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EXCEPT FOR ACCESS

Plans to restore the ecological, heritage and recreation value of Cobham Wood have come a step closer with the installation of range of barriers aimed at restricting the current levels of unauthorised access.

In line with the proposals set out in the last newsletter, contractors have now erected over 400 metres of stockproof fencing, installed 12 field gates, 6 kissing gates, including one specifically designed for wheelchair users, and a series of vehicle bollards.

In addition, following comments received during consultations, Gravesham Borough Council have agreed to fund a kissing gate at the entrance to footpath NS 180 and discussions are in hand with Blue Circle Industries and Medway Council on details for additional restrictions on the North Downs Way and at the end of White Leaves Rise.

Monitoring of the area has now been introduced with the Gravesham Ranger Service, Kent Police and local residents all actively involved.

Local support for the proposals is high and early indications are that the works have had a significant impact. However, Scheme Managers remain cautious. As Ted Allett, Steering Group Chairman explains:

“We are delighted to have been able to reach agreement with the range of groups and organisations involved and to have finally started work on the ground.

Initial results are encouraging and I would particularly like to thank the local police for their concerted effort in carrying out enforcement.

However, given the entrenched nature of the problems we need to remain vigilant and ensure that the problems do not gradually creep back.



Contractors install barriers at Strood underpass.

SECURE FUTURE FOR HISTORIC PARK?

Recognised as one of the most important buildings of its type in the country, the Darnley Mausoleum has been burnt, battered and blown up.

The surrounding landscape, designated a Grade II* in recognition of its national importance and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, for its nature conservation value has been, and continues to be used as an unofficial race track. It is also regularly used for fly tipping and burning out vehicles.

Because of the problems, it is not surprising that, over the years there has been a reluctance from individuals and organisations to invest in the site. It is also understandable that the unique heritage and ecology are not the sites best known features.

However this could change if access restrictions prove a success.

As David Standen, Scheme Manager explains:

“Success with the access control programme is vital. Just reaching this stage has demonstrated a clear commitment from landowners, local authorities, and user groups to work with CAMS and its partner bodies to maximise the opportunities offered by the project. It has also demonstrated a clear willingness to take a positive and pro active approach. We are not out of the woods yet but progress has already had a significant impact on confidence which can only improve if the programme of works begins to take effect.”



Left to Right: Simon Hill of Conservation Works, David Standen, Cllr Loughlin, chairman of GBC's Planning and Transportation Committee, Paul Phillips, contractor and WPC Tracy Mears.

TOP MARKS IN ECOLOGY

The quality and range of the CAMs ecology has been confirmed with the publication of the first ecological survey plans.

“Of very high interest indeed” was the interim judgement of Dr. Peter Kirby the consultant working for the Scheme looking at invertebrates when, after only 6 visits and very poor weather in June, the CAMS area entered the entomological charts at number 20 in the country for its beetle interest, a ranking that is likely to significantly improve.

Similar good results have been obtained from the surveys looking at breeding birds botanical interest and mycology with all identifying a good range of common species as well as a number of nationally and internationally rare species.

The wealth of wildlife in the area results from the unique combination of geology, habitat type and historical land uses.

Habitats as diverse as chalk grassland, coppice chestnut and wood pasture can all be found in the Scheme area. The

historic development has resulted in a legacy of 2-400 plus year old trees, unimproved meadows and ancient woodland sites, areas that have been permanently wooded for at least 400 years.

However there is no room for complacency. Man has played a major role in shaping and managing the landscape to date and in some areas lack of management, vandalism and disturbance are now beginning to take their toll on the local ecology.

Detailed management plans are now being developed on the strength of information received from the range of surveys to inform future management. National and local experts, land managers, residents and users will all be involved to ensure a practical yet sympathetic approach that will help to protect this valuable resource throughout the next millennium.



Just some of the range of fungi growing on dead wood in Ashenbank Wood.



A badger foraging near Ashenbank.

THE FACTS

Mammals. The area provides homes for a wide range of common and protected species. Of particular note is the presence of the scarce Hazel Dormouse, four roosts of the nationally rare Leisler's bat, and a number of badger setts.

Breeding Birds. 48-50 species of bird are thought to breed in the CAMS area making it of high local or county importance and within the qualifying level for Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Cobham Park provides the richest population with slightly less interest in Ashenbank Wood and the coppice woodland

Four species relatively scarce in Britain were recorded; Nightjar, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pippit and Hawfinch as well as Woodcock which is scarce in Kent.

Botanical. A wide diversity of species has been identified reflecting the wide variety of soil types across the area. Of particular interest are the nationally rare Meadow Clary, Hairy Mallow and *Filago pyramidata* and the nationally scarce Man Orchid, all largely associated with the chalk soils. There is also an interesting range of county rare species including Wild Liquorice, Horseshoe Vetch, Grey Sedge, Gromwell, Night Flowering Catchfly, Sweet Briar, Greater tussock sedge and *Valerianella dentata*.

Invertebrates. The invertebrate faunas of Ashenbank and Cobham wood are of very high interest. A total of seventy three nationally scarce and four red data book species, including *Mordellistena brevicauda* and *Chrysopilus laetus*, have so far been identified.

Early information suggests that the areas historic reputation for invertebrates has more than stood the test of time and that it is likely that the invertebrate interest is far wider than records initially indicated.

BUILDING RISKS TO BE ASSESSED

Detailed architectural surveys are to be commissioned for the range of parkland buildings in the Scheme area.

Following extensive consultations and advice from the Schemes' Historic Working Group, the Steering Group have given the go ahead for a professional architect team to be commissioned.

The team will support detailed project planning and if proposals are successful, the restoration of the Darnley Mausoleum, Gothic Dairy, Aviary and Pump House.

The Conservation Plan, currently being produced for the Scheme by English Heritage, has already collated

significant historical records and plans that will be used to guide the architects on restoration planning and assist in costing the range of proposals.

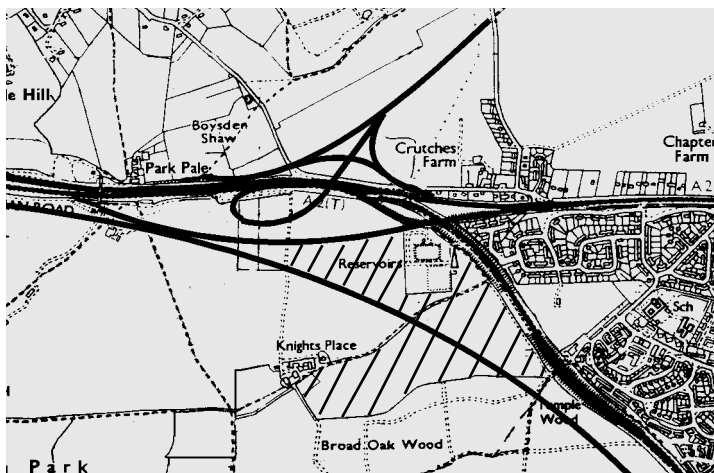
Information from the surveys due for completion during November, will be incorporated into the historic park restoration plan and will help in assessing project viability and priorities. The information will also be used to support future grant submissions and in the case of the Mausoleum, will assist in discussions with potential future owners and managers.



The Darnley Mausoleum



New pond recently constructed at Ashenbank Wood.



Future woodland areas at Knights Place

BALANCING EXERCISE

Work has started on the creation of a new pond in Ashenbank Wood.

Located next to the existing pond in the north eastern corner, the pond is being constructed by the Rail Link team to provide replacement habitat for losses at Becketts pond on the north end of Scotland Lane.

The pond is just one of the projects taking place along the Rail Link to create new habitat as compensation for losses due to the rail Link construction.

In the Scheme area, two ponds have already been constructed in the Knights Place area and there are proposals for substantial woodland creation around Knights Place and to the north west of Ashenbank Wood.

Where appropriate, woodland soils will be moved from the line of the railway to the new woodland areas so that existing wildflowers and bulbs can be preserved.

The dead wood interest of the Scheme area, will be maintained and enhanced with both the Rail Link Team and Highways Agency, responsible for the A2/M2 widening, agreeing to move timber off the construction line and leave it for the fungi and beetles in neighbouring woodland.

All works will be carefully monitored by the construction companies for a period of ten years ensuring that the success can be judged and information gathered to assist with future habitat replacement projects.

NEW BR PLANS PROPOSED

Detailed proposals for a bridleway linking Shorne to Cobham Park have been drawn up for consultation.

Highlighted as, key to the development of a comprehensive access network, by the CAMS Access Working Group, the plan proposes a bridleway from the Park Pale crossing of the A2, under the CTRL and then east to join the Knights Place access road.

Avoiding conflict was high on the agenda during planning and use has been made of the wide landscaping strip to the south of CTRL to keep the route away from the golf club greens.

Initial consultations with local user groups, the golf club and Gravesham Council have

raised no objections and plans have now been lodged with Rail Link Engineering, the land owners, for their consideration.

Agreement on the route will ensure that a safe crossing of the A2 and the CTRL are provided for walkers, riders and cyclists as well as the creation of a wide range of opportunities for local recreation and longer distance routes.

Pat Wilson, local footpath secretary for Gravesham for the Kent area of the Ramblers Association and Access Working Group member sees agreement on the route as essential saying:



— — Proposed new bridleway

“Historically, there is a dearth of provision for horse riding in the Shorne and Cobham area resulting in conflict on the footpath system as well as the dangers of horses on the road. We all fought hard to ensure that a bridle route was retained across the A2 at Park Pale during the inquiry into the

Wainscott Northern Bypass scheme and it will be tragic if the opportunities this opened up were lost with the development of the CTRL. We are delighted that the Scheme has addressed this important issue and are hopeful that proposals can be incorporated into the CTRL plans.”

ROYAL PERFORMANCE

The CAMS project provided one of the talking points for His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on his recent visit to Gravesend.

During his tour of an information packed exhibition on major partnerships in Gravesham, CAMS proved to be of particular interest.

David Standen, Scheme Manager, who spoke to the Prince about the Scheme said:

“The Prince seemed genuinely interested in the approach taken by the Scheme and

extremely knowledgeable on landscape issues.”

As well as questions on the ancestral history and current use of Cobham Hall, the Prince was particularly encouraged by the integration of current land use into a historic landscape and especially the historic park restoration plan adopted by the Rochester and Cobham Golf Club.



The Princes Visit

ALL CHANGE IN CAMS STEERING GROUP



John Chesshyre, the National Trusts Historic Buildings Advisor for the Kent and East Sussex region has joined the Schemes Steering Group.

John replaces Peter Griffiths whose move to the Trust's Southern region was reported in the last newsletter.

Both Phil and John bring considerable experience to the Scheme and are already involved in a number of detailed projects to forward the Schemes aims.



Phil Williams, Conservation Officer for Kent has joined the Steering Group as English Nature's representative.

Phil replaces Rob Cameron who, in addition to a range of Kent based projects, will be concentrating on ecological issues throughout the length of the Rail Link.