



The countryside & urban green space newsletter for people living in Ashford, Canterbury and the surrounding countryside

Stour View

Issue 45
Summer 2012

CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND
PROMOTING THE COUNTRYSIDE
AND URBAN GREEN SPACE OF
THE STOUR VALLEY

The Big Blean Walk & the Blean Interpretive Panels

This new waymarked walk exploring the Blean Woods, north of Canterbury, opened on Friday May 4th. It is a 25 mile circular walk through **one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England**. The Walk, combined with 18 new interpretive panels, promotes The Blean to visitors and locals, inviting people to explore a world of history and nature. A southern route of 12 miles and a northern route of 13 miles make up the Walk, but it can also be done in stages using public transport. The end/start of the Walk are - Selling Railway Station or East Blean Wood National Nature Reserve Car Park on Hicks Forstall Road near Hoath.

The Walk has been developed by the **KSCP** as a member of the Blean Initiative, which is a partnership of landowners, local authorities, parish councils, conservation bodies and community groups that look after and promote The Blean. The Big Blean Walk is part funded by Heritage Lottery and the Kent Wildlife Trust.

Ian Brown, Chair of the Blean Initiative Group says 'This walk provides a great way to explore this area and helps bring a sense of identity to a part of Kent, which we are all trying to enhance and enjoy'. The symbol for the Walk is the Heath Fritillary butterfly, one of Britain's rarest and perhaps The Blean's greatest conservation success story. Close to extinction in the late 1980s, the Heath Fritillary colonies in The Blean are now some of the country's largest. John Bennett, Chief Executive of Kent Wildlife Trust says 'The Big Blean Walk is an opportunity to see dramatic landscapes in one of the country's most important and historic woodlands. Rediscover our countryside and celebrate the wildplaces on your doorstep. We all owe a debt to The Heritage Lottery Fund and many people of Kent who have contributed to the huge amount of work that is making these changes possible.'

The eighteen **interpretive panels** have been installed outside pubs and other gathering places including a village hall and a garden centre. Each panel tells a different story about The Blean. Topics include 'The Battle of Bossenden' 1838, the last armed uprising on English soil; 'The Wood Ant'; 'Butterflies of the Blean'; 'Trees of the Blean'. The panels were part funded by a grant from Viridor Credits.



A free colourful Big Blean Walk guide with a map and information about the history and nature of The Blean can be obtained from the Canterbury Visitor Information Centre on Stour Street; Faversham Tourist Information Centre; the Horsebridge Community Centre in Whitstable and Makcari's Information Point in Herne Bay. The guide can be downloaded from www.theblean.co.uk or www.kentishstour.org.uk where other walking information on The Blean can be found and all 18 panels can be seen.

A Blean Panel, 'A journey through trees and time' outside the Chapter Arms in Chartham Hatch.

Partnership Sponsors



ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY



HOW HEALTHY IS THE RIVER STOUR?

Barrie Neaves of the Environment Agency answers the question

When you look at the River Stour it may give the impression of being a clean, healthy river. But is it? The 'health' of a river is determined by its capacity to support life. This is termed the river's 'ecological status'. Under the European Union's Water Framework Directive, rivers are classified by one of five ecological statuses: High, Good, Moderate, Poor and Bad. Good status rivers will support a thriving mix of flora and fauna.



A relatively good stretch of river shown by the rafts of water crowfoot.

For monitoring and classification purposes the River Stour is divided into a number of discrete waterbodies: The Upper Stour (upstream of Ashford); the Great Stour (Ashford to Canterbury) and the Great Stour (Canterbury to West Stourmouth). A number of the Stour's tributaries are treated as separate waterbodies: the East Stour, Aylesford Stream, Kennington Stream, Lampen Stream, Whitehall Dyke, Little Stour and River Wingham. Each of these has its own classification.

Currently the River Stour is classified as 'Poor' from its source at Lenham as far downstream as the A2, where it improves to Moderate. Only one of the rivers in the Stour catchment – the Aylesford Stream – is currently classified as being in Good ecological status.

So what causes a river to have a poor ecological status? One of the obvious ones is the chemical make-up of the water. Obviously polluting or contaminating inputs to the river will make it harder for a diverse range of species to survive. Sometimes this is because one species is able to adapt to or tolerate the conditions more than others and will become dominant. This is often the case where watercourses have high nutrient levels. Nutrients can enter the river in a number of ways: from sewage treatment works, from agriculture and industry and from surface water discharges from urban areas. Phosphate levels are a particular concern in the Stour system. Fortunately when phosphate levels are reduced many species can recover relatively quickly.



A poor stretch of river where manure has been spread right next to the river causing algal blooms.

Another factor that is important is the flow in the river: obviously the more we take out of the river for human, agricultural or industrial consumption, the less there is left in the river to support life. Although most of the water we use in Kent comes out of underground aquifers, these same aquifers feed water into our rivers. That is why it is important for all of us to use water wisely in our homes.



KSCP volunteers improving the habitat quality in Ashford with planting and the placement of stone.

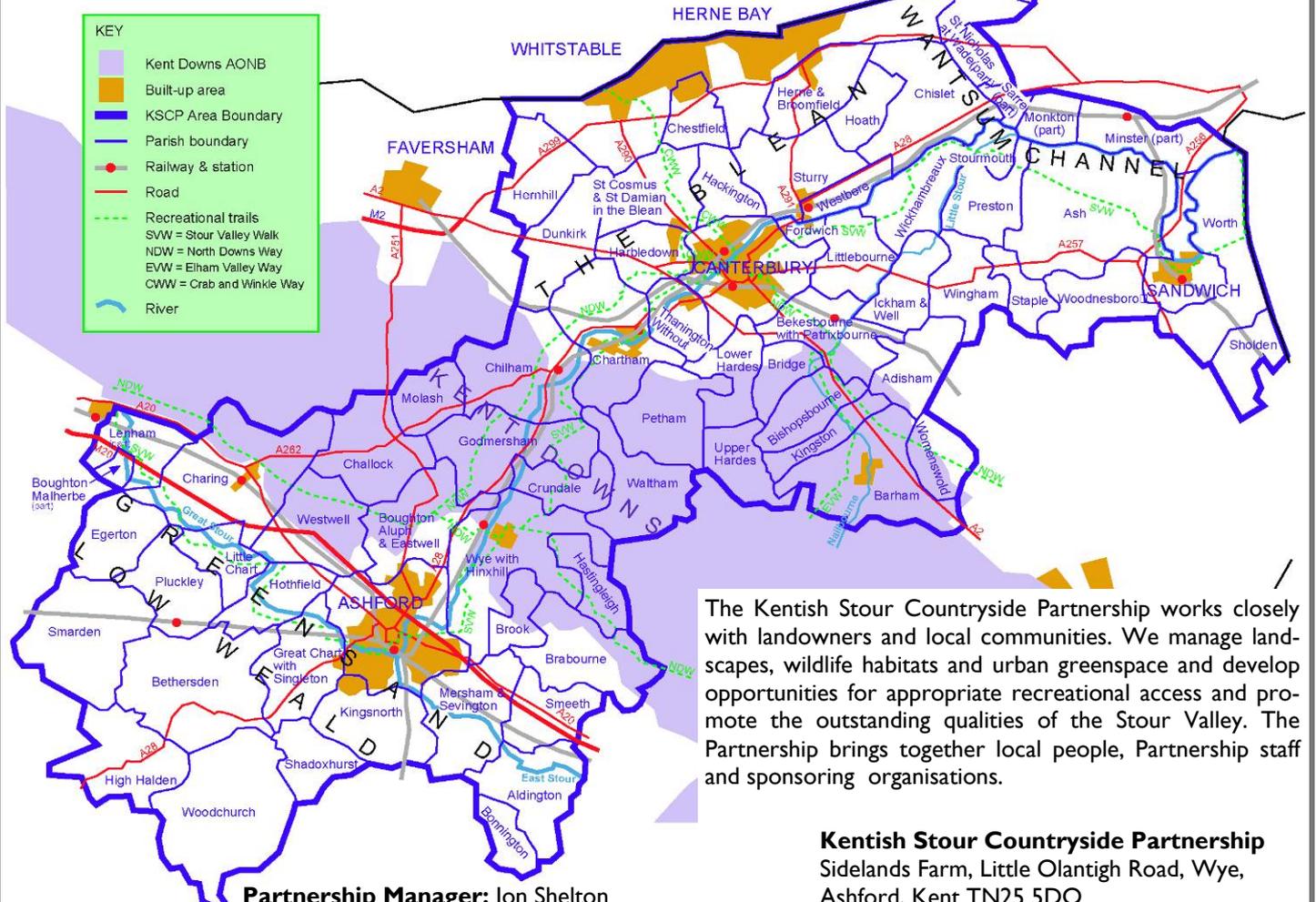
Another factor that impacts greatly on the Stour is the physical interference of man. Historically the river system has been managed by man, whether for drainage, flood risk management, navigation or to power mills. These activities can have a detrimental effect on the river. For example, weir structures often slow the river down to such an extent that silt settles out and smothers the gravel bed. Weirs can also obstruct the migration of fish.

We have an obligation to bring all our rivers up to Good status by 2027. Fortunately the interference of man can also bring about improvements to our rivers. And we are not starting from scratch; much has already been done and much more is planned. The Environment Agency has established an East Kent Catchment

Improvement Group to co-ordinate activities to improve the Stour. The work of the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership helps to improve the health of the river and we anticipate that the River Stour will be in at least Moderate status by 2015. If you would like to know more about the Water Framework Directive see:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

About the Partnership



The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership works closely with landowners and local communities. We manage landscapes, wildlife habitats and urban greenspace and develop opportunities for appropriate recreational access and promote the outstanding qualities of the Stour Valley. The Partnership brings together local people, Partnership staff and sponsoring organisations.

Partnership Manager: Jon Shelton
Ashford Countryside Officers (P/T): Debbie Adams & Diane Comley
 (Thomas Newton covering maternity leave Jan 2012-Oct 2012)
Canterbury & Wantsum Countryside Officer: Carol Donaldson

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership
 Sidelands Farm, Little Olantigh Road, Wye,
 Ashford, Kent TN25 5DQ
 Tel: 01233 813307
 E-mail: kentishstour@kent.gov.uk
www.kentishstour.org.uk

In need of a community toolkit?

KSCP have always been willing to lend community groups tools to do work however now we have specific tools for this purpose from bow saws to spades as well as all the protective clothing needed to use the tools safely. The purchase of the tools was made possible with funding from Kent County Council. We are happy to lend tools to any community/voluntary related group. If you are interested, simply call or email us. You can find out more about tools available and terms and conditions for loan on our website page www.kentishstour.org.uk/community_group_tools

New sculptured seats for Civic Centre North Park

KSCP commissioned five new seats/picnic tables on behalf of Ashford Borough Council. The seats have been sculptured by artist Steve Portchmouth. They feature riverside animals and aquatic minibeasts! Kent college students helped with the commission. Ashford BC portfolio holder for the environment Cllr Jessamy Blanford said 'These are not just pieces of park furniture, but imaginative works of art and we are very proud to have them adorning a town centre park. This sort of project goes to show the benefits of partnership working, a dynamic community organisation, talented local artist and young minds working together to produce stunning results.'



New leaflet for the Great Stour Way

The KSCP has produced a guide to the Great Stour Way shared use path between Canterbury and Chartham. It contains a map and information about the history of the area and wildlife along the route. Visit Tourist Information Centres to pick up the leaflet or download from publications on www.kentishstour.org.uk



Summer Westgate Parks Events

Westgate Parks brings wildlife to your doorstep and into the heart of the city! If you look carefully you'll discover that Canterbury is home to an enormous range of plants, insects and other species like the Daubenton's bat or kingfisher. Come along to some of our free events and see for yourself just what lives within our city. For all events meet at Toddlers Cove Car Park, Whitehall Close, Canterbury. Booking essential: KSCP 01233 813307, 07740 185224, kentishstour@kent.gov.uk Cost: Free, donations welcome. No bookings on the weekend of the event.

Insect Walk

Search for mini beasts, butterflies and dragonflies with an experienced ecologist.

Sunday 1st July 2-4pm

Natural Photos

Remember your camera for basic instruction and creating compositions around the parks.

Saturday 14th July 10.30am-12.30pm

Moth Evening

Enjoy an evening stroll around the parks then look for moths using a light trap.

Saturday 18th August 8pm-10pm

Small Mammal Trapping

Learn about and get an up close glimpse at our native small mammals. An expert from Kent Mammal Group will guide you through identifying voles, shrews and mice in the parks.

Please do not bring dogs to this event.

Saturday 15th September 9.30am-12.30pm



Buxford Meadow

Work has taken place in the Ashford green Corridor at Buxford by the KSCP wednesday volunteers to improve the riverside environment for wildlife. Some trees have been felled to allow more light to reach the river and woody debris has been placed in the river to diversify its flow. This follows on from the management plan KSCP wrote in 2010 for this local wildlife site. There is likely to be further work here so if you would like to volunteer your help please contact KSCP.



Volunteering

Come along and lend a hand with a variety of enjoyable and worthwhile practical conservation projects throughout the Stour Valley!

For our detailed programme phone us on 01233 813307 or go to www.kentishstour.org.uk and click on 'get involved'

.Wednesdays (Ashford area): Meet 9.15 at the KSCP offices or 9.30 at the back of the Stour Centre.

Thursdays (Canterbury & Wantsum): Meet 9.15 at KSCP offices or 9.45 outside the old Habitat entrance, Rheims Way, Canterbury.

Countryside events in the Stour Valley

For information about events in the Stour Valley visit the following websites:

KSCP: kentishstour.org.uk

The Blean Initiative: theblean.co.uk

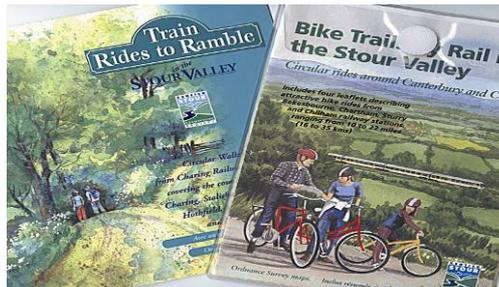
Friends of King's Wood: friendsofkingwood.org

Wildwood (Herne): wildwoodtrust.org

Spokes (cycling): spokeeastkent.org.uk

KSCP publications, for those who enjoy the countryside

All available from quality bookshops and KSCP. For information on other publications and free downloads visit kentishstour.org.uk



Train Rides to Ramble (£2.00) & **Bike Trails by Train** (£1.50) Circular walks and cycle rides from railway stations in the Stour Valley. Full colour, maps & directions, packed with information and illustrations.



Big Blean Walk (Free) A guide to this walking route with map.



Wildsites (£1.00) A guide to 31 wildlife sites in the Stour Valley.