



wkps

Watch on  
the Weald

FREE

Newsletter of the Weald of Kent Protection Society

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## Dark Skies

The fact is that artificial light at night (ALAN) is harmful to our health and to wildlife. There are numerous benefits from dark skies for all occupants of our planet and the night sky should be intrinsically dark.

Exterior lighting is governed by planning policy at all levels, from the Local Planning Authority Local Plans to Neighbourhood Development Plans to guidance notes such as 'The Reduction of Obtrusive Light Guidance Note 01/21' by The Institute of Lighting Professionals. This last document states that 'Good lighting practice is the provision of the right light, at the right time, in the right place, controlled by the right system', and that 'if not properly controlled, obtrusive light (sometimes referred to as light pollution) can present serious physiological and ecological problems.'

Think before you light. Is it necessary? What effect could it have on others? Has it the potential to cause a nuisance?

For domestic purposes we only need to light our way into and out of our homes on dark nights for a short period of time and we should avoid installing lighting that causes Sky Glow (the brightening of the night sky), Glare (the uncomfortable brightness of a light source when viewed against a darker background, Light Spill (the spilling of light beyond the boundary of the area being lit) and Light Intrusion ('nuisance'). These are all forms of obtrusive light which adversely affects fauna & flora, and us. It's also a waste of money and energy.

The message is: Downlight only. Install at low level. Use warm light at low wattage. Use PIR sensors only and set to a minimum length of time to remain on. PIR sensors ensure that the light cannot remain on all night.

See what you can do to reduce light by reviewing your outside lighting installation. Consider engaging with your parish council if you're concerned about ALAN near your home.

A browser search on the internet for dark skies reveals all sorts of maps and information about light pollution; one example being the national map by CPRE.

Sky Quality Meter (SQM) is the value for measuring light pollution. The devised scale is 16.00 – 22.00. At the lowest number – 16.00 – the sky is the brightest and would typically be in an urbanised area. The higher number of 22.00 represents the least light pollution. Where I live in Iden Green (Benenden), I have obtained readings as high as 21.94 and as ‘low’ as 20.22. So, I can say for sure that the skies here are intrinsically dark, but we mustn’t be complacent because there are light emissions all night. There is also the possibility that people are unaware of their light being on all night, so a polite chat may be all that’s needed to remove that pollution.

Join us in an exercise to obtain light meter readings where you are, and we’ll publish the results. Download the Dark Sky Meter app (for a small one-off charge) on your mobile, follow the instructions to take readings around your area. Send your results to [planning@wkps.org.uk](mailto:planning@wkps.org.uk) and please include the street name and postcode and the what3words reference to enable us to pinpoint the location of the readings.

**Peta Grant**  
**WKPS Planning Secretary**

## The Dark Art of Enforcement

We are British and we don’t like being told what to do. When that does happen, we are indignant even where there is clear justification.

So, the job of an Enforcement Officer must be daunting at the best of times and one can understand why there may not be a queue of applicants looking for this type of work.

Nevertheless, this country is well served by published regulations and Government should recognise the money that would be saved if there was proper enforcement. Not only would Government, local authorities and other bodies save in clearing up or applying appropriate remedy after the event, but the community would have greater respect for authority.

The job needs to be well paid, and participants need to be well trained. Current problems relate to lack of staff, lack of incentive and lack of support.

In our local area we have the Hoad’s Wood scandal which appears to be about to cost the State many millions in remediation.

We have the uncertainties of the Environment Agency permitting process in relation to the Chilmington Green Sewage Works application on which we report elsewhere in this issue. We also have regular unneighbourly breaches of planning control which only attract passing interest.

We then hear of water companies actually budgeting for the cost of fines that will be imposed following illegal effluent discharges. With that happening, how can anyone be expected to take regulation seriously. Current cost to the country must be huge with a potential upside exponentially greater in environmental terms, socially and financially.

The Environment Agency must be able to act as a watchdog. It needs teeth and it must be able to bark.

Water pollution has only recently become a big issue once again. The community understands that it is very important. Will we get a Government that can keep its eye on the ball?

# Restore Nature Now March: A Call to Action for Environmental Restoration



**Tenterden  
Wildlife**  
Turning the tide for nature

On June 24, Tenterden Wildlife members took part in a powerful demonstration for the Restore Nature Now March organised by Chris Packham. The event united thousands of environmentalists, scientists, students, and concerned citizens in a shared commitment to healing the planet. Amongst them were many celebrities including Emma Thompson, Liz Bonnin, Dr Amir Khan, Feargal Sharkey and Steve Backshall.

## The Urgency of Restoration

The march was organized in response to the increasing degradation of natural habitats and the urgent need for environmental restoration. Over the past decades, human activities such as deforestation, pollution, and unsustainable agriculture have severely damaged ecosystems, leading to a loss of biodiversity, climate change, and compromised ecosystem services. The march aimed to highlight these issues and push for immediate, science-based action to reverse the damage.



## Key Demands

The marchers outlined several key demands:

- **Increased Funding for Restoration Projects:** Governments and international organizations must allocate substantial funding for reforestation, wetland restoration, and the rehabilitation of degraded lands.
- **Stronger Environmental Policies:** Enhanced legal frameworks are needed to protect natural areas, enforce anti-pollution regulations, and promote sustainable land use practices.
- **Corporate Accountability:** Corporations must be held accountable for their environmental footprints and invest in sustainable practices and restoration efforts.
- **Public Awareness and Education:** A global effort to educate the public about the importance of ecological restoration and ways individuals can contribute.

## The Role of Technology and Innovation

The march also emphasised the role of technology and innovation in restoration efforts. Participants showcased new tools and methods for monitoring ecosystems, improving agricultural practices, and restoring habitats. Technologies such as drones for planting trees, AI for tracking wildlife populations, and advanced water purification systems were highlighted as essential in the fight to restore nature.

## A Message of Hope

While the challenges are immense, the Restore Nature Now March sent a message of hope and determination. It demonstrated the power of collective action and the shared belief that, with concerted effort, it is possible to heal the planet. The event underscored that restoring nature is not just an environmental issue but a fundamental aspect of ensuring a sustainable future for all.

As the day ended, participants left with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to continue advocating for the planet. The Restore Nature Now March was more than just a single day of action; it was a catalyst for ongoing efforts to restore and protect the natural world.

**Siggi Nepp**  
**Tenterden Wildlife**

# Turtle Dove decline: Tutankhamun to blame?

Perhaps not. Although mummified turtle doves were entombed to feed the famed Pharaoh in the afterlife, and thousands are still slaughtered for sport every year as they migrate through the Mediterranean, the main cause is industrial farming and the tidying-up of the countryside. Herbicides have left them with less food, and loss of tall hedgerows and scrubby areas has reduced their nesting habitat. Sadly, for many people their best chance of seeing one is now on a Christmas card.



Photo: Jac Turner-Moss

The disastrous 98% population decline since the seventies left the country with just 2,100 breeding pairs in 2021. A third of these were in Kent, with a significant number in the Low Weald. Fortunately, help is at hand. Farmers and landowners, working with Kent Wildlife Trust, RSPB, and volunteer members of Marden Wildlife, are throwing a lifeline to this beautiful but beleaguered bird.

Arriving after their 5,000km flight from their wintering grounds south of the Sahara they are welcomed with seed liberally spread on field margins by sympathetic farmers. After the almost complete eradication of arable weeds, these seedeaters have difficulty getting into breeding condition, hence the supplementary provision. Doves only lay two eggs at a time, so must raise two broods a year just to balance natural adult mortality and keep their population stable. Gone are the days when three broods were the norm, and numbers were buoyant.

In 2022, five doves were colour-ringed in Marden (by ringers licensed by the British Trust for Ornithology) to track their use of the supplementary feeding – and it was wonderful when four of them returned to



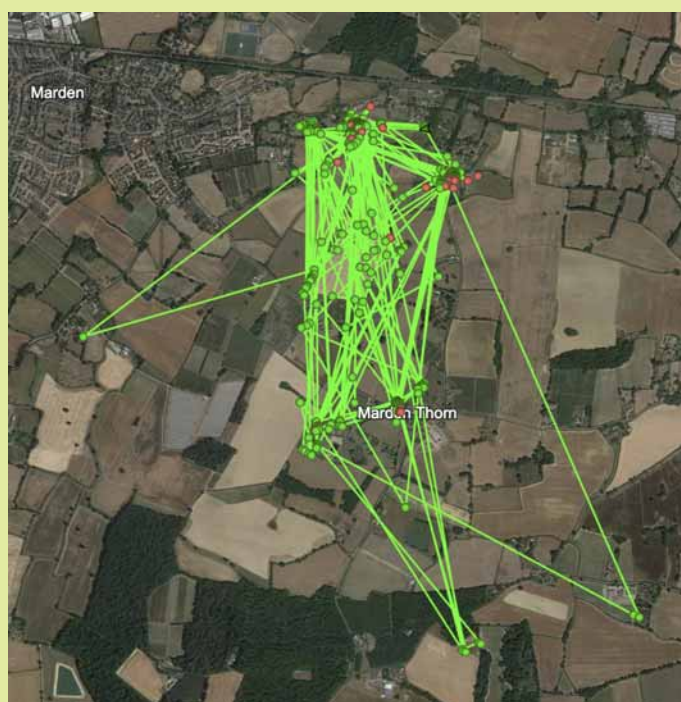
Yellow/Yellow Photo: Jac Turner-Moss

Marden the following summer after their African migration. Five more were ringed last year, and lightweight GPS trackers were fitted to two (George and Dave) for further research – how are birds using the wider landscape and what might farmers do to provide more help?

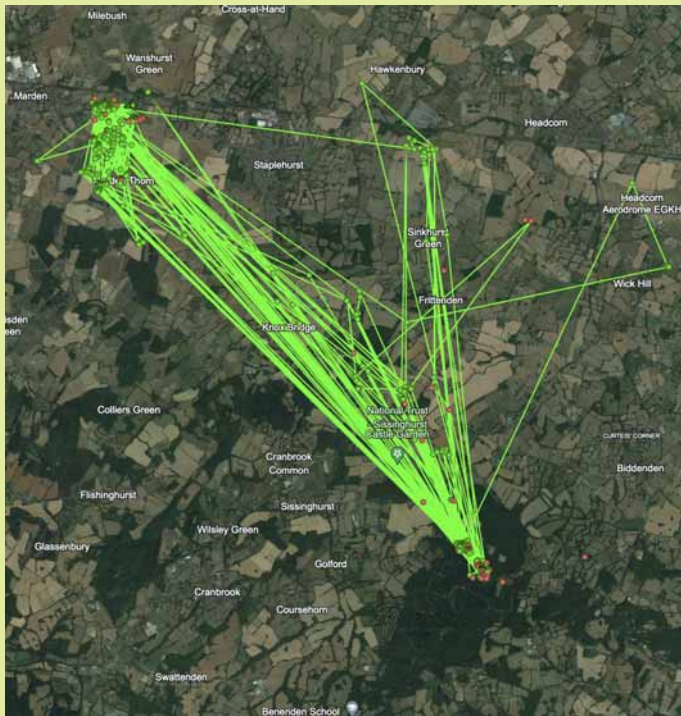


George with his GPS tag Photo: Ray Morris

While George stayed within about 3km, as per the book, Dave tore it up and ranged over a wide area of the Weald pointing to possibly under-recorded areas of occupied habitat for further exploration.



'By-the-Book' George



*'Footloose' Dave*

Both confirmed the importance of water easily accessible to the doves (they have very short legs so need ideally to paddle to drink it). As seedeaters they require extra water as they feed their young with 'pigeon milk' secreted from glands in their throat. Much of George's time was spent with other doves in fields with bare soil to find native seeds (thanks to the farmer scarifying field margins) and easily accessed field ponds for the essential water.

Worryingly, both birds spent time in scrubby areas – overgrown orchards and untidy hedges vital for nesting, but vulnerable to removal if properties are 'smartened up'.

This year, with generous Kent Wildlife Trust funding, nine more tagged birds are revealing their secrets. This iconic countryside bird, part of our Christmas and literary traditions, may yet be saved from extinction.

**Ray Morris, Marden Wildlife**  
[mardenwildlife.org.uk](http://mardenwildlife.org.uk)

## Pollution – An Ugly Problem

The middle and late Pleistocene represents one million years of human evolution. Throughout that period rivers have been used for trade, navigation and modified to achieve numerous other objectives. During that time human populations were relatively stable but that has changed dramatically in recent centuries and our rivers have been used to accommodate many engineering solutions, one of which is the disposal of sewage farm effluent. The two principal routes of human faecal organisms into waterways in the UK are from raw sewage entering rivers via storm overflows and by continuous effluent discharge from routine sewage works operations. Despite treatment processes, sewage effluent will contain human bacteria and viruses which have the potential to cause serious disease if ingested. Increasing pressure from population growth and more frequent and intense rainfall events due to climate change overwhelm our ageing wastewater system too regularly. Faecal organisms from agricultural runoff, livestock, wild animals, septic tank discharges, storm overflows and treated final effluent from wastewater treatment works require more rigorous attention.

Apart from sewage farm effluent, there is pollution from agriculture and diffuse pollution from road runoff which is generally underestimated and not measured. Something like three hundred chemicals are involved, oil, grease, heavy metals, microplastics, tyre wear and salt. Then the various materials which are toxic do not break down – all harmful to insects. Efforts have to be made to stop these from entering the environment either through adaptations to surface water drains which run into our rivers, or through wetlands, and it is estimated there are over one million outfalls in the country. Since Covid, there has been much more wild swimming and resultant sickness arising.

Damage from agriculture has come from production systems that go back to the 1950s. During this time the Government has been focused on the production of cheap food and cheap water, with disastrous consequences. Migratory fish have seen population reductions in the region of 80% as a direct result of climate change, warmer conditions, pollution, silt deposition etcetera. Nitrates and phosphates create algae which removes oxygen and creates sub optimal conditions for fish and aquatic invertebrates. The environment must be prioritised.

We need partnerships and a catchment-based approach. That way people will have more say on environmental issues locally, which is important as successive Governments have indicated they are unable to deal with this politically. Water security affects society at every level and there is a pending nature crisis which will affect everybody. There is inertia at the top – "there is always tomorrow". The owners of the water companies have to prioritise clean water against profits. We have interfered with the natural course of our rivers and restoration has already proved to be beneficial. For instance, we love our weirs, but they are eco-monsters, putting a break on natural processes such as fish migration, gravel movement etcetera. The natural course of a river will have trees, a deep marginal fringe, meanders etcetera down the watercourse as well as natural connections out into the river's floodplain. Is the modern world capable of tackling these problems or will we continue to pay lip service to the gathering storm?

**Mike Bax**  
**WKPS Chairman**



# River Beult Threatened by Sewage Works Wastewater Proposal

On the western side of Ashford, the Chilmington Green development is a massive urban expansion involving planning permissions for several thousand new homes. With that comes the vital requirement for effective foul drainage.

In previous issues we have reported on the nutrient neutrality issues arising from high phosphate levels in the Stodmarsh wetland complex on the River Stour downstream of Canterbury. Mitigation of those problems is still outstanding and accordingly implementation of the Chilmington consents cannot be achieved using the original infrastructure proposals which would have discharged wastewater to the Stour.

As a result, Ashford Borough Council received an application for construction of a new wastewater treatment plant at Chilmington Green under Ref: PA/2023/0715.

Local residents were made aware of the application at an early date and raised concerns over odour as well as the lack of attention to other conditions in the original Section 106 Agreement.

But, of course, a new sewage works requires a route for discharge of treated effluent and that was designated for a headstream of the River Beult which runs through land adjacent to the application site. Discharge to a

watercourse requires Environment Agency permitting and it became apparent that developers required the two consenting processes to be dealt with separately. Firstly, consideration of the application for the built infrastructure of the sewage works, and secondly a separate process for the required Environment Agency discharge consent.

As a result, landowners downstream of the discharge point received no notification of the application and no consultation was undertaken. By chance, at the eleventh hour, the Parish Council advisers, Shadoxhurst Drainage Team, became aware of the Upper Beult Farmer Cluster, engaged in the enhancement of River Beult headwaters around Shadoxhurst and Bethersden, through the recent article in Watch on the Weald. That led them to our Society Chairman, who is a founder member of the cluster and a campaigner for clean rivers. Inevitably, the majority of objectors referred to the potentially negative environmental impact, but the planning authority continued to insist that all would be resolved by the Environment Agency after planning approval.

Even when sewage effluent has passed through a sewage treatment plant, it



contains bacteria and viruses known as endocrine disruptors and these include the residues of pharmaceuticals, contraceptives and recreational drugs amongst other features. The Upper Beult catchment lies in the north eastern extremity of the Low Weald where soils are impermeable Wealden Clay of considerable depth. No natural infiltration of surface water takes place. The land is drained by hundreds of miles of field ditches into which land drains discharge. As soon as drier weather arrives in spring, the land drains cease to run, the ditches dry out, and



by the end of June in most summers there is no continuous flow in the main stem of the river which comprises a chain of unconnected pools at best. This situation applies downstream to Bethersden and beyond and it is not until the river has passed through the outskirts of Smarden Village that there is water retention on any scale. At that point and downstream to the confluence with the Medway at Yalding, the River Beult becomes the only designated riverine SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in Kent.

The seasonal drying of the summer river is in stark contrast to the high flows of winter when field drainage systems are at and beyond capacity.

Planning Case Law is clear to the effect that the authority granting permission (Ashford Borough Council) cannot be confident that there will be no significant environmental effects without having the confidence that the intended

mitigation measures will be effective. It cannot have that confidence when it does not know what the Environment Agency will require and that is another reason for concern at the two consents not being considered in tandem. Without adequate screening, grant of consent would be unlawful and susceptible to Judicial Review.

The Upper Beult Farmer Cluster's vision for the Beult is 'a clean river running through a mosaic of wet grassland and woodlands, riparian corridors for the wildlife and a functioning floodplain, embedded within a productive agricultural landscape and providing benefits to the communities living alongside it'. The current reality is that despite being the only protected river in Kent from Smarden down to the Medway, the Lower Beult is in poor condition and bearing numerous scars of human pressure. A large percentage of the water in the river during high summer is sewage treatment works wastewater, because the river is so vulnerable to drought.



The outcome of all this for the sewage works application is that having received representations, the application was unanimously refused on 7th May – all credit to ABC Planning Committee – but has now been appealed.

Regulations do not permit discharge into a watercourse where there is no continuous flow, and it is therefore impossible to see any reason why this application should be pursued all the time the Upper Beult watercourse is proposed for drainage of the sewage effluent. This brings the whole question of enforcement of regulations into sharp focus and that is the subject of a separate article.

In the meantime, the River Beult will continue to fight for its survival.

**Mike Bax**  
**WKPS Chairman**

# THE PRESIDENT'S SUMMER RECEPTION

## Thursday 18th July

**Speaker: Ben Moorhead, Chairman of CPRE, Kent**



**Peregrine Massey invites you to his stunning gardens at Boldshaves, Frog's Hole Lane, Woodchurch, Ashford TN26 3RA**

**The gardens will be open to members from 5pm for you to wander round and enjoy and to sit and have tea and cake.**

**An organised tour will start from the Tea House at 5.30pm.  
The reception will be 6-8pm in the Barn.**

**Ben will speak about his new role at CPRE, Kent  
and then there will be a Q&A session.**

Ben, as Chairman of The Wye Future Group, successfully defeated Imperial's, KCC's and Ashford BC's plans for a Science Park at Wye and the secret plan to build 4,500 houses on the Wye Agricultural College farmland (900 acres). He has created his own Wildflower Nature Reserve at his home high on the North Downs. He is very interested in wildlife and flora and fauna. He carried out all the legal work to create Sport England, UK Sport and the Sports Council Trust. He has been Deputy Lieutenant for Kent since 2015.

**Members are warmly encouraged to bring a guest.** The reception is free to those members who have introduced a new member during the year. Otherwise a voluntary donation of £15 a head would be appreciated.

**To confirm your attendance and help us with seating and refreshments,** please inform the Society Secretary on 01580 861246 or email: [secretary@wkps.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wkps.org.uk)

# AONBs redesignated as National Landscapes

In November 2023, the 46 AONBs (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) in the UK were rebranded and given the new name of National Landscapes. For example, the High Weald AONB is now the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL).

The change reflects the importance of the designated protected landscapes for the benefit of the nation, and places them alongside the UK's National Parks.

HWNL website [highweald.org](http://highweald.org) states that 'the change is a significant milestone for the UK in realising the opportunity for National Landscapes to enhance the beauty of the landscape, restore ecosystems, provide food, store carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, and safeguard against drought and flooding – whilst also nurturing people's health and wellbeing.'

A National Landscape remains as a designated AONB insofar as all policy, legislation and guidance applies to the designated landscape. The statutory purpose of a designated landscape remains unchanged 'to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape'. AONB Management Plans therefore continue to be valid.

The 46 National Landscapes are members of the National Landscapes Association ([national-landscapes.org.uk](http://national-landscapes.org.uk)). The Association is a national charity supporting the UK's network of National Landscapes, helping them to be as effective as possible, bringing local teams and partnerships together and creating greater collaboration.

What does the rebrand mean in planning terms? Well, it remains exactly the same as the AONB Advisory Teams are just that – advisory. They can only advise, in an attempt to influence, the local planning authority (LPA) and are not a statutory consultee, so it is the decision of the LPA on whether to seek advice from them. By contrast, the National Parks do constitute a planning authority and therefore have more power to resist undesirable development.

From a planning point of view, it seems that very little has changed but at least the National Landscape Teams will have the support of the Association. With the redesignation, I would like to have seen, at the very least, the National Landscape Teams becoming statutory consultees to the LPAs...

**Peta Grant**  
**WKPS Planning Secretary**



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# Solar Farms in the Countryside

## Renewable Energy versus Food Security

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In October 2023 Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Planning Committee REFUSED a planning application for a large solar farm covering 74.5 hectares or 184 acres of farmland west of Marden. In February 2024 the Appeal Inspector APPROVED the application. Both MBC and the Inspector had valid arguments. What is going on? What might it mean for the future?

This case illustrates where an investment in renewable energy is in conflict with the policies of a Local Authority to protect the countryside as set out in its Local Plan. Despite this conflict, a decision on this planning application must be made. This article sets out the story.

The solar farm is the same size as Marden, or the equivalent of 90 football pitches – see photo. Its output is 49.9MW. It is next to an overhead power line which saves a lot of connection cost. The three buildings are up to 5m high. 43-47% of the land is classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV). It breaches MBC's policies in several areas, landscape, heritage etc. The site is not identified or allocated in the Development Plan. The applicant undertakes to provide mitigation as far as possible, planting screening etc.



Objections came from many areas. Following a site tour, WKPS objected; the installation is massive. CPRE objected as their policy is to promote rooftop solar not ground-based. MBC's Planning Officer objected for reasons of policy: a significant portion of the land is BMV agricultural land, contrary to the Local Plan which directs solar farms to lower grade agricultural land, the significant harm to the character and significance of the countryside, the harm (but less than substantial) to the settings of Heritage Assets, noise and the detriment to biodiversity. On these grounds MBC's Planning Committee refused the application by 14 against, 0 for and 1 abstention.

The UK is self-sufficient in neither renewable, clean, affordable energy nor basic food. It is getting worse. These shortages focus down on what do we use our land for – more housing, rewilding, Green Belts, growing food, more solar farms etc. The government (any government) has to respond – Net Zero 2050 is on the Statute Book. Last year the policies and guidelines decision-makers use in planning applications for energy production in its various categories were updated – tidal, off-shore wind farms, transmission lines etc., including solar farms (just to update, the guidelines for onshore windfarms remain in consultation as they are so restrictive that nationally no planning applications for them have been made this year).

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The new policies and guidelines took effect on 17th January 2024. The wording calls for judgements by decision-makers – lots of “should” instructions rather than “must do”. They are set out in Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1). They apply to large schemes, dubbed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP’s). These are approved by the Secretary of State. Approval of smaller energy schemes (solar farms less than 50MW’s) remains with the Local Authority. The word Overarching is eye-catching. It signals the importance attached to reducing the UK’s dependence on energy imports. What does it mean? Planning decisions for energy production and infrastructure may be decided differently in future compared to the past. This case is an example.

Additional guidance to decision-makers is given in the associated National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3). It states that the objective for solar output (farms plus rooftops) is to increase fivefold by 2035.

The text of EN-3 for solar includes all the conventional Planning factors and impacts to be taken into account – site suitability, proximity to dwellings, biodiversity, agricultural land classification (BMV), design, landscape impact, etc., plus one specific: grid connection.

After refusal by MBC the case went to Appeal. The Inspector visited the site, held meetings with MBC to clarify where he agreed with the MBC and where he didn’t. This included a review of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) which turned an earlier evaluation from a negative to a positive. The harm to adjacent Listed Buildings was agreed to be less than significant harm. The Appeal Inspector decided to apply the new EN-3 guidelines for larger NSIP projects, despite the output being below the qualifying level. He commended the “cogent and structured representations” of the objectors but simply disagreed that this was the wrong development in the wrong place.

The two principal areas of contention were Land Classification and Landscape Impact. EN-3 states:  
Agricultural land classification:

*“While land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of ‘Best and Most Versatile’ agricultural land where possible.”*

Landscape, visual and residential amenity:

*“Solar farms are likely to be in low lying areas of good exposure and as such may have a wider zone of visual influence than other types of onshore infrastructure. However, while it may be the case that the development covers a significant surface area, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography, the area of a zone of visual influence could be appropriately minimised.”*

In his Balance of Judgements, the Inspector gave limited weight to “temporary use of BMV land” (i.e. 37 years), moderate weight to landscape damage and rated no harm to the significance of heritage assets. These could be called the historic grounds for Refusal.

He then gave substantial weight to the provision of renewable energy, significant weight to biodiversity net gain, neutral weight to quick delivery due to the gridline, and positive weight to farm diversification and to construction activity. The Inspector also stated that by itself the overarching need for renewable energy would outweigh all the objections to this application.

These judgements provide the grounds for future Approvals of solar farms.

The Inspector approved the application. This solar farm will provide electricity for 15,000 homes somewhere in England.

Each of us has their own view on decisions such as this. We have views about renewable energy. We all know more or less about the pros and cons of solar farms and how we ourselves would decide, but in the end planning decisions must be made, like them or not...

**David Northcroft**

# Benenden School

## Educating Towards a Sustainable Future

Benenden School celebrates its centenary this year, having moved to its present site (on what was known as Hemsted Park) in March 1924. Included in the original sale of 1924 was a sizeable proportion of the surrounding estate, with the school retaining the 250 acres. The immediate areas bordering Hemsted House were laid out in its latest iteration by William Brodrick Thomas, the Victorian garden designer, employed by Earl Cranbrook when the original house was demolished, and the present building erected in its place in 1862. Thomas designed the terraced lawn and neighbouring Rose Garden, with the Hemsted in the centre, further features include a serpentine lake, a pinetum, a walled kitchen garden and even a beehive ice house.

Benenden School of 2024 has many of the features of the Victorian landscape preserved. My colleague Matt Commander and I have been on a journey to identify, understand and plan out the future of the Benenden site, including all the various habitats, whilst considering how we can integrate the use of the site into the school curriculum and wider community. A key consideration has been our commitment to sustainability and understanding the complexity of the areas within the 250 acres. What has been most exciting is discovering the diversity of the habitats the estate has. The school sits on the Tunbridge Wells Sand and in areas streams have eroded down to create the distinctive gills of the High Weald, these are rich with bluebells, wood anemones, ransoms, violets, primroses and at points early purple orchids. There are established coppiced woodlands, rich with indicator species, a pinetum which can be dated back to the mid-19th century with a wide variety of conifers including the tallest known British specimens of Japanese Thuja and Japanese Umbrella Pine (Pollard and Strouts, 2006). Within the original parkland there are a range of ancient oaks and a very old Spanish chestnut (reputed to be over 400 years old), situated just off the original lime avenue entrance to the old Hemsted.



*Early purple orchids amidst bluebells in one of the gills on the Benenden School estate*

Over the past 18 months, we have initiated engagement initiatives as part of a broader strategy to adopt a whole-school sustainable approach. Welcoming local schools to participate in forest schools, utilising natural woodland and ancient hedges to enrich the curriculum, and collaborating with groups such as the WKPS are some of the ways we've integrated pupils, staff and community with the grounds. Staff have used the grounds to inspire nature journaling, while groups have reclaimed an abandoned orchard, uncovering various apple trees amidst the brambles. Within the school campus, we've adapted and developed the mowing plan to allow native species like yellow rattle to thrive, finding a balance between the demands of a busy school site and environmental conservation. As we look ahead to the next century, we remain focused on preserving and sustaining this remarkable High Weald site. We are committed not only to ensuring its preservation, but also to acknowledging and cherishing its distinctive characteristics.

**Nick Rendall**  
**Director of Partnerships, Benenden School**

# Nature Notes



Devil's-bit Scabious is an exciting name for a plant and an exciting plant it is. Its common name arises from the fact that its roots look as if bitten off, legend has it, by the Devil but its traditional use was much more friendly – as a treatment for skin conditions such as scabies and the sores of the Bubonic Plague.

It will be found in flower-rich grasslands – now down to less than 10% of their acreage in the early 20th Century, but nevertheless reasonably easy to find in the Weald and it will also be found along woodland rides. It flowers between July and October, attracting a wide variety of bees and insects, and a well populated meadow will contain a haze of blue flowerheads on a dramatic scale.

Not a great rarity, but very special  
*Mike Bax*  
**WKPS Chairman**



**wkps**  
weald of kent protection society

## Please Join Us!

WKPS covers the heart of the Weald of Kent, High and Low. It is a vast area, and we need you to join us to make it a team effort. The Weald needs protection by its community for its community. You can join via our website [www.wkps.org.uk](http://www.wkps.org.uk) or email [secretary@wkps.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wkps.org.uk)

**what a wonderful weald**  
help us keep it that way

# NEWS FROM THE CHEQUER TREE 'NURSERIES'

A quick update from **Anne Tipples** at Marden and **Mike Bax** at Shadoxhurst.

Seed was collected at the time of the Chequer Tree Safari in November 2023. This was stratified in fridges for something over four months. Advice on Google suggests 17 weeks. Some concerns over mildew in the plastic zippy bags. At Shadoxhurst the germination rate was low (less than 25%), but photographs show some healthy seedlings at this stage.

Anne is now augmenting her potting compost with a small amount of woodland soil to try to introduce the mycorrhizal fungi which is so prevalent in the woodland soils. Elsewhere in Marden, there are other back garden nurseries cherishing Marden and Shadoxhurst provenance plus the Carpenters' Bridgehurst Wood and Allingham Red Fruited.

Shadoxhurst experience is that it is easy to overdo the woodland clay – the seedlings don't seem to like water retention in the pots early on. The dull ordinary temperatures of early summer have not spurred growth rates, but the recent warm days in late June have moved things on significantly.

It has been interesting to compare seedlings dug up from below parent trees to those germinated in pots. The pot grown is markedly more vigorous. Transplanted cotyledons are probably best planted direct into bigger pots to avoid the need for a second move.

Lots to learn and an autumn report will follow. At this stage, mature Chequers have set seed for a 2024 crop, so harvesting and sowing can begin in the autumn. Please let us know of your successes, failures or experiences.



## 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](http://www.wkps.org.uk)  
[secretary@wkps.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wkps.org.uk) 07919 871543

# Dates for the Diary 2024

## THE PRESIDENT'S SUMMER RECEPTION

Thursday 18th July

Boldshaves Garden, Woodchurch TN26 3RA



The stunning gardens will be open to members from 5pm and a tour will leave from the Tea House at 5.30pm. Reception 6–8pm in the Barn.

See page 8 for full details.

### WKPS WILL BE AT

the **Weald of Kent Ploughing Match**  
on **Saturday 21st September**

in Munday Bois, Pluckley

**Please come along and say hello to us**

## Do you have an hour or two to spare a week?

WKPS are looking to recruit the following volunteers:  
Planning Scrutineers; Press & PR Media Officer; Membership Secretary

We also need volunteers to help at events  
for details please email [secretary@wkps.org.uk](mailto:secretary@wkps.org.uk) or call 01580 861246

Don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Instagram

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

## 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.

### Disclaimer

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# wkps

## The Weald of Kent Protection Society

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