

CAMS



NEWS

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# HISTORIC SCHEME LAUNCHED

**The signing of an historic Memorandum of Agreement uniting some of the Countries leading conservation and heritage organisations formally set up the Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme on the 9th September.**

Established to identify and carry out projects as compensation for the effects of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link as it passes through the ancient Ashenbank Wood and historic Cobham Park, the Scheme represents the culmination of wide ranging discussions between Union Railways, Gravesham Borough Council as well as local and national interest groups.

For David Nessling, who as special projects director for Gravesham Borough Council was responsible for negotiating the Scheme, it provides an excellent opportunity for conservation groups and developers to show how they can work together.

He added, "The Scheme has brought together all the major players for the first time I can remember in over 30 years of planning. We are very excited and confident that the Scheme will have a positive impact on the area".

The partnership comprises English Heritage, English Nature, Gravesham Borough Council, Kent County Council, The National Trust, The Woodland Trust and Union Railways. The

Highways Agency, although not a formal signatory, are also represented on the group.

Landowners and local interest groups are expected to take the lead role in developing the detailed plans for the area, drawing on the experience and expertise of the Steering group members as required.

On the day of the launch, over 30 different groups and individuals met in the Gilt Hall at the historic Cobham Hall to discuss the project in the first forum chaired by lord Darnley.

Peter Griffiths, the National Trust's Regional Director and



*John Neerhoute Jnr. Managing Director Union Railways and Mayor Makham Singh*

key Steering Group member was delighted with the attendance saying:

"The launch has been very successful. It is good to see so many diverse groups coming together. I am delighted with the generally positive attitude taken by everyone today and hope that all will continue to take an active role in the development of the Scheme".

**Since the launch, project planning has started in earnest with groups established to consider ecology, access and the historic park.**

**Anyone with an interest is encouraged to contact David Standen, the Scheme Manager, who will ensure all ideas are considered.**



*From left to right: Tony Chadwick - senior planner with Gravesham Borough Council, John Tucker - South East Regional Manager for The Woodland Trust, Peter Griffiths - National Trust Director for Kent and East Sussex, Chris Waite - Kent County Council, Ted Allett - Country Route Director for Union Railways, David Standen - Scheme Manager, Jeff Waller - Liaison Manager for Rail Link Engineering and Jim Forster from the Highways Agency. Photo by David Nessling.*

# HISTORY TEST



*The Darnley Mausoleum*

## **Is it Georgian, Medieval, Picturesque, Gothic or a modern replacement?**

These are some of the questions that the Historic Park Working Group will be trying to answer over the next few months.

Most of the CAMS area is designated a Grade II\* historic park, a national designation for parkland of significant historical value and many of the buildings warrant a Grade I or II listing, reserved for the most important architectural buildings.

Although largely a landscape inspired by Humphrey Repton, the famous Georgian landscape architect, the areas history can be traced back to Roman times and boasts features from this period on.

A significant amount of work detailing the history of the surrounding park has already been researched and published in an excellent document commissioned by the Cobham Hall Heritage Trust from Kendrun Laurie, a local historian. The task now is to assess remaining landscape features and buildings and draw up a programme of works aimed at preserving and enhancing significant features for future generations.

The Cobham Hall Heritage Trust, English Heritage, Cobham School, Gravesham Borough Council and The National Trust are all playing an active role in developing the plans.

Funding the projects is a key consideration and discussions have already taken place with potential funding bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It is hoped that amongst the features to benefit from the programme is the Darnley Mausoleum built on Williams Hill in 1783 for the princely sum of £30,000.

Dr Richard Morrice, English Heritage's inspector of historic buildings for Kent and East Sussex, describes the building as 'one of the two or three most important buildings of its type in the country'.

Unfortunately the building has deteriorated over the years and is still open to vandalism. However, if vandalism is controlled, Dr Morrice hopes that work to stabilise and restore the building may be carried out with the assistance of lottery funds.

# ORDERS PLACED FOR ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS

## **Surveys of the wildlife and plants in the CAMS area will start in Spring.**

The Scheme's Ecology Working Group have been speaking to a range of national experts to establish contracts for monitoring the area's birds, plants, veteran trees and the bugs and beetles.

Over 600 acres (275 hectares) of the CAMS area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a designation given to sites of national importance for wildlife.

The information obtained will compliment existing records giving a broad understanding of the site's ecology and the conditions that need to be retained or created to

maximise the value of the area for wildlife.

As Rob Cameron, English Nature's representative on the Steering Group explained:

'The area is particularly well known for it's important and diverse range of invertebrate fauna and particularly it's bugs and beetles. The sites are also important for their range of woodland birds and a number of notable plants. It is vital that we have comprehensive and up to date information on which to base our management decisions if we are going to balance the needs of the various groups to the maximum advantage.'

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# BID TO RESTRICT UNAUTHORISED ACCESS

## **Projects aimed at reducing unauthorised access to the CAMS area have been included in an application for INTEREGG funds recently submitted by Kent County Council.**

Interegg grants form part of the European Regional Development Funds. They are aimed at encouraging countries within the E.E.C to discuss common problems and develop common solutions.

The bid from Kent, as part of the Kent/Nord-Pas de Calais Scheme, is for funding in support of the development

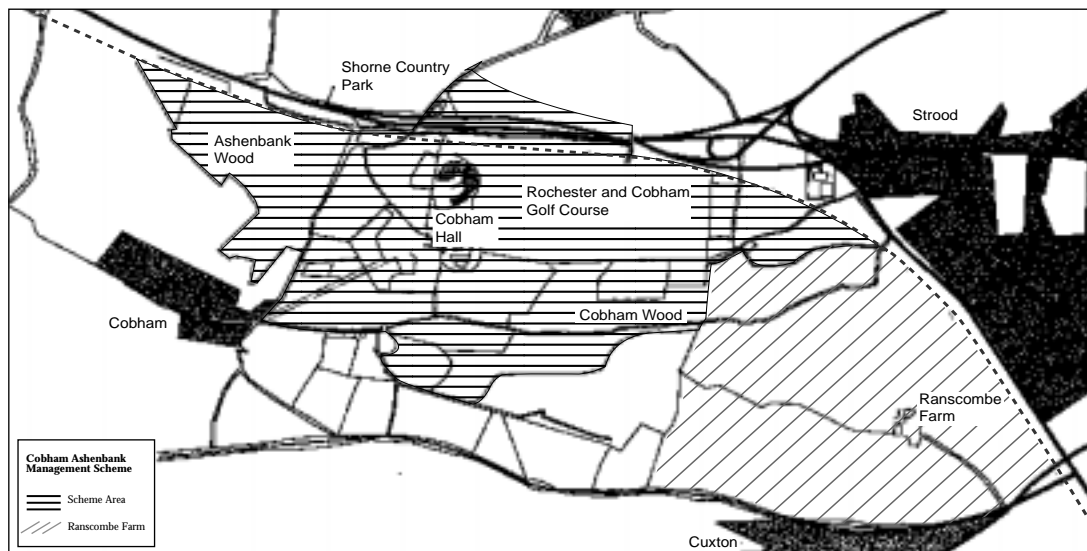
of a Green grid - a County wide proposal to establish a network of informal open spaces linked by a network of rights of way.

Inclusion of the CAMS project is recognition of the significant benefits that can be achieved for the environment and quiet recreation by resolving the current access problems.

# WHITECLIFF SUPPORT SURVEYS

**Whitecliff properties, a joint venture between Blue Circle Industries and Lend Lease, have pledged £2,000 to support the production of ecological surveys.**

Whitecliff properties own Ranscombe Farm to the south of Cobham Wood and the pledge will ensure that survey work is extended to cover land in their ownership and that the resulting conservation plans take into account the full ecological area.



*Plan of showing the relationship of Ranscombe Farm to the Scheme Area*

Ranscombe Farm is shown in the draft Medway towns local plan as a potential country park. As well as an operating farm the site contains a considerable area of woodland within the Cobham Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest.

It is hoped that results from the surveys will provide

valuable information to Whitecliff properties on the value of the area for wildlife and assist in their future management decisions.

The survey information will also ensure that management recommendations are integrated with proposals for the wider CAMS area.

John Tucker, regional manager for The Woodland Trust, says that the decision opens up a fantastic opportunity for wildlife and conservation. He added:

‘We are delighted that Whitecliff have agreed to support the surveys and the development of a

comprehensive management plan. The inclusion of the Ranscombe Farm site almost doubles the area under consideration and provides a superb opportunity for conservation development. It is an excellent example of how the CAMS Scheme can provide added benefit to the local area’.

## UNAUTHORISED ACCESS A PRIORITY

**Resolving the current problem of unauthorised access to the CAMS area remains a Steering Group priority.**

Throughout the area and particularly in and around Cobham Wood, unauthorised users continue to cause damage and disturbance to people and property.

Misuse ranges from the relatively innocuous use of mountain bikes and horses, to motorcycling and off road vehicles, to disposal of stolen vehicles and fly tipping.

Resolving these problems is never easy but, in CAMS, the task is complicated by the number of access points, the need to retain legal access rights, the number of landowners involved and the impassable nature of many of the tracks for enforcement vehicles.

Many attempts have been made in the past to restrict main points of access but barriers have either been bypassed or broken.

Following detailed discussions with the local authorities,

landowners, the police, fire services and groups representing off road recreation users, a comprehensive programme of works has been developed.

The proposals, currently the subject of extensive consultations, include erection of barriers, on site monitoring and co-ordinated enforcement.

Consideration is also being given how legal facilities can best be provided.

Ted Allett, Chairman of the Steering Group, sees resolving the problem as a major step in

achieving the Scheme’s aims. He summed up the general feelings saying:

‘It is tragic that the minority have been allowed to disrupt the day to day lives of local residents and landowners and despoil this valuable area. We are committed to supporting the landowners and enforcing authorities in resolving the problem in whatever way we can. I am convinced that a resolution to the problem will promote a renewed confidence in the area resulting in further investment and substantial improvements.’

# ENGLISH HERITAGE TO SUPPORT HISTORIC PLAN

**English Heritage look set to pledge staff and resources to develop a conservation plan for the CAMS area.**

Based on a pioneering approach first used in assessing the future of the Sydney Opera House, the plan will develop policies and proposals for the full range of interests in the CAMS area.

Dr Roger Bowdler, a member of the South East conservation group of English Heritage, has been presented with the task of adapting the approach to cover conservation, recreation and historic interests.

It is hoped that, in addition to assessing the features of CAMS and developing ideas for the future, the report will provide a blue print for conservation plan development across the country.

## ACCESS ASSESSED

**Representatives of local access groups, landowners, the Borough council and County Council have been working with CAMS to develop long term proposals for access throughout the area.**

The original Cobham Park and Ashenbank Wood report highlighted that there was a dearth of east west links in the area and a general shortage of bridleways. The report also highlighted potential opportunities for creating circular walks and rides and integrating the Scheme into the wider area.

During a series of meetings and site visits, the Access working group have sought to set out a vision for future access catering for walkers, riders and cyclists considering, not only routes in the area, but links to the surrounding urban area.

Given the existing misuse of much of the area, it is generally accepted that access must be controlled before new opportunities can be exploited. However, the proposals will ensure that opportunities to establish agreements for the future are not overlooked.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**Detailed plans of the Scheme area are currently being produced.**

The 1:5000 plans are based on recent aerial photographs and are being confirmed on the ground through a series of site visits.

In addition to paths, boundaries and contours, the

plans will give an indication of vegetation cover.

The plans will provide a valuable resource and will assist considerably with ecological surveys and historic mapping.

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## IN PRACTICE

**Vegetation has been removed from the roof of the Darnley Mausoleum to prevent continued deterioration.**

Following advice from Alan Cox, Gravesham Borough Council's Conservation Architect, specialist contractors were employed to treat the vegetation growing from the buildings roof.

According to Mr Cox, if left untreated, the roots could cause long term damage to the roof

structure and facades. In addition to the normal hazards associated with the height and chemical treatment, the contractors had to face the hazard of 18" of mud on the track leading to the Mausoleum forcing them to walk the last 500 metres carrying ladders and equipment.



*Steering Group members negotiate one of the many hazards encountered on routes in the CAMS area.*

## WAR TIME MEMORIES SOUGHT



*Air-Raid Shelter – Ashenbank Wood*

Do you remember the military camps in Ashenbank Wood or the anti aircraft battery off Lodge Lane? If so David Standen would like to hear from you.

In partnership with Victor Smith of the New Tavern Fort project, David is trying to piece together the story of these areas both during and after the war.

Plans already uncovered show that there were three camps in Ashenbank Wood possibly linked to the nearby airfield. It also seems likely that the site was used to house the homeless after the war and perhaps until as late as the mid 50's.

A number of features still exist on the ground which are currently being mapped by volunteers from the Gravesham Historical Society.

In addition to adding to the knowledge of Gravesham's war years, the information will be used during the development of the Scheme's management plan.