If you to get up early and listen to the dawn chorus, it is like an orchestra, only there is no entry fee and the singers are no popstars, just humble garden birds. They are beautiful and joyful and although they might be small, they are loud, and anyone listening to a wren would think it was a particularly musical ostrich because of the volume. But of course, all animals matter, and the problem is that British wildlife is in decline. Yeah, all of it!

We need to help it, and we need to help it now. So many things are dependent on wildlife. Without the bees and other pollinating insects there would be hardly any crops, much less for birds and other animals to feed on. Just imagine a world without nature... that would be the end of me!

So that is why I have joined Tenterden Wildlife, to help nature to recover now!



Graham checking a camera trap on his family's farm near Bethersden

THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION

Wednesday 13th December



Boldshaves Garden
Frog's Hole Lane,
Woodchurch,
Ashford TN26 3RA

6 - 8pm in the barn
Guest Speaker to be
announced
Drinks and nibbles

This event is free to anyone who has introduced a new member to WKPS in the last year, otherwise a £15 donation would be appreciated.

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

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



WEALD OF KENT PROTECTION SOCIETY
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP – CHARITY NO 261992
Membership runs from 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024

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 £20 Single, £30 Couple or £35 Group, 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 _____

Charitable Donations and Bequests

In these difficult times and 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.

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Article submissions & letters please send to Society Secretary