



Kent  
**HIGH WEALD**  
protect / explore / enjoy

## Kent High Weald Partnership

Annual Report

April 2021 – March 2022

Kent High Weald Partnership aims to connect people and nature through conservation, education, and wellbeing. Through our work we support the development of resilient communities and resilient ecosystems that mean people and wildlife can thrive together.

“No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.” (Sir David Attenborough)



2021/22 was a challenging year for everyone as we navigated the second year of an unprecedented global pandemic. Fortunately, working outdoors presents a much safer work environment for our staff and volunteers, and despite the significant barriers we were able to achieve some fantastic outcomes for people and nature. We have dynamically adapted to meet the demands of varying government restrictions, increasing footfall pressure on our greenspaces, extreme weather events, and the acute rise in the need for health and wellbeing services for people of all ages. Alongside this has been the growing concern about climate change and the importance of sustainability and resilience in our communities.

Our parks, open spaces, and nature reserves not only present vital opportunities to help protect and restore nature but they are also essential resources to help people flourish and they must be accessible to everyone. It is vital that, with the involvement of local people and communities, we protect and manage them appropriately, and explore and enjoy them freely and respectfully. Our green spaces also offer critical nature-based solutions and mitigation opportunities against the effect of climate change.

This report summarises the work and outcomes of KHWP in 2021/22 under our 3 main branches of conservation, education, and wellbeing; all of which could only have been achieved with our partners, our core funding, and our wonderful team of volunteers.



## *Thank you!*

Our core partners and funders, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council, enable us to carry out this important work making a real difference to people and nature.

Collaboration is the key to success, and we express our deepest gratitude to all the partners we work with who help us with funding and support. So a huge thank you to: Town and Country Housing; Southborough Town Council; Matfield & Brenchley PC; Cranbrook & Sissinghurst PC; the High Weald AONB Team; the Friends Groups of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park, Dunorlan Park, Calverley Park, the Cemeteries, and Barnettts Wood; Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom; Forestry England; Tunbridge Wells Commons; Shaw Trust; Involve Kent; West Kent Mind; Birch Wood Association; Sherwood Shed; Kent Wildlife Trust; Southborough, Bidborough and Broadwater Primary Schools; Oakley School; Skinners Kent Academy; Natural England; No 1 Community Trust; Lamberhurst PC; Rusthall PC; Dandara; Kent & Medway NHS; and Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth.



*Community Allotment Peas*

This year we were also grateful to achieve external funding grants from the Sussex Lund, Colyer Fergusson, Councillor Paul Barrington-King, and Councillors Sarah Hamilton and James McInroy (some funds carried forward from 2020).

## Conservation Highlights

KHWP oversees the conservation management of 3 Local Nature Reserves (Barnett's Wood and Hilbert's Wood in Tunbridge Wells, and Crane Valley in Cranbrook) and 3 Local Wildlife Sites (Cinderhill in Matfield, Southborough Common, and Sherwood Lake & Woods). We also work with other organisations and landowners to help improve their sites for nature and access. This year KHWP:

- Improved 17 sites for nature and people with the help of amazing local volunteers
- Enhanced over 150 hectares of land for biodiversity whilst also raising awareness of the importance of our local biodiversity and how people can do their bit to help
- Removed invasive species such as Himalayan balsam and cherry laurel from Sherwood, Southborough Common, Dunorlan Park, and Hilbert Woods
- Supported Tunbridge Wells with 11 South and Southeast in Bloom awards, helping the Borough to win 5 golds and 3 categories
- Delivered 86 volunteer tasks, totalling 4235 volunteer hours (numbers were more restricted than usual years due to covid safe working protocols)
- Restored 13 ponds and created 3 new ponds
- Surveyed 22 ponds for great crested newts with 12 positive outcomes
- Planted 215 new trees in Tunbridge Wells
- Sowed hundreds of thousands of native wildflower seeds in Tunbridge Wells
- Maintained 10 "leaky" dams, providing natural flood defences
- Installed 18 new bat and owl boxes
- Hosted 110 attendees to our bat walks and heritage walk
- Launched the Tunbridge Wells Community Nature Reserve encouraging residents and businesses to dedicate at least 2m<sup>2</sup> of their land or home to wildlife.



[Bank stabilising at Dunorlan Park / Clearing an old Victorian carriageway at Sherwood / Storm Eunice damage at Hilberts]

"I have been very impressed by KHWP's handling of volunteering events during covid. We were kept informed and involved throughout. It is great that they are doing all that can be done to get people out and come together, there are many that rely on volunteering as their only interaction with others." (KHWP Volunteer)

## Education Highlights

KHWP has a dedicated and passionate team of Forest School practitioners and professionally qualified teachers delivering a diverse range of outdoor learning in a variety of settings each year. Forest School is a transformative and holistic approach to learning that has real and long-lasting benefits to participants. Our aim is to provide Forest School for disadvantaged children and those struggling with mental health challenges and complex needs which, in many cases, have been worsened recently by the lockdown period. This year we have:

- Delivered over 100 outdoor enrichment sessions to over 350 children
- Provided 55 disadvantaged primary school children (including SEN and EAL students) and 15 secondary school children with forest school programmes
- Delivered 25 pre-school Forest School sessions
- Provided Teambuilding at Bedgebury for over 250 children and 30 adults
- Hosted 110 children at our Bedgebury Forest Summer Camp
- Trained 23 adults and teachers to be qualified Level 3 Forest School leaders
- Engaged over 300 children and families at our Wild Child drop-in Forest School experience sessions on the Commons
- Improved grounds for outdoor education purposes at 4 different schools
- Provided work experience for 5 young people



[Forest School Level 3 Training / Forest Preschool activity / Cooking pancakes at Forest School]

“One student who has ADHD had the highest amount of behaviour logs in year 8. Forest School was used as a carrot to get him to regulate his behaviour and also helped staff to understand better his needs. At his recent Annual Review, the student was commended on the improvement in his behaviour around the Academy and how he now trusts certain members of staff that he has built a relationship through Forest School.”  
(Skinner Kent Academy Teacher)

## Wellbeing Highlights

The wellbeing benefits of being out nature are becoming more widely recognised and evidenced. All our work has a positive impact on the wellbeing of those we work with. Our volunteer programme alone helps provide social interaction and a sense of belonging to over 30 adults. With years of experience and skills we have developed nature connection programmes and activities designed to help people, often focussed on families and children in need and adults struggling with poor mental health and social isolation. We are delighted that the online Connect with Nature programme we designed during lockdown has been hugely successful and has continued this year. In 2021/22 we:

- Supported 6 families through our therapeutic family forest school programme 'Forest Time'
- Provided horticultural therapy at our community allotment to 27 adults with poor mental health or learning difficulties
- Supported 36 adults suffering poor mental health and social isolation via our online Live Well Kent "Connect with Nature" programme
- Provided nature connection support at our community allotment for 4 NHS psychiatric patients and their support workers
- Grew 30 different varieties of vegetables, herbs, and pollinator friendly flowers from seed on our community allotment – including seedlings grown for the new Amelia Centre courtyard garden
- Helped enhance the Horsmonden Community Garden for local groups and schools
- Managed and maintained 2 community allotment sites with the help of volunteers
- Begun supporting the development of a community garden project in Showfields



[Community Allotment produce / Online CWN participant notebook / Family Forest Time]

"This kind of mental health support brings a great opportunity not only resulting from the lockdown but in continuing it would be inclusive of those unable to attend physical nature sessions either because of disability or poor mental health. It encouraged some of the attendees to reach out to attend 'in person' sessions and others were enthusiastic to attend similar events in the future." (WK Mind Counsellor feedback on online Connect with Nature programme).

## Financial summary

KHWP is a non-profit organisation and our turnover for the financial year 2021/22 was **£317,299**. Due to a small amount of income loss because of the pandemic our expenditure was £324,662 and we used £7,363 of our reserve fund, leaving us a reserve fund of £29k. 25% of our income was core funding, 26% was funding and grants for conservation, 10% for wellbeing grants and contracts, 14% was education and training income, and 25% from wider landscape project grants.

## Find out more...

### ***Get in touch***

Contact KHWP Manager, Cally Fiddimore, by emailing [cally.fiddimore@kent.gov.uk](mailto:cally.fiddimore@kent.gov.uk) or call 07545 743416. We would be very happy to provide presentations on our work to your groups or organisations.

### ***Follow us on social media***

You can find us online, on Facebook, Instagram and now TikTok! Just search KHWP. Or watch a short video of some of our work highlights from 2021:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOM03Hs8tZ4>

### ***Come and join us!***

We welcome groups of volunteers (or individuals) from organisations and businesses looking to get involved – we always have plenty to do, particularly between September and March. Tea, coffee and biscuits provided!



Photo by Stephen Ambrose