

Reconnecting our Ancient Forest



Our Vision

Working with local MPs, Councillors, wildlife groups and landowners, with the help of Sir John Lawton, author of the 2010 government review of England's protected areas "Making Space for Nature", we have been developing a proposal to reconnect the Ancient Woodland from Kings Wood and Perry Wood, North-Eastward to the Blean Woodland Nature Reserve and East Blean at Hoath, to connect essential wildlife habitats and re-create a landscape-scale Forest in East Kent.

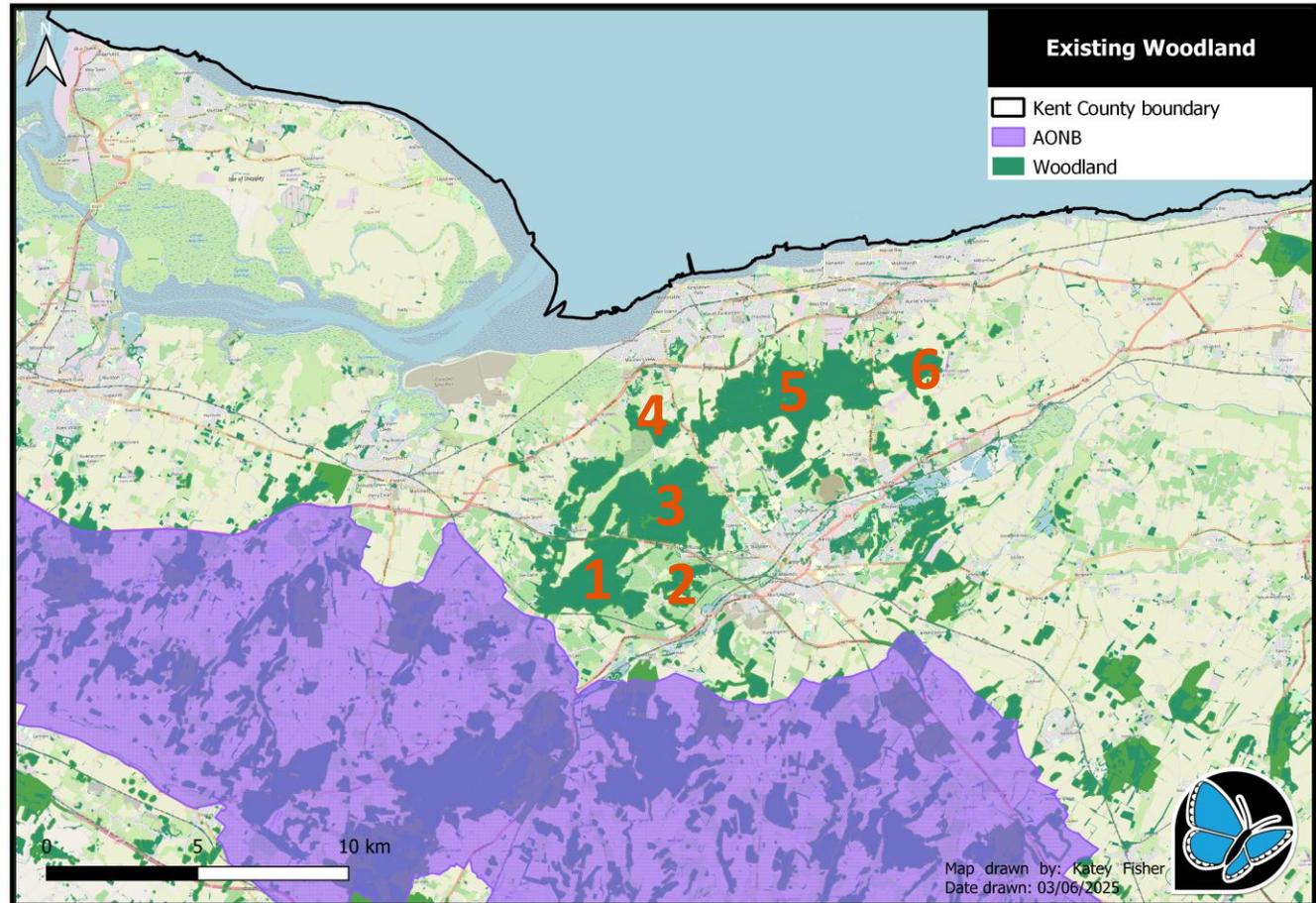
This exciting project includes a "Green" land bridge across the A2, creating "stepping stones" to connect habitats and developing marginal habitats to support the biodiversity of the forest.

As part of this scheme, we will be proposing an expansion of the Kent Downs National Landscape, (previously the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) into the area, to create a substantial forest that can support threatened species and, possibly, allow the reintroduction of larger, lost species such as Bison and Lynx.

View of Victory Wood & The Blean from Monkshill

Reconnecting our Ancient Forest

Ancient Woodland

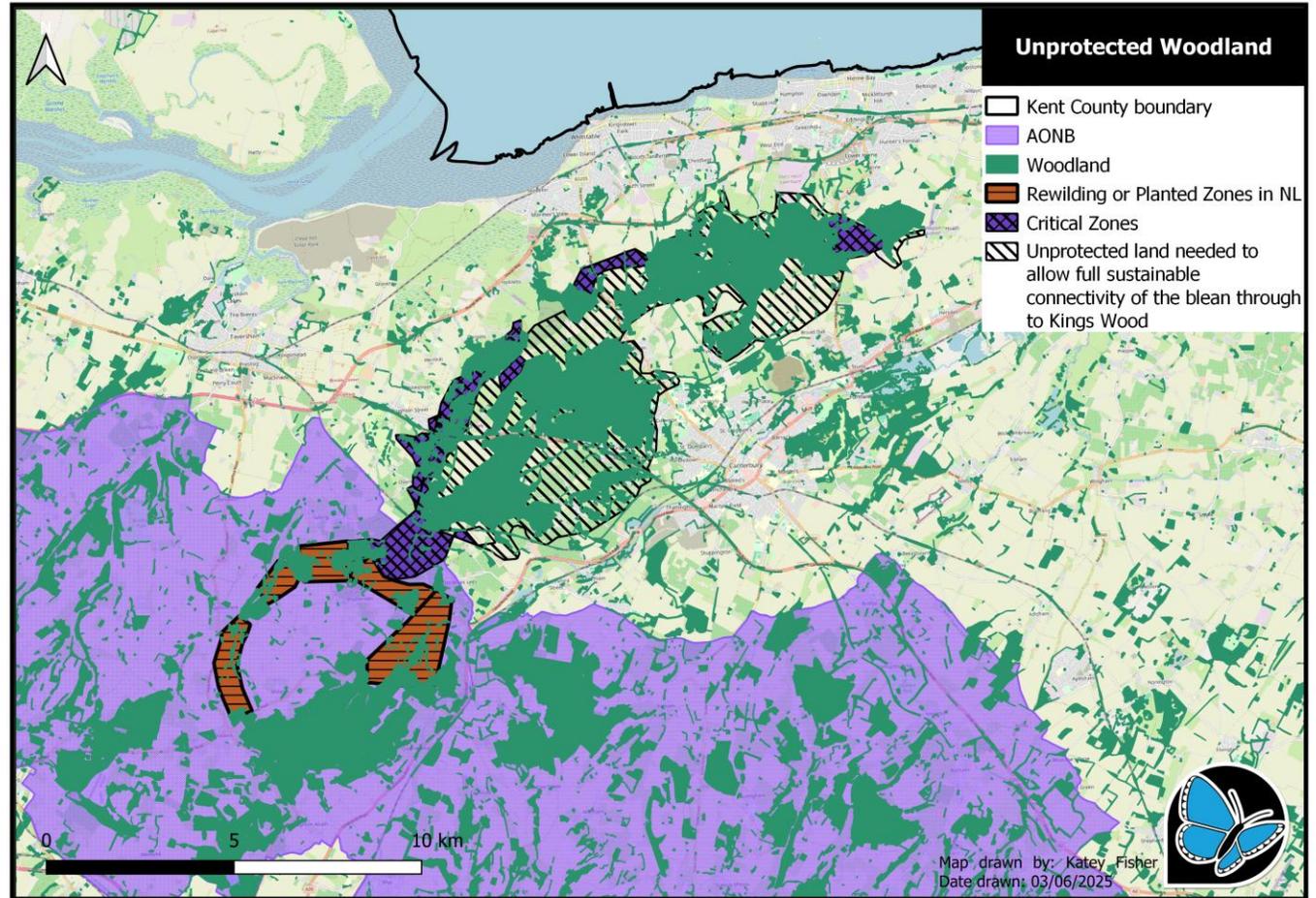


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- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1: Denstead Woods | 4: Ellenden & Victory Woods |
| 2: Bigbury Hill | 5: Thornden |
| 3: Harbledown | 6: East Blean |

Reconnecting our Ancient Forest

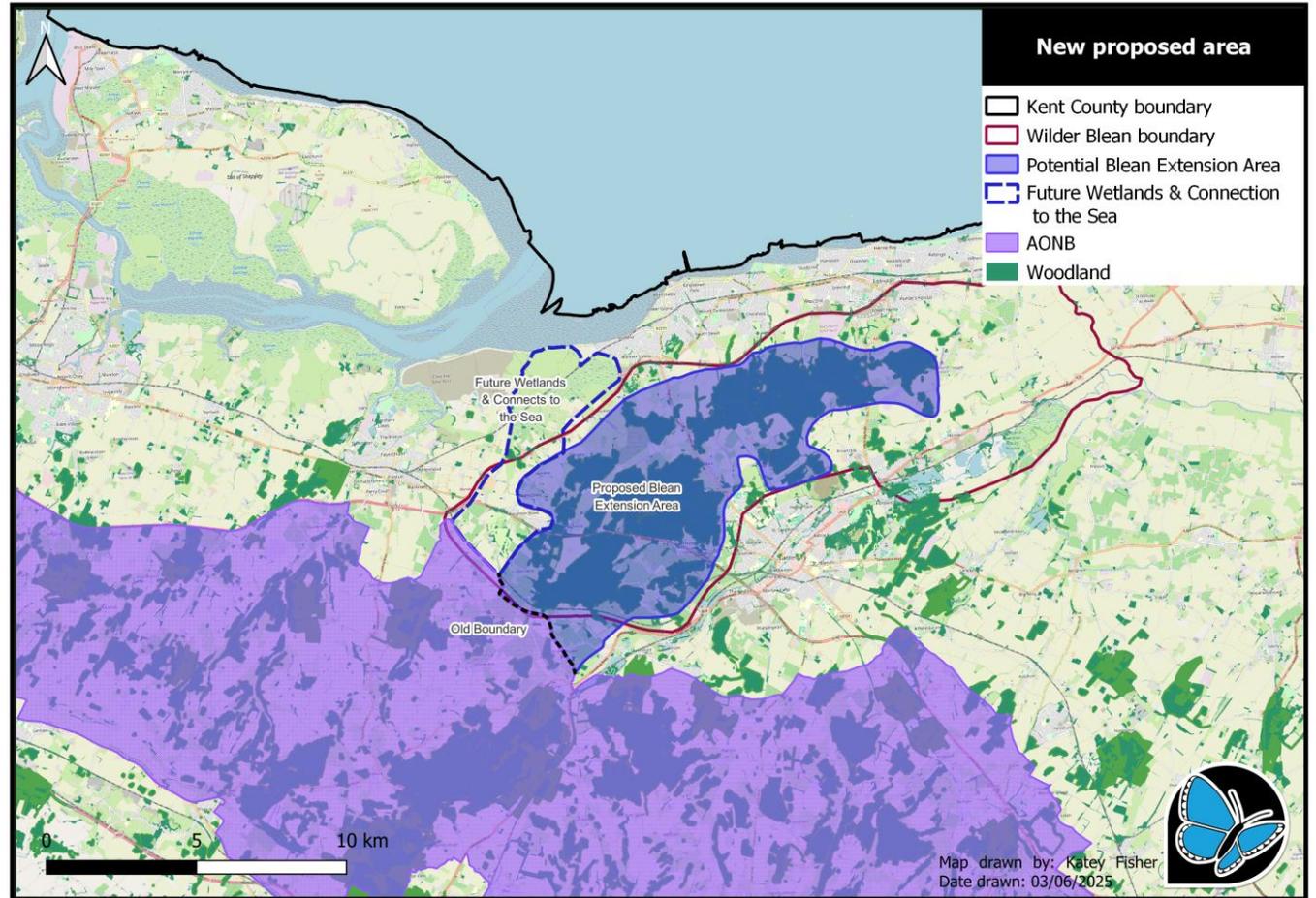
Proposal Area



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Reconnecting our Ancient Forest

Proposal Area



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Our Objectives

View of Holly Hill from the West



View from Victory Wood. Photo: Pam Fray



Work in partnership with the relevant Local Authorities to advance their Local Nature Recovery Plans and other biodiversity targets;



Work in partnership with existing nature & wildlife organisations to enhance, expand and connect priority habitats on a landscape-scale;



Work in partnership with the local farming and landowning community to generate sustainable farming systems in and around the proposal area;



Enable more people, and more diverse audiences, to discover, explore, enjoy and understand the ancient forest and connective “stepping stone” and marginal habitats; how they are managed and the wider benefits they provide;



Work with Natural England to create an expanded Kent Downs National Landscape area that includes The Blean.

Special Landscape Character of the Proposal Area

The Blean is an area distinguished by a ridge of higher ground, with gentle valleys; it is covered by extensive ancient semi-natural and ancient replanted woodland and part of the largest contiguous areas of ancient deciduous woodland in southern Britain, with areas of managed Hornbeam and Chestnut Coppice. The coppice woodlands harbour the few remaining colonies of the rare heath fritillary butterfly along with many at-risk wildlife species.

The woodland is designated internationally, nationally and locally. A strong sense of remoteness prevails, with a high level of tranquillity and good experience of dark skies.

Source: [CCC Landscape Character & Biodiversity Appraisal](#)

View of Mount Ephraim & The Blean at Dunkirk



Special Landscape Character

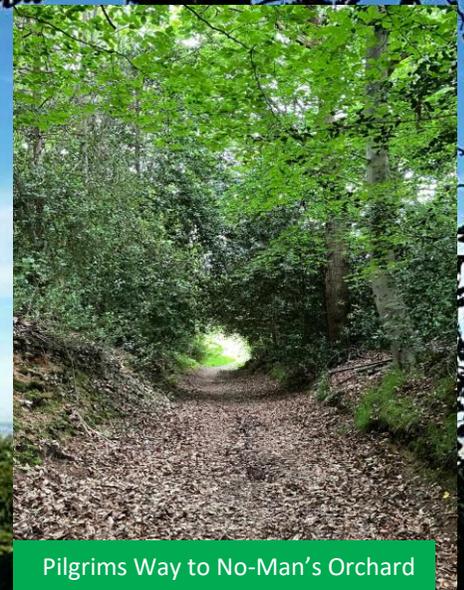
Views are generally contained by woodland, giving a sense of seclusion, but at the woodland edges there are sudden dramatic views over the Seasalter Levels and out to the Thames Estuary. The unusual close proximity of these large woodlands to the sea creates a distinctive sense of place, unique within the context of the Kent landscape. Outside the woodlands, majestic specimen oaks are commonly seen scattered across the open pastures.

There is a comprehensive Public Rights of Way network across the woodland area including the Pilgrims Way and the Crab and Winkle Way, which is a major recreational connection between the coast, Blean and Canterbury City.

View of the Swale from the woodland edge at Holly Hill



Court Wood Photo: [Simon Carey](#)



Pilgrims Way to No-Man's Orchard

Special Landscape Character

On the edge of the current Kent Downs National Landscape area, the route of the Pilgrims Way gives views from the woodland edge at Bigbury Hill to Canterbury Cathedral, an important view, enjoyed for centuries by pilgrims travelling to Canterbury from London. The high woodland provides a backdrop to the City below.

View of Bigbury Hill from the woodland edge

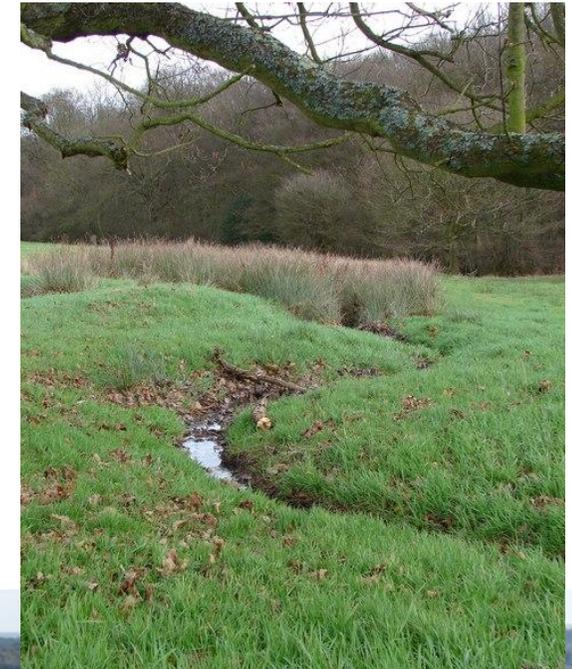


View of Canterbury from Bigbury Hill

Special Landscape Character

Open areas of grassland and heathland clearings, rides and glades provide important habitats and an open landscape, contrasting with the enclosed and secluded woodland, whilst wooded horizons created by the woodland blocks across elevated land create a strong visual backdrop to the surrounding rural landscape of orchards, arable farmland and grazed pasture. Beyond the wooded areas, the pattern of fields, hedgerows and occasional small woodland is characteristic of the agricultural landscape, with a coherent field pattern including the remnants of Medieval enclosures.

View of Victory Wood & The Blean from Monkshill



North Bishopden Wood Photo: [Adam Hincks](#)

Special Landscape Character

Settlement within the area is limited to occasional isolated farmsteads and cottages including some Grade II Listed buildings, displaying local vernacular.

The woodland is divided by the A2 dual carriageway at Dunkirk, but National Highways plan to build a Green Bridge at this point, which will restore a safe and sustainable corridor for nature.



Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity within the Proposal Area



These sites represent some of the most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes in the southeast. The Blean is the largest ancient broadleaved woodland in southern Britain a remarkable distinction considering that only 2.5% of the UK remains covered by ancient woodland. As such, every hectare is of critical importance.

The Blean hosts an array of nationally and internationally important designations, including SSSIs, Special Areas of Conservation, and National Nature Reserves. It provides vital habitat for rare and threatened species, including the heath fritillary butterfly—one of Britain’s rarest—and a host of Red-listed woodland bird species, such as the lesser-spotted woodpecker, nightingale, and spotted flycatcher. In addition to its natural value, the area is steeped in historical and cultural significance, offering a deeply rooted sense of place that is cherished by local communities.

Kent Wildlife Trust

KWT manage seven nature reserves within the Blean landscape, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest



Inclusion of The Blean within the Kent Downs National Landscape would support our ongoing conservation efforts in the area and build on the strong partnership work already taking place within the landscape.

Incorporating The Blean into the Kent Downs National Landscape will also deliver significant benefits for the National Landscape designation itself and contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) targets. These include:

- Bringing in four additional SSSIs which are already under trusted conservation management helping to meet the target of 80% of SSSIs in favorable condition by 2042
- Supporting habitat creation and access improvement targets through an established and collaborative partnership of conservation organisations, local authorities, and landowners
- Expanding ancient woodland within protected landscapes, contributing meaningfully to the target of increasing woodland cover by 3%

Heath Fritillary. Photo: [Serfettin Ünye](#)

Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity



The Woodland Trust describes the Proposal Area as:

..one of the most scenic and diverse examples of ancient wooded landscape in south-east England. The Blean's ancient woodland is a complex mosaic of high forest, coppice woodland, glades, and heathland.

The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity, with a vision of a world where woods and trees thrive for people and nature. They have long supported the aims of the Kent Downs National Landscape and work closely with partner environmental NGOs (eNGOs) with shared ambition for nature recovery across both the Kent Downs and The Blean landscapes.



The inclusion of The Blean within the National Landscape will significantly enhance the protection, restoration, and connectivity of one of the most scenic and diverse examples of ancient wooded landscape in south-east England. The Blean's ancient woodland is a complex mosaic of high forest, coppice woodland, glades, and heathland.

Expanding the National Landscape would improve the cohesion and protection of a network of NGO-managed nature reserves, both within and beyond the current boundary.

Small Leaved Lime. Photo: [AJ Paxton](#)

Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity



The Blean Complex is one of the most significant areas of lowland woodland habitat in the UK and serves as a stronghold for iconic species such as the nightingale, lesser-spotted woodpecker, and heath fritillary. Its importance is derived not only from the substantial size of the remaining woodland blocks but also from the dedicated efforts of conservation organisations and private landowners.

RSPB

The RSPB work at Blean Woods involves managing the mix of habitats to create the ideal conditions for wildlife to thrive. They undertake coppicing in some areas of the woods – a traditional cycle of cutting and regrowing of trees. This creates dense thickets for nesting birds like Nightingale, and the sun filtering through in the newly cut areas attracts a dazzling array of butterflies.



We have collaborated closely with partners to ensure that the Blean Complex is recognised as a key landscape in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy process. A crucial part of achieving the vision is to safeguard the ‘gaps’ within this landscape from inappropriate development, using these areas instead to connect habitats through measures such as planting hedgerows, woodlands, or other semi-natural habitats.

The proposal to extend the National Landscapes to encompass this area would both acknowledge its natural and cultural heritage and support planning decisions that safeguard the landscape. It would also align strongly with the government's ambitions for 30x30, the Nature Recovery Strategy and the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Nightingale. Photo: [Gundula Vogel](#)

Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity



This area of ancient woodland is extremely important for local populations of various woodland bat species. These animals are dependent on interconnecting flight lines such as wooded shaws, tree lines and mature hedges to preserve the genetic diversity within the various maternity colonies. Fragmentation leads to genetic isolation and more likelihood of local extinctions.

Both the Blean and Challock Forest are very large blocks of woodland. Connectivity between these blocks incorporating a smaller ancient wood, Perry Wood, would also benefit invertebrates and small mammals such as dormice, again preserving population genetics.

Kent Bat Group

Kent Bat Group is a charity of voluntary bat workers covering the county of Kent.



Extending the existing National Landscapes area into The Blean and Challock Forest would benefit the whole area by protecting the landscape and preserving an extremely valuable resource, not only for the native wildlife but also for people to enjoy. The benefits are multiple including people's mental health. This extension will help meet government targets for protected landscapes.

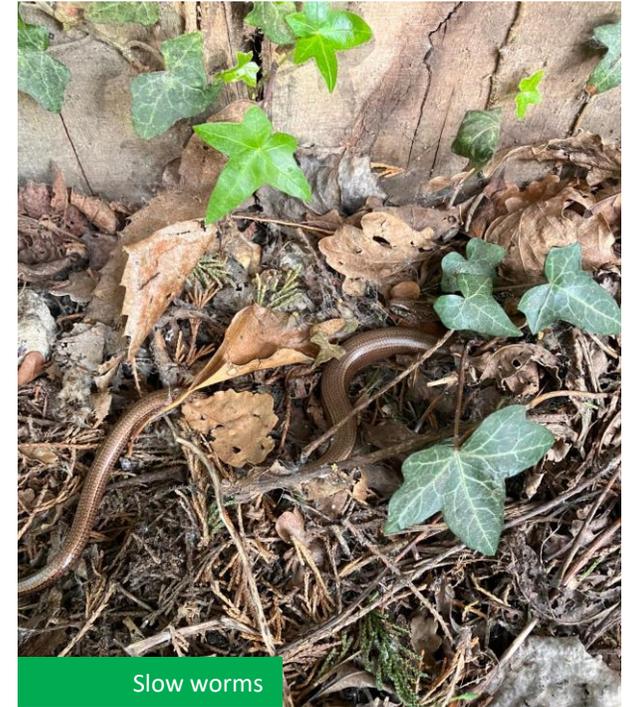
Photo: [Ian Gabaraev](#)

Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity



The Blean is one of the most important areas of ancient woodland in Britain, including woodland types of international importance.

It contains areas of extremely rare lowland woodland habitat as well as wet woodland. This is a unique opportunity to protect a habitat the is not present in other protected forests, which are considerably higher and dryer.



Slow worms



Wet woodlands in Thornden Wood



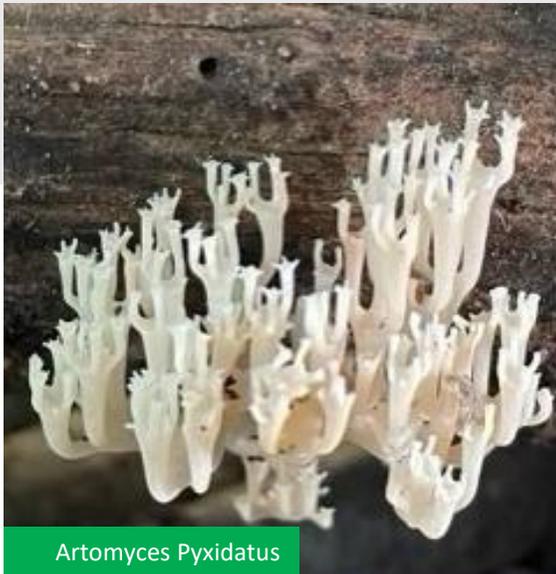
Essential Wildlife Habitat & Biodiversity



Bower Wood has been recently studied and shown to provide a unique habitat containing a spring-fed stream, Wood Anemone, Early Purple Orchid, Russula Silvestris Fungi and Artomyces Pyxidatus.



Spring-fed stream



Artomyces Pyxidatus



Early Purple Orchid



Wood Anemone



Russula Silvestris

Designations within the Proposal Area



Designations:

The proposal area includes numerous sites that have been designated locally, nationally and internationally:

Designation

Internationally
designated sites:

Blean Complex SAC

Nationally
designated sites:

Church Woods SSSI

Blean SSSI

East Blean Woods SSSI

Ellenden Wood SSSI

West Blean & Thornden Woods SSSI

Blean Woods NNR

RSPB Bird Reserve

Locally Designated sites:

Blean Woods LWS

Blean Woods South LWS

Blean Woods West & Holly Hill LWS

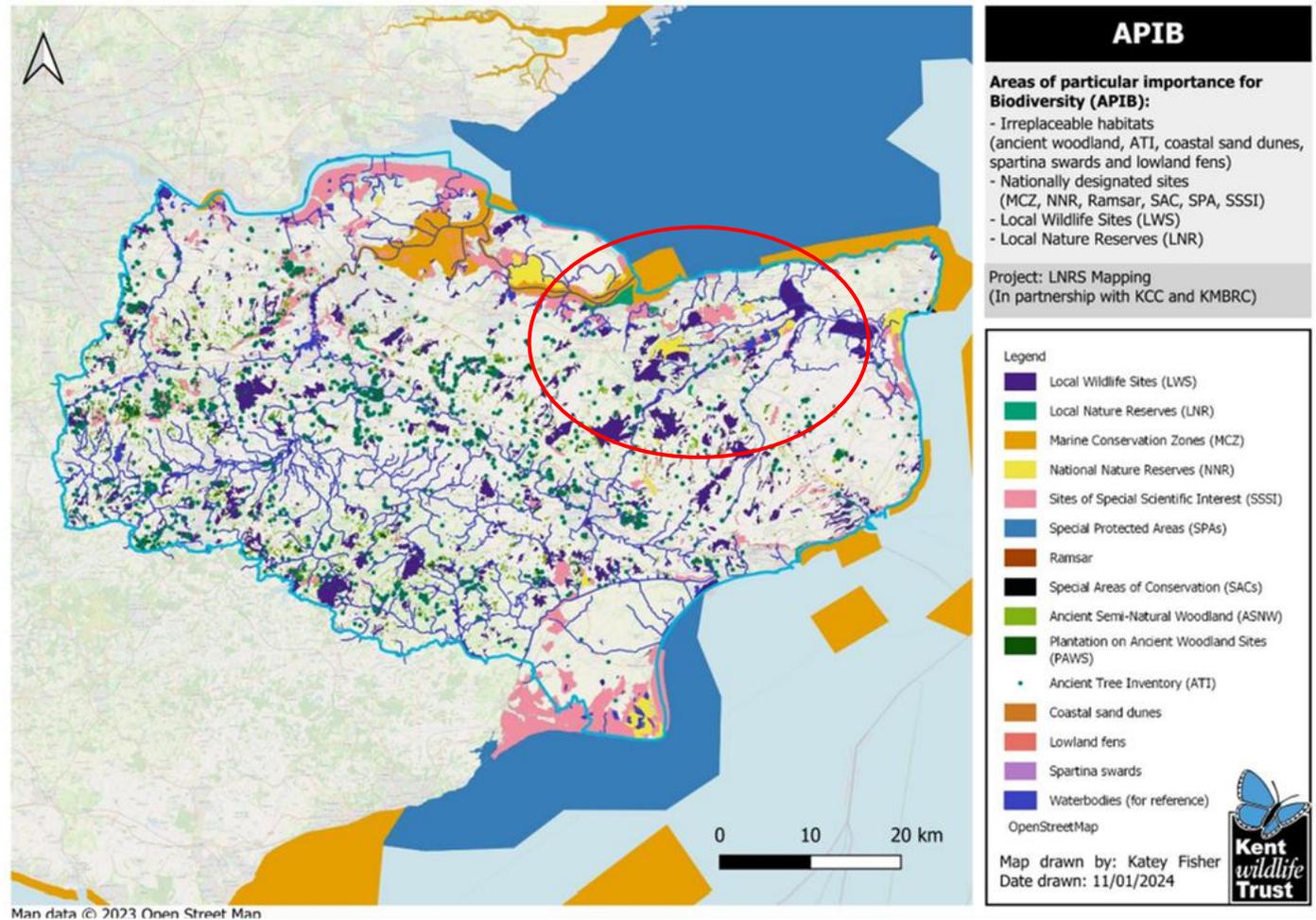
Blean Woods Harbledown to Dunkirk LWS

Clowes Wood and Marley Wood LWS

No Mans Orchard LNR

Designations

The proposal area includes sites that have been designated, but it is the undesignated connecting areas that need protection by becoming part of the National Landscape, to ensure that “stepping stones” and marginal habitats needed for biodiversity are maintained and enhanced.



Source: Kent & Medway LNRS

Cultural & Historical Importance of the Proposal Area



The ancient woodland includes areas of commercial forestry and coniferous plantations mixed with areas of managed sweet chestnut and hornbeam coppice and extensive oak and beech woodland plus smaller areas of acid grassland and heathland in clearings and rides.

It is part of a historic Medieval landscape, with woods historically used for pannage for pigs and herbage for cattle belonging to Canterbury Cathedral. The evidence of Medieval cultural and woodland management practices exist in the form of earthbanks, coppice, pollards, droveways.

Source: [CCC Landscape Character & Biodiversity Appraisal](#)

Ancient fruit trees



Three-tiers of coppice



Temporary foresters tent



Cultural & Historical Importance



There is a historic network of formal and informal paths and public Rights of Way, many of which originated as droveways, through the woodland and connecting to the wider landscape, which now provide recreational access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Historic entry points to The Blean are marked by place names including Radfallgate, Bleangate, Broomfield Gate.

Historic ownership includes links to the Abbey and Cathedral in Canterbury. The woodland provided fuel for the cottagers and employments such as charcoal burning, much of which fed the gunpowder mills of nearby Faversham. It was also used for shipbuilding (at Faversham and Whitstable), housebuilding, farm implements and fencing and, of course, hop poles.

Photo: [Marathon](#)



Source: [Historic England](#)

Cultural & Historical Importance



Barry Reay "The Last Rising Of The Agricultural Labourers" Clarendon Press, 1990



Dunkirk Mast

A Range of archaeological sites are preserved within woodland including Bronze Age barrows, sites of tile kilns and claypits and the Iron Age hillfort at Bigbury.

Victory Wood was planted between 2005 and 2008 to mark the 200th anniversary of Britain's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. The creation of the woodlands highlights the role trees played in the battle and it bears the name and has become a symbol of the English ships which battled against French and Spanish adversaries on 21 October 1805.

The Battle of Bossenden Wood on May 31st, 1838 has been called the last battle on English soil and took place in the woodland near Dunkirk.

The World War II Chain Home Radar station at Dunkirk is important in terms of the development and early implementation of radar, representing its first use beyond the experimental phase.

Cultural & Historical Importance



Watling Street



North Downs Way/Pilgrims Way

Part of the track of the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway, the first passenger steam railway in the world, is now used as the Crab and Winkle Way cycle route. The Canterbury to Whitstable railway opened in 1830 and was the third railway line ever to be built. It was the first in the world regularly to take passengers. The first ever season tickets were sold in Canterbury to take people to the Whitstable beach for the summer season.

Watling Street runs through the Blean at Dunkirk, it is an historic route first used by the ancient Britons, mainly between the areas of modern Canterbury (Durovernum) and St Albans. The pilgrimage route from Southwark in London, to Canterbury was of course famously captured in the collection of stories known as The Canterbury Tales, written by the medieval poet and author, Geoffrey Chaucer, between 1387 and 1400, and published from the 15th Century onwards.

The Pilgrims Way/North Downs Way is an historic trackway which connected the shrines of Saint Swithun at Winchester Cathedral and Thomas Beckett at Canterbury Cathedral. The trackway now follows the North Downs Way, which enters The Blean near Chartham Hatch

National Wildlife & Biodiversity Policies & Guidance



Our proposals provide a unique opportunity to support & enhance both National and Local policies & guidance through the creation of a connected, accessible and well-maintained forest area. The relevant National Policies and guidance include:

- [The Environment Act 2021](#)
- [30by30](#)
- [The 25 Year Environment Plan](#)
- [Making Space for Nature](#)
- [The Agriculture Act 2020](#)
- [Environment Improvement Plan](#)
- [Environmental Land Management System](#)
- [Agricultural Transition Plan 2021-2024](#)
- [Biodiversity Net Gain](#)
- [Nature Recovery Network](#)
- [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#)
- [Local Natural Capital Plans](#)
- [National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Review](#)
- [Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework](#)
- [The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024](#)

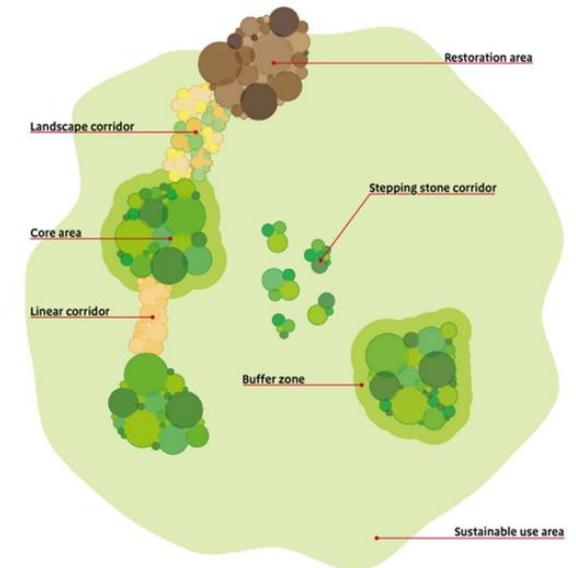
The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, A Green Future (2018), pledges that this will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it and pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future.

Making Space for Nature

In 2010 Sir John Lawton reported an official review of England's protected areas, published as Making Space for Nature, challenging the Government to address the loss of biodiversity and providing guidance on how everyone, from farmers, wildlife groups, landowners and individuals can play a role in helping to create, manage and improve these areas. This report states that:



Surviving in small, isolated sites is ... difficult for many species, and often impossible in the longer term, because they rarely contain the level of resources or the diversity of habitats needed to support sustainable populations... However, re-creating large expanses of continuous natural habitat is not a feasible option over most of England. An alternative approach is to secure a suite of high-quality sites which collectively contain the range and area of habitats that species require and ensure that ecological connections exist to allow species, or at least their genes, to move between them. It is this network of core sites connected by buffer zones, wildlife corridors and smaller but still wildlife-rich sites that are important in their own right and can also act as 'stepping stones' ... that we call an ecological network. 'Wildlife corridors' do not have to be continuous, physical connections: a mosaic of mixed land use, for example, may be all that is needed – it is the permeability of the landscape to species (or their genes) that matters.



“Stepping Stones” & “Corridors” create a sustainable ecological network

Local Wildlife & Biodiversity Policies & Guidance

Our proposals provide a unique opportunity to support & enhance both National and Local policies & guidance through the creation of a connected, accessible and well-maintained forest area. The relevant National Policies and guidance include:

- [Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)
- [Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [State of Nature in Kent 2021 Report](#)
- [Canterbury City Council, Swale Borough Council & Ashford Borough Council Landscape & Biodiversity Appraisals](#)
- [Canterbury District Tree, Woodland & Hedgerow Strategy](#)
- [The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(AONB\) Guidance](#)

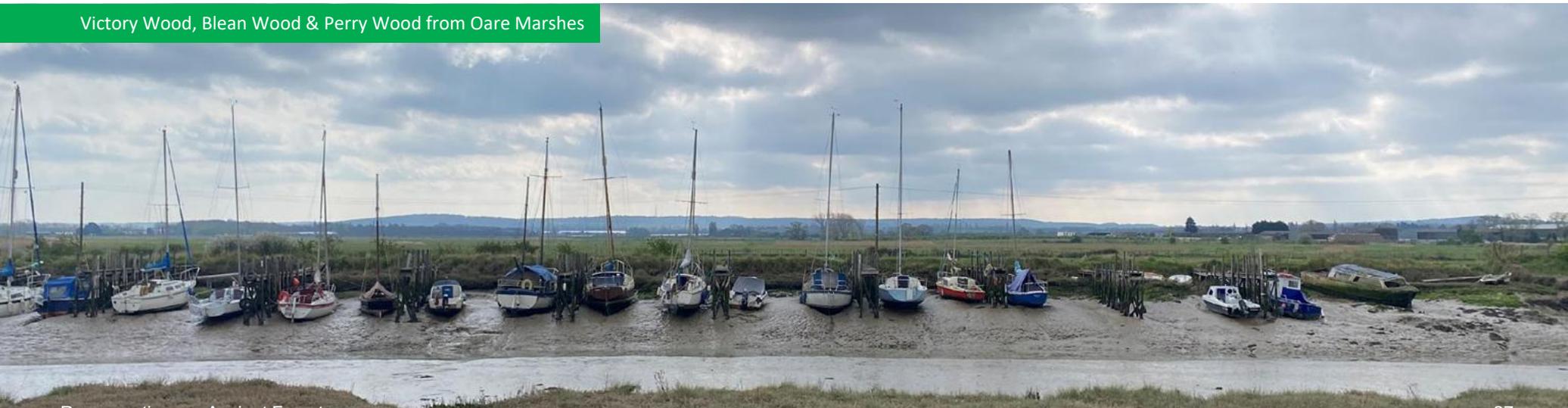
Holly Hill & Blean Wood from the West

Wildlife & Biodiversity Projects in the Proposal Area

Wildlife groups that work in The Blean and surrounding area include:

- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Wildwood
- RSPB
- Kent Bat Group
- Kent Mammal Group
- Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group
- Woodland Trust

Victory Wood, Blean Wood & Perry Wood from Oare Marshes



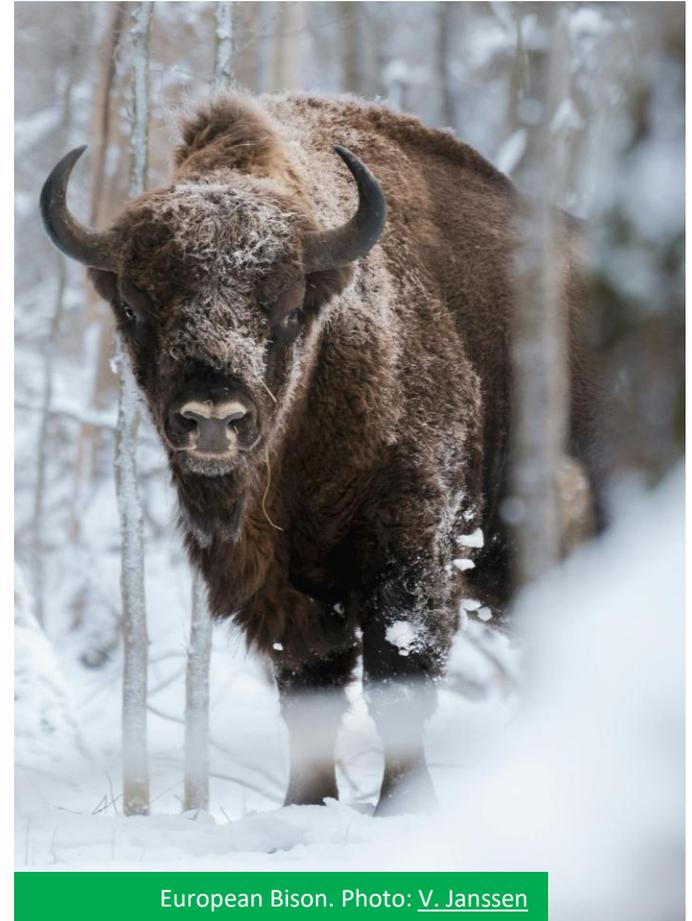
Wilder Blean

Kent Wildlife Trust's Wilder Blean Initiative aims to secure the future of the Blean to become a place not only visited for its outstanding wildlife and scenic woodlands but also recognised for its positive social and economic opportunities for the community.



Over the next ten years, using a collaborative and joined up approach, the Wilder Blean Initiative will work with the community, landowners/managers and stakeholders to bring together knowledge, expertise and ideas to build a vision for this landscape. Driven by natural processes, they want to see missing species returned to a reconnected and wilded landscape in one of the most land-scarce corners of England.

The first phase of this long-term project was the introduction of European bison into West Blean and Thornden Woods in 2022: the first step towards a Wilder Blean. These large grazing herbivores, along with longhorn cattle, Exmoor ponies and Iron-Age pigs, have been introduced to take over the woodland's management. These animals act as ecosystem engineers; their natural behaviours return ecological processes that have been missing from UK woodlands for thousands of years, allowing human management to take a step back to restore a functional and thriving ecosystem and an abundance of wildlife.



European Bison. Photo: [V. Janssen](#)

Wildwood

Wildwood is a native species conservation charity established in 2002 to push the boundaries of innovative conservation and rewilding in The Blean. They work with nature to fight the biodiversity crisis, to halt the extinction of species and to create resilient habitats in which nature thrives. They focus on evidence-based solutions to return native species and recreating truly wild spaces.



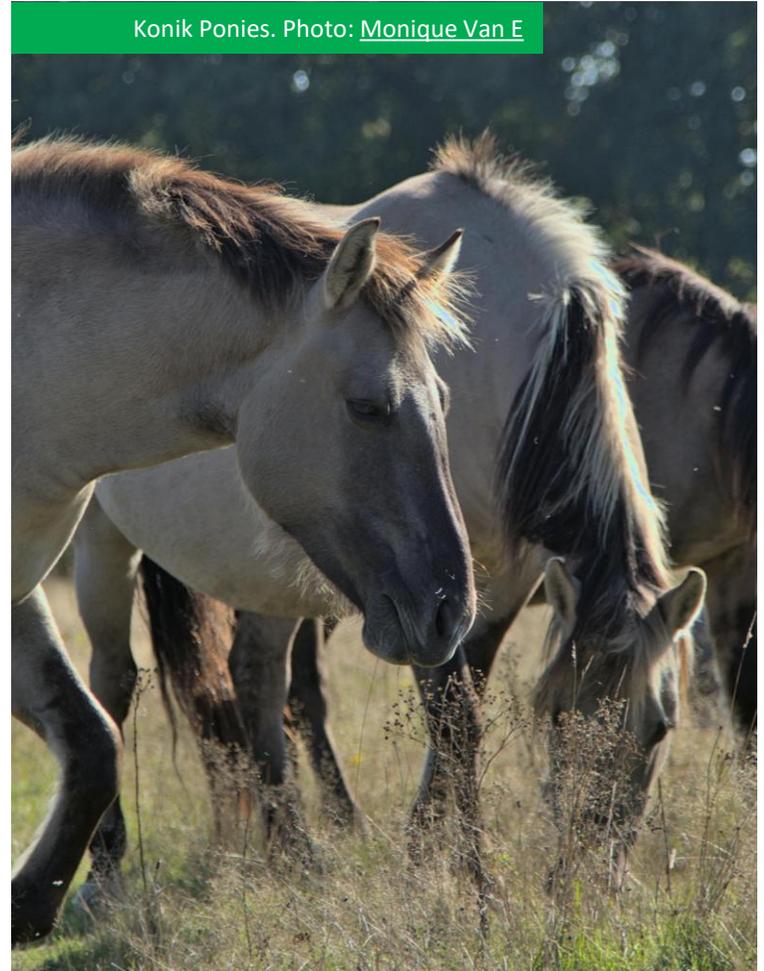
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Rewilding, through the reintroduction of keystone species, is the most powerful tool we have. These animals change the landscape by creating the space and complexity for hundreds of other species to recover and thrive. Wildwood Kent lies within 40 acres of The Blean ancient woodland.

Wildwood works with Kent Wildlife Trust on the Wilder Blean project and the reintroduction of Bison into the woodland.

Wildwood work to breed and restore many native species including Konik Ponies, Beavers, Red Squirrels, Pine Martins, Choughs and Water Voles.

Konik Ponies. Photo: [Monique Van E](#)



Kent Bat Group

Kent Bat Group (KBG) has been working to help protect the county's bats and learn more about them since 1983. The Kent Bat Group aims to work for the conservation of bats and their habitats in The Blean. This work varies from raising awareness of bats through talks to a wide range of audiences, to surveying and monitoring bat populations and to caring for grounded bats.

The group take part in the National Bat Monitoring programme and provide the records consulted by developers, land managers and researchers, amongst others. They work with other wildlife charities and land managers to conserve roost sites and bat habitats, they care for and rehabilitate sick and injured bats, then, hopefully, returning them to their roosts. They also work to educate the public, giving talks about bats to schools and groups, and man the KBG stand at public events.

Brown Long Eared Bat. Photo: Sean Hanna



These animals are dependent on interconnecting flight lines such as wooded shaws, tree lines and mature hedges to preserve the genetic diversity within the various maternity colonies. Fragmentation leads to genetic isolation and more likelihood of local extinctions.

Pressures & Challenges

1.8 million people live in Kent. There are pressures on land use which are specific to Kent's location, such as its proximity to London and as a gateway to Europe, through road, rail, sea and air links. But the biggest pressure Kent faces is the significant and unprecedented levels of growth, making the protection and connection of our existing wildlife sites essential to species survival and biodiversity. The Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy sets out some general trends which, historically, have had a negative effect on the natural diversity of Kent. Some of these factors have included:

- Intensification of land management, such as use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in farming, ploughing up of semi-natural grasslands, loss of traditional orchards.
- Direct loss of habitats through increased development, urbanisation and over-tidying and other land uses.
- Degradation of soil health and productivity, resulting from nutrient depletion, declines in levels of humus, and erosion and compaction of soils.
- A wide range of pollutants, from many sources, threaten wildlife and have an impact on all habitats, with the most widespread current harm from excess nutrients (phosphate and compounds of nitrogen) in air and water. There has also been a rise in concern over plastics pollution, particularly in the water environment.
- Lack of appropriate management, such as the loss of woodland management as the woodland resources become uneconomic to extract; or recreational overuse of sensitive areas.
- **Habitat fragmentation – species movement or migration is impaired and populations can become isolated, making them less able to survive or adapt to changing climate conditions.**
- Invasive non-native species, which can out-compete native species, and pests and diseases, which can have impacts beyond the species they directly attack.
- Climate change – loss of land through sea-level rise, changes in temperature, weather and other environmental factors altering habitat composition and species movement and survival (Kent is a gateway for species colonising from Europe in a response to climate change).
- Lack of investment and a drop in public sector expenditure on biodiversity, which in the UK, as a proportion of GDP, has fallen by 42% since a peak in 2008/99 .

Source: Kent & Medway LNRS

Landowners & Land-Managers

Support from landowners and land-managers will be crucial to achieving our aim of reversing some of the trends that threaten our landscape & biodiversity and to reconnect the forest by creating a network of habitats that connect the wooded areas.

This can be achieved by using existing mechanisms, such as Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and Biodiversity Net Gain, to produce the right outcomes for all farmers while delivering food security and nature recovery in a just and equitable way.

The expansion of the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the proposal area will further incentivise local farmers and land managers to take action to support nature as part of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL).

They can then be supported by the bespoke advice offered by Protected Landscape bodies to land managers in their area, helping farmers to take actions that contribute to national and Protected Landscapes targets in a way that works for their local circumstances and businesses. It will help with delivering profitable food production alongside the recovery of nature.



Landowners & Land-Managers



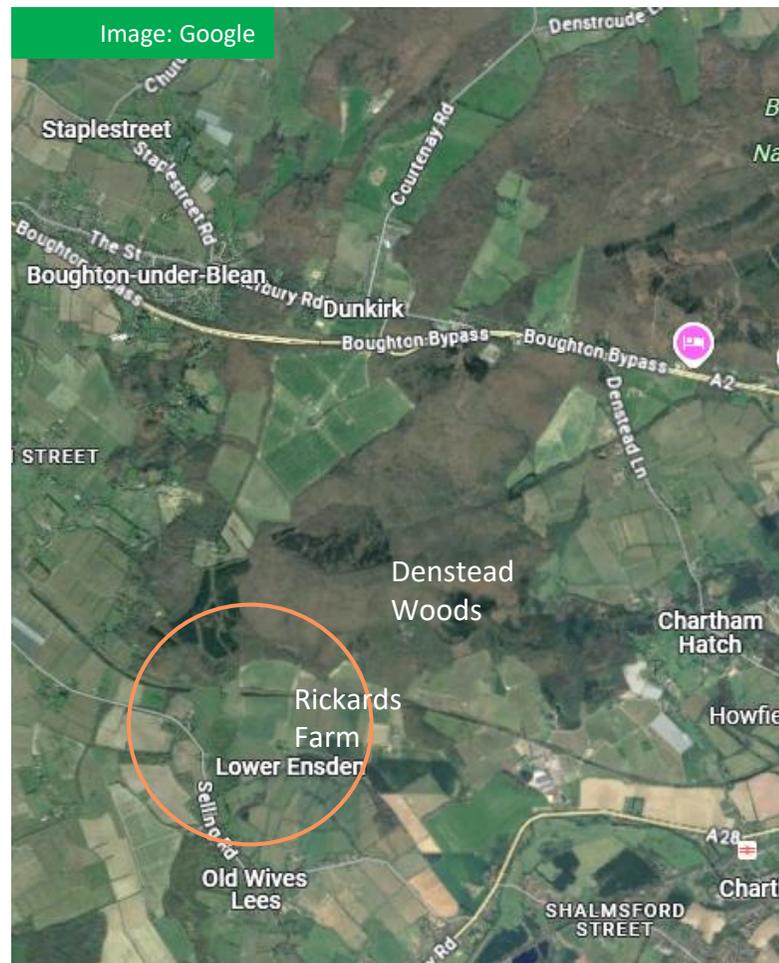
As farmers we have invested in the land over the last three generations to increase biodiversity and farm the land sustainably, however we have come to realise that we cannot do this in isolation and desperately need more connectivity across the wider environment.

We consider this initiative should be a top priority for Government, Natural England and Kent County Council.

Currently woodland and key wildlife habitats across the area consists of fragmented units preventing wildlife moving across the landscape, by connecting these areas will become wildlife rich places for not only different species but also for people to enjoy for their health and wellbeing. The Covid pandemic clearly taught us the importance of the role of the countryside has to both physical and mental health. Therefore, there is a real need to protect and enhance what little there is left in this busy part of Kent.

James & Penny Rickards

Rickards Farm



Green Economy

The Green economy is advancing environmental goals while also generating significant economic and social benefits throughout the UK, but especially in the South-East. With its impressive productivity, substantial investments, and continuous innovation, the sector plays a crucial role in the UK's journey towards a sustainable future, fostering ongoing prosperity and resilience across all regions.

Analysis by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), found that, in 2024, 22,000 net zero businesses, from renewable energy to green finance, employ almost a million people in full-time jobs in the UK. The average annual wage in the businesses – £43,000 – was also £5,600 higher than the national average. The analysis showed economic growth and climate action go together and improve lives and livelihoods.



The transition to a net zero economy is not just a climate imperative; it is one of the most significant economic opportunities of our time. For the UK, seizing this opportunity is essential to securing long-term prosperity, global competitiveness, and environmental sustainability.

Confederation of British Industry



Chainsaw sculpture



Chestnut clad home and office



Source: CBI [The Future is Green](#)

Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

1

Adoption of The Blean and other ancient woodland areas into the Kent Downs National Landscapes will protect existing woodland areas and enhance them through improved connectivity.

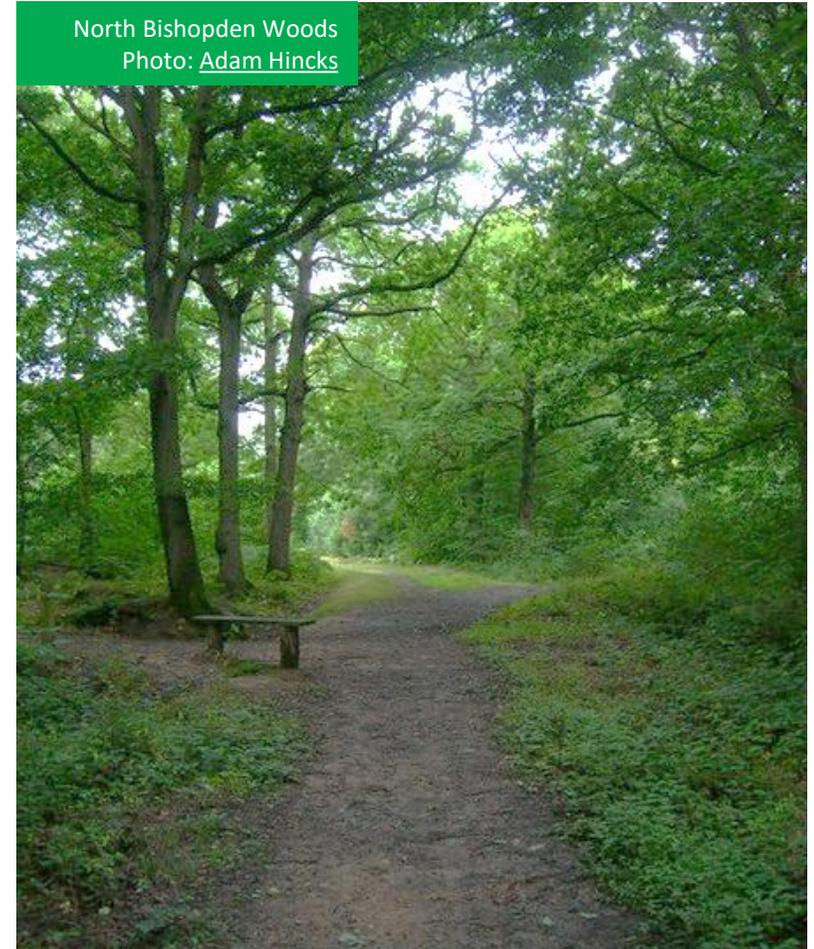
2

This offers a unique opportunity to further the objectives of National Landscapes, by enhancing the resilience of Perry Wood and Kings Wood, (which are already in NL), by enabling their connection to other protected woodland areas, including the Wilder Blean project area.

“

The inclusion of The Blean within the National Landscape will significantly enhance the protection, restoration, and connectivity of one of the most scenic and diverse examples of ancient wooded landscape in south-east England. The Blean's ancient woodland is a complex mosaic of high forest, coppice woodland, glades, and heathland.

The Woodland Trust



Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

3

Extending the area of connected woodland will improve biodiversity and provide opportunities for species that have been lost over time to return to the larger forest, area, which currently cannot happen.

4

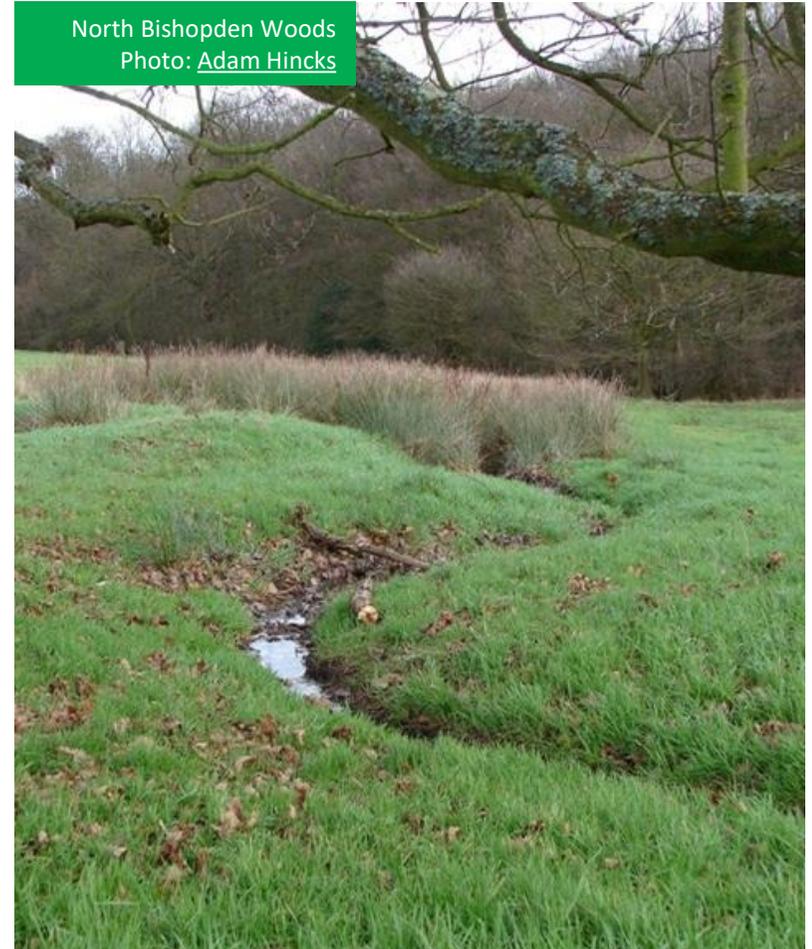
It will enable existing NGO's who work in the various woodland areas to connect their individual habitat improvement projects across a wider area; connection is vital for species protection and enhancement.



Inclusion of The Blean within the Kent Downs National Landscape would support our ongoing conservation efforts in the area and build on the strong partnership work already taking place within the landscape. Our collective vision for The Blean Wildscapes is to restore and maintain a biologically rich, extensive, and connected ancient woodland, governed by natural processes and where wildlife and people can thrive together.

Kent Wildlife Trust

North Bishopden Woods
Photo: [Adam Hincks](#)



Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

5

National Landscape designation would increase public awareness and support for biodiversity improvement projects already happening in The Blean and surrounding areas, as well as creating opportunities for new projects within the connecting habitats.

6

National Landscape designation is a 'badge' that helps people better understand the importance of the ancient woodland by improving access and information for walkers and naturalists.



Inclusion in the National Landscape will also raise awareness of the value of ancient woodlands and promote public access and understanding. This is a unique opportunity to enhance the area's scenic beauty, relative wildness, and tranquillity, while helping to ensure the long-term survival of vulnerable species and habitats.

The Woodland Trust

Photo: [Ellie Burgin](#)



Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

7

The designation will enable local authorities to connect their individual protection zones to allow movement of animal and plant species. This could potentially, in the future, include larger animals that need room to roam across a wider area.

8

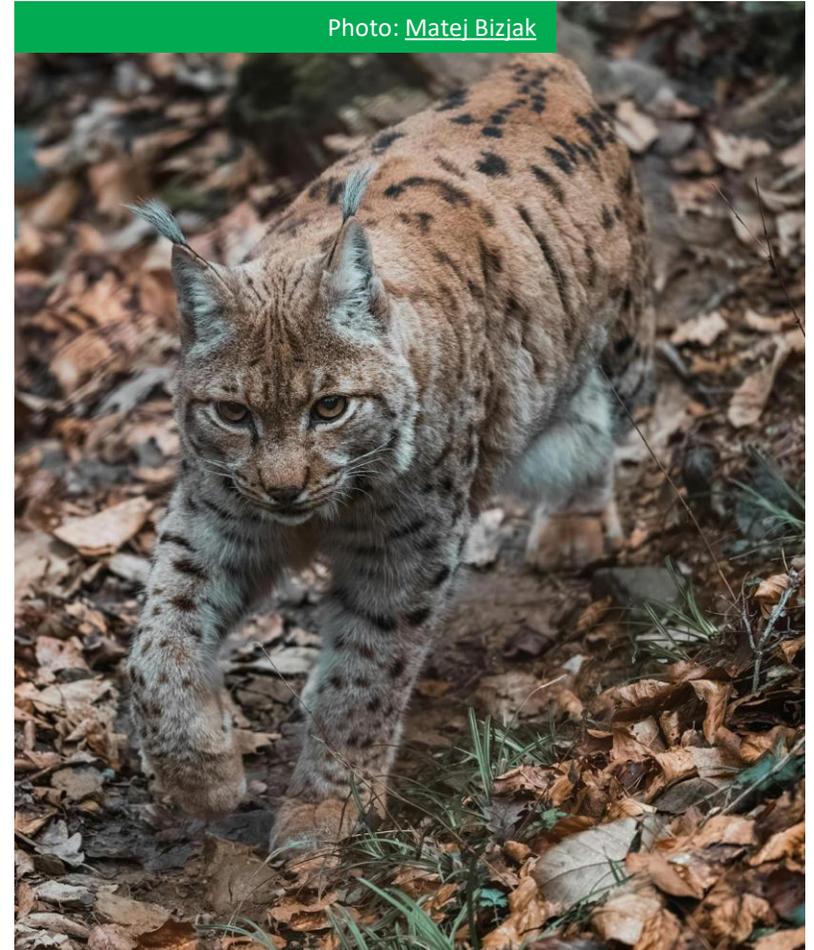
It is the perfect opportunity for Local Authorities to deliver their “Bigger, Better, Connected” ambitions in the South-East by protecting connecting landscapes as well as the woodland itself.



The proposal to extend the National Landscapes to encompass this area would both acknowledge its natural and cultural heritage and support planning decisions that safeguard the landscape. It would also align strongly with the government's ambitions for 30by30, the Nature Recovery Strategy and the Environmental Improvement Plan.

RSPB

Photo: [Matej Bizjak](#)



Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

9

Connectivity can be created across the A2 via the Green Bridge, which is already the No. 1 priority project of the National Highways Sustainability Programme and has funding. The protection provided to the surrounding landscape by National Landscape designation will ensure that this investment is certain to provide maximum biodiversity and sustainability outcomes.

“

A crucial component of this vision is the proposed green bridge across the A2, which has been identified by National Highways as the top priority for a wildlife crossing in the country. The A2 currently forms a major barrier between South Blean Woods and RSPB Blean Woods, creating an impermeable divide for wildlife. A green bridge would restore ecological connectivity across the entire Blean complex, enabling species ranging from invertebrates and small mammals to large grazing animals to move freely through the landscape. Unlike other landscape features, the A2 cannot be mitigated without this type of infrastructure, making the bridge essential.

Kent Wildlife Trust

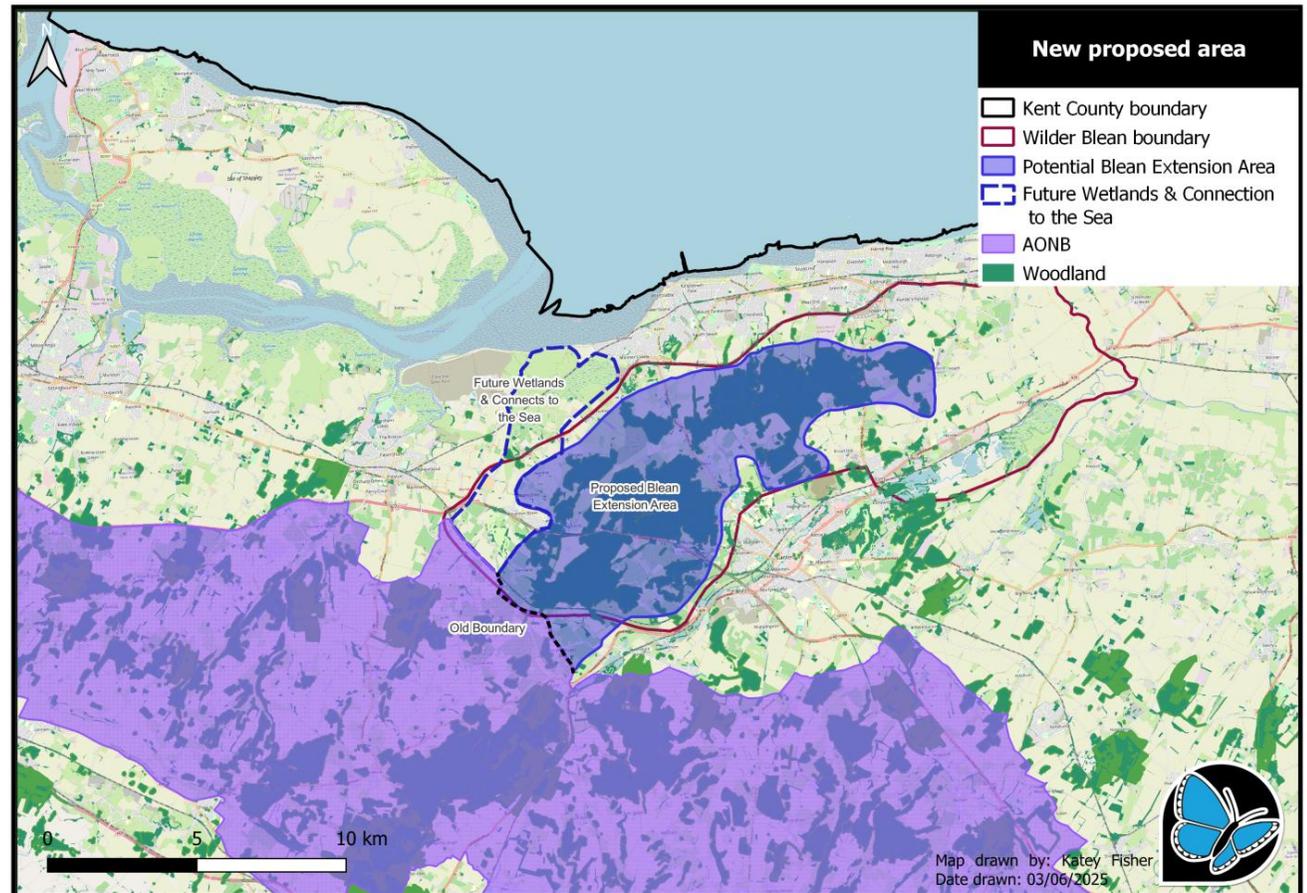


Reasons to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into the Proposal Area

10

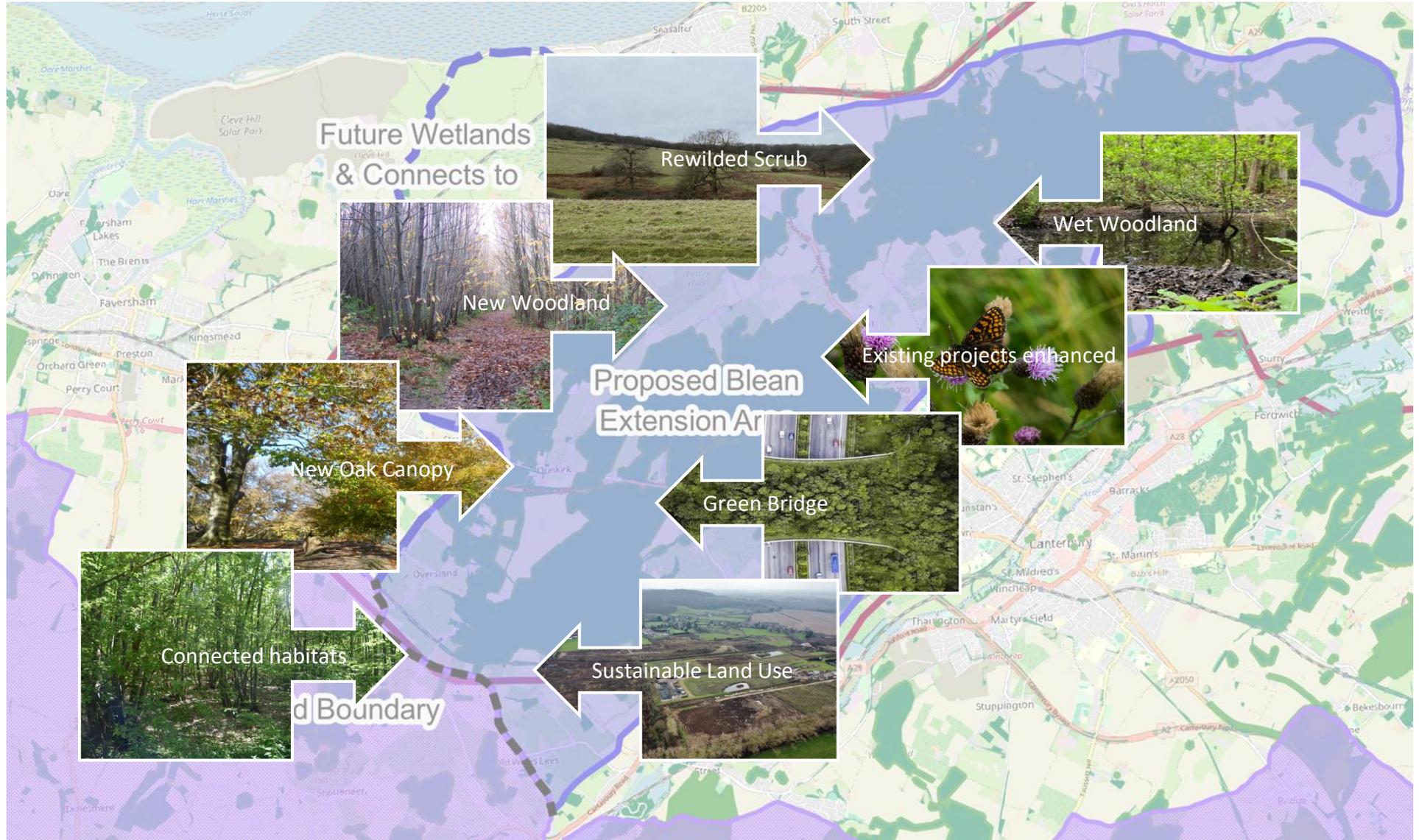
We have, now, a unique opportunity to create the largest system of protected, interconnected areas of woodland in England, including just under 1500 hectares of ancient woodland.

Without National Landscapes protection the undesignated areas of connecting landscape are very likely to be lost to development and no such opportunity will be available to future generations.



Map data contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2010-2023.

Opportunities to enhance and connect habitats



Support from Sir John Lawton Making Space for Nature

Sir John Lawton (CBE FRS) is a British ecologist. He is (among other roles), RSPB Vice President, President of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and President of The Institution of Environmental Sciences.

He has made major contributions to environmental NGOs, including a five-year period as Chairman of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and a trustee of WWF-UK.

In 2010 he reported an official review of England's protected areas, published as Making Space for Nature, challenging the Government to address the loss of biodiversity and providing guidance on how everyone, from farmers, wildlife groups, landowners and individuals can play a role in helping to create, manage and improve these areas.

Sir John Lawton accepted our invitation to visit The Blean in March 2025, he came to see woodland landscape and spoke to the wildlife groups who work there. His response was unequivocal and he has provided a letter of support for our proposal that the Kent Downs National Landscape is extended into the area. He says:



It is often difficult for local people to appreciate what you have on your doorstep, but this area is very special not least because so close to London. But that also makes it terribly vulnerable to development pressures. But with wise planning, essential development and nature restoration can go hand in hand, for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Sir John Lawton CBE FRS

Conclusion

Our proposals provide a unique opportunity to support & enhance both National and Local landscape & biodiversity policies & guidance through the creation of a connected, accessible and well-maintained forest area. They will:



Support the ambitions of 30by30 by enhancing the Kent Downs National Landscape



Accord with The Environment Act 2021 by supporting Local Nature Recovery Strategies & extending the Kent Downs National Landscape



Support the Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy by conserving & enhancing the woodland and connecting landscape



Support the Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework by expanding the area of the Kent Downs National Landscape



Support the Swale, Canterbury & Ashford Landscape Character & Biodiversity Appraisals by conserving and enhancing the landscape and biodiversity of the proposal area.

Conclusion

Our proposals go beyond this by providing a unique opportunity to create a new landscape-scale forest area in a highly populated and developed part of the country. They will:



Follow the principles of “Making Space for Nature” by providing “Stepping stones” of ecological networks that can support existing species.



Enhance the existing Kent Downs National Landscape by improving connectivity and access through the expanded area.



Protect and enhance areas vital for habitat connectivity but currently not designated.



Enhance access and understanding of the forest area and the wildlife that live there through better connectivity and accessibility for the local community and visitors.



Create a connected forest area that could, in the future, support larger lost native species such as the Lynx, Pine Martin and Bison.

Appendix 1: Letters of Support



Letter of Support from Sir John Lawton

Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS
The Hayloft
Holburns Croft
Heslington
YORK
YO10 5DP
UK

e-mail: sirjohnlawton@gmail.com

29 March 2025

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

Blean Wood

Allow me to introduce myself. I had the pleasure of visiting the Blean Wood Area, including part of the current National Landscape, for three days in March this year at the invitation of Terry Conrad Kid, in my capacity as author of what is now often called the "Lawton Report" but more formally known as *Making Space for Nature*. The report advocated "more, bigger, better managed and joined up" landscapes to restore nature at scale. I was extremely impressed by what I saw at Blean, and to learn about the plans of a wonderfully dedicated group of people to restore and enhance the woodlands for the benefit of people and wildlife. One of their key visions is to extend the area designated as a National Landscape.

Specifically, the main objectives would be:

- Adoption of The Blean and other ancient woodland areas into the Kent Downs National Landscapes to protect existing woodland areas and enhance them through connectivity.
- This offers a unique opportunity to further the objectives of National Landscapes, by enhancing the resilience of Perry Wood and Kings Wood, (which are already in NL), by enabling their connection to other protected woodland areas, including the Wilder Blean project area.
- Extending the area of woodland will improve biodiversity and provide opportunities for species that have been lost over time to return to the larger woodland, or forest, area, which currently cannot happen.
- National Landscape designation would increase public support for biodiversity improvement projects already happening in The Blean and other areas of ancient woodland, as well as creating opportunities for new projects.
- It will enable existing NGOs who work in the various woodland areas to connect their individual habitat improvement projects across a wider area; connection is vital for species protection and enhancement.
- National Landscape designation is a 'badge' that helps people better understand the importance of the ancient woodland by improving access and information for walkers and naturalists.
- The designation will enable local authorities to connect their individual protection zones to allow movement of animal and plant species. This could potentially, in the future, include larger animals that need room to roam across a wider area.

- It is the perfect opportunity for Local Authorities to deliver their "Bigger, Better, Connected" ambitions in the South-East.
- Last, but by no means least connectivity will be created across the A2 by the Green Bridge which is already the No. 1 priority project of the National Highways Sustainability Programme and has funding. The road is a massive barrier (I hate to use the word "scar", but that is what it is) through the woodland and a Green Bridge would have major benefits.

It is often difficult for local people to appreciate what you have on your doorstep, but this area is very special not least because so close to London. But that also makes it terribly vulnerable to development pressures. But with wise planning, essential development and nature restoration can go hand in hand, for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Yours faithfully,

Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS

Letter of Support from RSPB



9th April 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Blean Complex is one of the most significant areas of lowland woodland habitat in the UK and serves as a stronghold for iconic species such as the nightingale, lesser-spotted woodpecker, and heath fritillary. Its importance is derived not only from the substantial size of the remaining woodland blocks but also from the dedicated efforts of conservation organisations and private landowners.

The RSPB has been working alongside other organisations to protect, restore, and expand habitat within this landscape, aiming to enhance its value for both nature and people, while also mitigating the effects of climate change. It is well understood that for some species, connectivity is vital for survival. Many woodland specialist bird species rely on connections between blocks of woodland to disperse and thrive.

We have collaborated closely with partners to ensure that the Blean Complex is recognised as a key landscape in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy process. A crucial part of achieving the vision is to safeguard the 'gaps' within this landscape from inappropriate development, using these areas instead to connect habitats through measures such as planting hedgerows, woodlands, or other semi-natural habitats. The proposal to extend the National Landscapes to encompass this area would both acknowledge its natural and cultural heritage and support planning decisions that safeguard the landscape. It would also align strongly with the government's ambitions for 30x30, the Nature Recovery Strategy and the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Johnson

Kent & Essex Area Manager

RSPB Kent & Essex
9 Manor Cottages
Herrhill
Faversham
ME13 9JY

Tel: 07766 726147
@RSPBEngland
@RSPBEngland
rspb.org.uk



The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a network of passionate organisations, working together to save nature across the world.

Patron: His Majesty The King. President: Dr Amir Khan. Director, RSPB England: Michael Coppleston.
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 202076, Scotland no. SC032954. Registered address: The Lodge, Pottton Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG9 2DL.

Letter of Support from Kent Bat Group

John Puckett
17 Share & Coulter Rd
Chestfield
Whitstable
Kent
CT5 3LE

Blean Wood

Dear sir/madam

I am chair of Kent Bat Group, a charity of voluntary bat workers covering the county of Kent. I am writing in support of the proposal to expand National Landscapes into the area in which I volunteer i.e. incorporating the Blean woodland complex, Perry Wood and Challock Forest. This area of ancient woodland is extremely important for local populations of various woodland bat species. These animals are dependent on interconnecting flight lines such as wooded shaws, tree lines and mature hedges to preserve the genetic diversity within the various maternity colonies. Fragmentation leads to genetic isolation and more likelihood of local extinctions.

Both the Blean and Challock Forest are very large blocks of woodland. Connectivity between these blocks incorporating a smaller ancient wood, Perry Wood, would also benefit invertebrates and small mammals such as dormice, again preserving population genetics.

Extending the existing National Landscapes area into The Blean and Challock Forest would benefit the whole area by protecting the landscape and preserving an extremely valuable resource, not only for the native wildlife but also for people to enjoy. The benefits are multiple including people's mental health. This extension will help meet government targets for protected landscapes.

The high priority green bridge across the A2 will obviously help link the important wooded habitats both north and south of this major infrastructure barrier.

John Puckett
Chair Kent Bat Group

Letter of Support from Kent Wildlife Trust



Kent Wildlife Trust
Tyland Barn
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 3BD

Kent Wildlife Trust,
Tyland Barn, Sandling,
Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3BD

01622 662012
info@kentwildlife.org.uk

Kent Wildlife Trust
Tyland Barn
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 3BD

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Kent Wildlife Trust to express our support for the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape designation to include The Blean ancient woodland.

Kent Wildlife Trust is the county's leading conservation charity. With over 65 years of experience, we manage more than 86 nature reserves covering over 9,100 acres across Kent. Our work with communities and individuals at all levels of society enables us to deliver meaningful, lasting change for nature and the climate.

We are proud to manage seven nature reserves within the Blean landscape, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) at East Blean, West Blean, and Thornden Woods. These sites represent some of the most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes in the southeast. The Blean is the largest ancient broadleaved woodland in southern Britain—a remarkable distinction considering that only 2.5% of the UK remains covered by ancient woodland. As such, every hectare is of critical importance.

The Blean hosts an array of nationally and internationally important designations, including SSSIs, Special Areas of Conservation, and National Nature Reserves. It provides vital habitat for rare and threatened species, including the heath fritillary butterfly—one of Britain's rarest—and a host of Red-listed woodland bird species, such as the lesser-spotted woodpecker, nightingale, and spotted flycatcher. In addition to its natural value, the area is steeped in historical and cultural significance, offering a deeply rooted sense of place that is cherished by local communities.

Inclusion of The Blean within the Kent Downs National Landscape would support our ongoing conservation efforts in the area and build on the strong partnership work already taking place within the landscape. Our collective vision for The Blean Wildscapes is to restore and maintain a biologically rich, extensive, and connected ancient woodland, governed by natural processes and where wildlife and people can thrive together. The designation would strengthen this vision by:

Supporting the defragmentation of the landscape through green corridors and buffer zones



kentwildlifetrust.org.uk

Follow us on social media and help us create a #WilderKent










Registered Charity No. 239992. A company limited in England and Wales by guarantee 433096.



Kent Wildlife Trust,
Tyland Barn, Sandling,
Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3BD

01622 662012
info@kentwildlife.org.uk

Safeguarding designated sites and strategic habitats from development

Enhancing community engagement and public appreciation of the natural world

A crucial component of this vision is the proposed green bridge across the A2, which has been identified by National Highways as the top priority for a wildlife crossing in the country. The A2 currently forms a major barrier between South Blean Woods and RSPB Blean Woods, creating an impermeable divide for wildlife. A green bridge would restore ecological connectivity across the entire Blean complex, enabling species ranging from invertebrates and small mammals to large grazing animals to move freely through the landscape. Unlike other landscape features, the A2 cannot be mitigated without this type of infrastructure, making the bridge essential.

Incorporating The Blean into the Kent Downs National Landscape will also deliver significant benefits for the National Landscape designation itself and contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) targets. These include:

- Bringing in four additional SSSIs which are already under trusted conservation management, helping to meet the target of 80% of SSSIs in favorable condition by 2042
- Supporting habitat creation and access improvement targets through an established and collaborative partnership of conservation organisations, local authorities, and landowners
- Expanding ancient woodland within protected landscapes, contributing meaningfully to the target of increasing woodland cover by 3%

Kent Wildlife Trust is committed to working in partnership to deliver these outcomes, and we believe that the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape into The Blean is a positive step towards achieving our shared environmental and societal goals.

We urge you to support this important designation for the benefit of nature, climate, and future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hadaway
Director of Conservation & Engagement
Kent Wildlife Trust



kentwildlifetrust.org.uk

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Letter of Support from the Woodland Trust



The Woodland Trust
Kempton Way
Grantham
Lincolnshire
NG31 6LL
Telephone
0330 333 3300
Facsimile
01476 590808
Website
woodlandtrust.org.uk

Date 29th April 2025

RE: Support for the proposal to expand the Kent Downs National Landscape into the Blean and connecting woodland

Dear whom it may concern,

Letter of Support for the Extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape to Include The Blean and Connecting Woodland

On behalf of the Woodland Trust, I am writing to express our support for the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape to include The Blean and its connecting woodlands.

The Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity, with a vision of a world where woods and trees thrive for people and nature. We have long supported the aims of the Kent Downs National Landscape and work closely with partner environmental NGOs (eNGOs) with shared ambition for nature recovery across both the Kent Downs and The Blean landscapes.

The inclusion of The Blean within the National Landscape will significantly enhance the protection, restoration, and connectivity of one of the most scenic and diverse examples of ancient wooded landscape in south-east England. The Blean's ancient woodland is a complex mosaic of high forest, coppice woodland, glades, and heathland.

Expanding the National Landscape would improve the cohesion and protection of a network of NGO-managed nature reserves, both within and beyond the current boundary. These include Victory Woods, Perry Wood, King's Wood, and the Wilder Blean project area. Victory Woods, purchased by the Woodland Trust, was planted between 2005 and 2008 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Britain's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. Recognising the site's cultural importance, various features have been created to reflect this heritage, including sculptures and groves representing each ship in the British fleet. Additionally, the woodland we planted has reconnected Blean Wood and Ellenden Wood—ancient woodlands that were historically severed by piecemeal agricultural clearance during the early to mid-20th century.

100% recycled paper. The Woodland Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales (No. 294344) and in Scotland (No. SC038885).
A non-profit-making company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No. 3262871.
The Woodland Trust logo is a registered trademark.

Including The Blean in the National Landscape will strengthen existing partnerships between NGOs and enable better coordination of habitat recovery efforts, enhancing the ecological resilience of the region and reinforcing the identity of The Blean as a cohesive landscape.

This collaboration is essential to build upon the connectivity projects achieved so far—projects that support species movement, increase biodiversity, and improve climate resilience. Inclusion in the National Landscape will also raise awareness of the value of ancient woodlands and promote public access and understanding. This is a unique opportunity to enhance the area's scenic beauty, relative wildness, and tranquility, while helping to ensure the long-term survival of vulnerable species and habitats.

In conclusion, extending the National Landscape to include The Blean supports the ambitions of local authorities to deliver "Bigger, Better, More Connected" strategies and aligns with national government targets for protected landscapes and nature recovery.

We fully support this proposal and believe that extending the Kent Downs National Landscape to include The Blean and its connecting woodlands will bring lasting benefits for nature, people, and the landscape itself.

Kind regards,

Jenny Schofield
Regional Director – South East England

Letter of Support from Kent Reptile & Amphibian Group



John@kentarg.org
www.kentarg.org

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG) to express our strong support for the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape to include The Blean and surrounding ancient woodland.

KRAG is a volunteer-led conservation organisation dedicated to the protection, study, and education of Kent's native reptile and amphibian species. Our work focuses on monitoring populations, improving habitats, and raising awareness about the vital role these often-overlooked species play in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Amphibians and reptiles are excellent ecological indicators, and their wellbeing is directly tied to habitat quality and connectivity.

The Blean is one of the most ecologically valuable landscapes in Kent and this project represents a rare opportunity to protect and connect ancient woodland on a significant scale, providing habitat corridors between the Blean, King's Wood and Perry Wood. The proposed area of expansion supports a diverse range of herpetofauna, including species of conservation concern such as the great crested newt and European adder, both of which are listed as priority species in the first draft of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy created by Kent County Council.

Incorporating The Blean into the Kent Downs National Landscape would greatly benefit our conservation work by ensuring greater protection and connectivity between fragmented habitats. Connectivity is critical for amphibians and reptiles, which rely on a variety of interconnected habitats to complete their life cycles. This designation would allow us to better align our habitat enhancement efforts with neighbouring organisations and land managers, creating a more resilient landscape for these species. Additionally, the inclusion of The Blean would strengthen the existing National Landscape by expanding its ecological reach and helping to meet national targets for land protection. Protecting and restoring ancient

The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group is a non-profit making organisation that works to promote the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in Kent. KRAG is an affiliate of ARG UK, a network of wildlife volunteer groups which aim to protect and conserve the native amphibians & reptiles of the UK.



woodland, especially through collaborative initiatives, is essential for reversing biodiversity decline and enhancing climate resilience.

We also wish to highlight the critical importance of the proposed green bridge across the A2. This major road currently acts as a hard barrier for wildlife, especially for low-mobility species such as amphibians. A green bridge would not only reconnect vital habitats but would serve as a nationally significant model for integrated infrastructure and biodiversity. KRAG fully supports this proposal and urges decision-makers to recognise the environmental, cultural, and strategic value of including The Blean and associated woodland in the Kent Downs National Landscape.

Yours sincerely,

John Rowland
Recording Officer
Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG)

Date: 26th May 2025

The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group is a non-profit making organisation that works to promote the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in Kent. KRAG is an affiliate of ARG UK, a network of wildlife volunteer groups which aim to protect and conserve the native amphibians & reptiles of the UK.



Letter of Support from the Wildwood Trust



To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Wildwood Trust to express our support for the proposal to expand the Kent Downs National Landscapes into The Blean and connecting woodland.

Wildwood Trust is a national conservation charity based in Kent near Canterbury, our mission is the protection, conservation and rewilding of British Wildlife. We work to restore the U.Ks biodiversity and native species by working with partners and applying the best science led species reintroductions and translocations. Finding areas where the habitat is suitable and connected is always a huge challenge. We are always in search of "more, bigger, better managed and joined up" landscapes. It is essential that we create more space for nature to try and reverse the biodiversity crisis.

The adoption of The Blean and other ancient woodland areas into the Kent Downs National Landscapes to protect existing woodland areas and enhance them through connectivity. This will further the objectives of National Landscapes, by enhancing the resilience of Perry Wood and Kings Wood by enabling their connection to other protected woodland areas, including the Wilder Blean project area.

Extending the area of woodland in this landscape will improve biodiversity and provide opportunities for species that have been lost over time to return to the larger woodland, or forest, area, which currently cannot happen. The National Landscape designation would increase public support for biodiversity improvement projects already happening in The Blean and other areas of ancient woodland, as well as creating opportunities for new projects.

The designation will enable local authorities to connect their individual protection zones to allow movement of animal and plant species. This could potentially, in the future, include larger animals that need room to roam across a wider area and that will return missing ecosystem functions.

We urge you to positively consider this expansion of the designation for this important landscape.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Whitfield
Director General
On behalf of Wildwood Trust

WILDWOOD
KENT

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info@wildwoodtrust.org
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Wildwood Trust, Herne Common,
Kent CT6 7LQ

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Wildwood Devon, Escot Park,
Ottery St Mary, Devon, EX11 1LJ

Protecting, Conserving
& Rewilding British Wildlife



Letter of Support from Local Landowner at Rickards Farm

Rickards Farms, Kiln Cottage, Lower Ensdon Road, Old Wives Lees, Canterbury,
Kent, CT4 8BA,
rickardsfarms@farming.co.uk, Tel 01227 730602

31 May 2025

Dear Terry

Letter of Support for connecting the East Kent Forests from Perry Wood, Kings Wood through to the West, Central and East Blean Woods.

Further to our meeting today we are writing to confirm our support for the proposed project to link the above woodlands to support large scale nature recovery by joining up fragmented habitats across a wider area in East Kent. We believe this area should be protected by the special status afforded by the Kent Downs National Landscape.

We farm the land at Rickards Farms, Lower Ensdon, CT48BA and Upper Ensign, CT4 8BB which are situated adjacent to the Blean Woods and are located in the Setting of the Kent Downs National Landscape.

As farmers we have invested in the land over the last three generations to increase biodiversity and farm the land sustainably, however we have come to realise that we cannot do this in isolation and desperately need more connectivity across the wider environment. With this in mind we have joined the East Kent Downs Landscape Recovery Project, a Natural England initiative that is driving significant changes on both a farm and landscape scale to increase food production while simultaneously protecting and enhancing the environment. We already have created wildlife some corridors by planted species rich grass and wildflower meadows under Natural England's Countryside Stewardship scheme which connect the ancient woodland on the farms and we can see the benefits of increased biodiversity (an increase in numbers and species of insects, butterflies and moths as well as the endangered Dormouse) by this landscape recovery scheme.

We are also involved in the Farming in Protected Landscapes project of the Kent Downs National Landscape which has provided funding for hedge planting to on the farms.

why this project is so important:

We consider this initiative should be a top priority for Government, Natural England and Kent County Council for the following reasons:

1. The fourth State of Nature (SON) Report published in 2023 lays bare the stark fact that nature is still seriously declining across the UK, a country that is already one of the most nature-depleted in the world. The data show that since 1970 UK species have declined by about 19% on average, and nearly 1 in 6 species (16.1%) are now threatened with extinction¹. Of 3,684 species in

¹ <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/29/state-of-nature/#:~:text=The%20data%20show%20that%20since,Amazon%20or%20Great%20Barrier%20Reef.>

Kent that have had their UK threat status assessed, 372 (10%) are classified as threatened with extinction from Great Britain²

2. Kent County Council's 2023 mid-year population estimates show that Kent is the most populous county council area in the South East with a population of 1,610,300 people³. Therefore, there is increasing pressure on land, especially areas of woodland within the Blean complex and surrounding habitats that need to be protected from housing and other infrastructure to provide a sanctuary for wildlife.
3. By establishing further networks of wildlife rich places without disturbance from development will help to lock up carbon, further contributing to climate change mitigation. These areas need to be recognised as a huge carbon store with great potential to lock up more carbon in future.
4. Currently woodland and key wildlife habitats across the area consists of fragmented units preventing wildlife moving across the landscape, by connecting these areas will become wildlife rich places for not only different species but also for people to enjoy for their health and wellbeing. The Covid pandemic clearly taught us the importance of the role of the countryside has to both physical and mental health. Therefore, there is a real need to protect and enhance what little there is left in this busy part of Kent.

We do hope you are successful in securing this large-scale Nature Recovery Project under the protection of the Kent Downs National Landscape for the reasons outlined.

Yours Sincerely

James and Penny Rickards

² [State of Nature in Kent 2021](#)

³ https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/14724/Mid-year-population-estimates-total-population-of-Kent-bulletin.pdf

Letter of Support from Blean & Boughton under Blean Parish Councils

Blean Parish Council

Parish Council Office, 4. School Lane, Blean, Canterbury, Kent CT2 9JA
Clerk: Mrs Denise Horswell
Tel: 07703561509
E-Mail: clerk@bleanparishcouncil.co.uk

28th August 2025

To whom it may concern

Letter of support for Forest of Kent proposal

I am writing on behalf of Blean Parish Council to express our wholehearted support for the proposal to expand the area of the current Kent Downs National Landscape north-eastward to take in the Blean Woods National Nature Reserve through to East Blean Wood.

Terry Thomposon, Swale Borough Councillor, attended a recent Parish Council meeting and gave an informative and compelling overview of the project to reconnect ancient woodland along with access to the detailed presentation document.

Given the location of our Parish between two Sites of Special Scientific Interest – RSPB Blean and West Blean Reserves – this vision is one that could not be closer to our heart as a community. Sir John Lawton is quoted as saying that it is often difficult for local people to appreciate what they have on their doorstep; however, as representatives of the Parish of Blean, we know that local residents – and visitors - are very aware of the special landscape character, the precious wildlife habitat, and the cultural and historical importance associated with the Blean Complex.

In our opinion, the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape would help to ensure the careful and balanced planning necessary to sustainably meet the needs for essential development and nature restoration in the long term.

Yours faithfully
Denise Horswell
Clerk to Blean Parish Council



BOUGHTON under BLEAN PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office, PO Box 310, Faversham, Kent ME13 3EA
07740 706189 - clerk@boughtonunderblean-pc.gov.uk

14th July 2025

To whom it may concern

I am writing on behalf of Boughton under Blean Parish Council to express support for the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape designation to include The Blean and connecting woodland.

Swale Borough Councillor Terry Thompson recently provided the Parish Council with an informative presentation on "Reconnecting our Ancient Forest" and explained the proposals.

Kind regards

Sarah Muteham PSLCC
Parish Clerk

Letter of Support from Chartham & Dunkirk Parish Councils

CHARTHAM PARISH COUNCIL
The Parish Office, Chartham Village Hall, Station Road,
Chartham, CT14 7HZ



23rd September 2025

Dear Whom it May Concern,

Chartham Parish Council supports the proposed extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape to encompass The Blean and its adjoining woodland.

The Blean represents one of the most significant areas of ancient woodland in southern Britain. It is of exceptional ecological value, providing habitat for rare and threatened species, including the heath fritillary butterfly, nightingale, and lesser-spotted woodpecker. The area also holds multiple national and international designations, underlining its importance for biodiversity and heritage.

The extension of the Kent Downs National Landscape boundary would:

- Strengthen the protection, restoration, and connectivity of fragmented ancient woodland, creating a resilient, landscape-scale forest.
- Support the delivery of Government targets such as 30x30, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the Environmental Improvement Plan.
- Safeguard "stepping stone" habitats essential for wildlife movement and long-term species survival.
- Enhance opportunities for access, recreation, education, and wellbeing for residents and visitors.
- Contribute to climate resilience, sustainable land management, and the growth of the green economy.

This proposal provides a rare and important opportunity to safeguard and enhance one of the most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes in the country. We urge that the extension be approved to ensure its long-term protection for the benefit of both people and nature.

Yours faithfully,

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
On behalf of Chartham Parish Council



Southland, Church Hill, Hernhill, Faversham, Kent ME13 9JX
07496202894
clerk@dunkirkpc.gov.uk

16th September 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of Dunkirk Parish Council who unanimously resolved to support the proposed extension to reconnect the ancient woodland of the forest of Blean under the Kent Downs National Landscapes project as presented to the Parish Council at a meeting on the 18th August 2025 by Swale Borough Councillor Terry Thompson.

Kind regards

Rebecca Parr
Clerk to Dunkirk Parish Council

Letter of Support from Selling Parish Council

SELLING PARISH COUNCIL

50 Park Road, Sittingbourne Kent, ME10 1DY
T: 07941 987691 E: clerk@sellingparishcouncil.gov.uk

16th June 2025

To whom it may concern,

Selling Parish Council wishes to lend its support to the project to reconnect ancient woodland across northern Kent, as described in the presentation we received at the parish council meeting on 15th May 2025.

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Bex Ratchford
Parish Clerk