# The Meads Community Woodland

## Management Plan 2022-2026

The Meads Community Woodland

Swale Borough Council

White Horse Ecology

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This management plan has been produced by White Horse Ecology on behalf of Swale Borough Council. It is an update of a management plan written in 2017 that was commissioned by the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership that formed part of the Woodland Wildlife Hidden History project that was been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Swale Borough Council.

It should be noted that most of the material in this plan has been updated from the 2017-22 plan. The work carried out in this update included site visits to refresh species lists and discuss management with Swale Borough Council staff as well as discussions with local stakeholders. Mapping was also updated for this plan. This work ensures that the management plan is still fit for purpose and that it can be used as a guide to future management by all of those that have an interest in the site. It is hopes that this plan can be used as a basis for exciting work that is being initiated by volunteers on the ground.

Thanks are due to all of the stakeholders and members of the public who took time to contribute their ideas to the original management plan as well as this update.

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White Horse Ecology
T: 01227 652126
T: 07540 250320
E: info@whitehorseecology.co.uk
W: www.whitehorseecology.co.uk

White Horse Ecology

Woodland Wildlife Hidden History

The Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership

Swale Borough Council

# 1. Introduction

The Meads Community Woodland is owned and managed by Swale Borough Council. This management plan has been produced as a way of gathering together some of the accumulated knowledge about the site to create a plan for the future management and use of the site. It reflects the views of local people, stakeholders and those working at the woodland who have been consulted about their views. The uses of the document include:

- Clearly identifying management objectives for each of the distinct habitats within the site as well as how the woodland should be interpreted and whether there are infrastructure improvements needed to help people enjoy the open space.
- Updating knowledge about species present on site and ensuring that protected flora and fauna are identified and that works enhance and conserve the habitats of these species.
- Acting as a guide to a possible future 'Friends of' group that may get involved in the management of the site.
- Supporting external funding applications.
- Allowing Swale Borough Council to prioritise work programmes undertaken by contractors and make the best use of current site expenditure.

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre have provided species information for the site and this has been supplemented by on-site surveys. The aim of this document is to be a short introduction to the wildlife, heritage and amenity of the site that is readable, identifies achievable outcomes and maximises the biodiversity potential for the site.

The 2021 update is set within a context of increased community involvement opportunities at The Meads with interest to develop this from both Bobbing Parish Council and Councillor James Hunt. Set alongside this, Swale Borough Council has limited resources to devote to The Meads in terms of officer time and finance. This updated plan will reflect this changed environment and suggest some potential ways forward.

## 1.1. Location

The Meads Community Woodland is situated in the western part of Sittingbourne just to the east of Bobbing and between the Sonora Fields and Grove Park housing estates. The centre of the site is located at TQ 893 644.

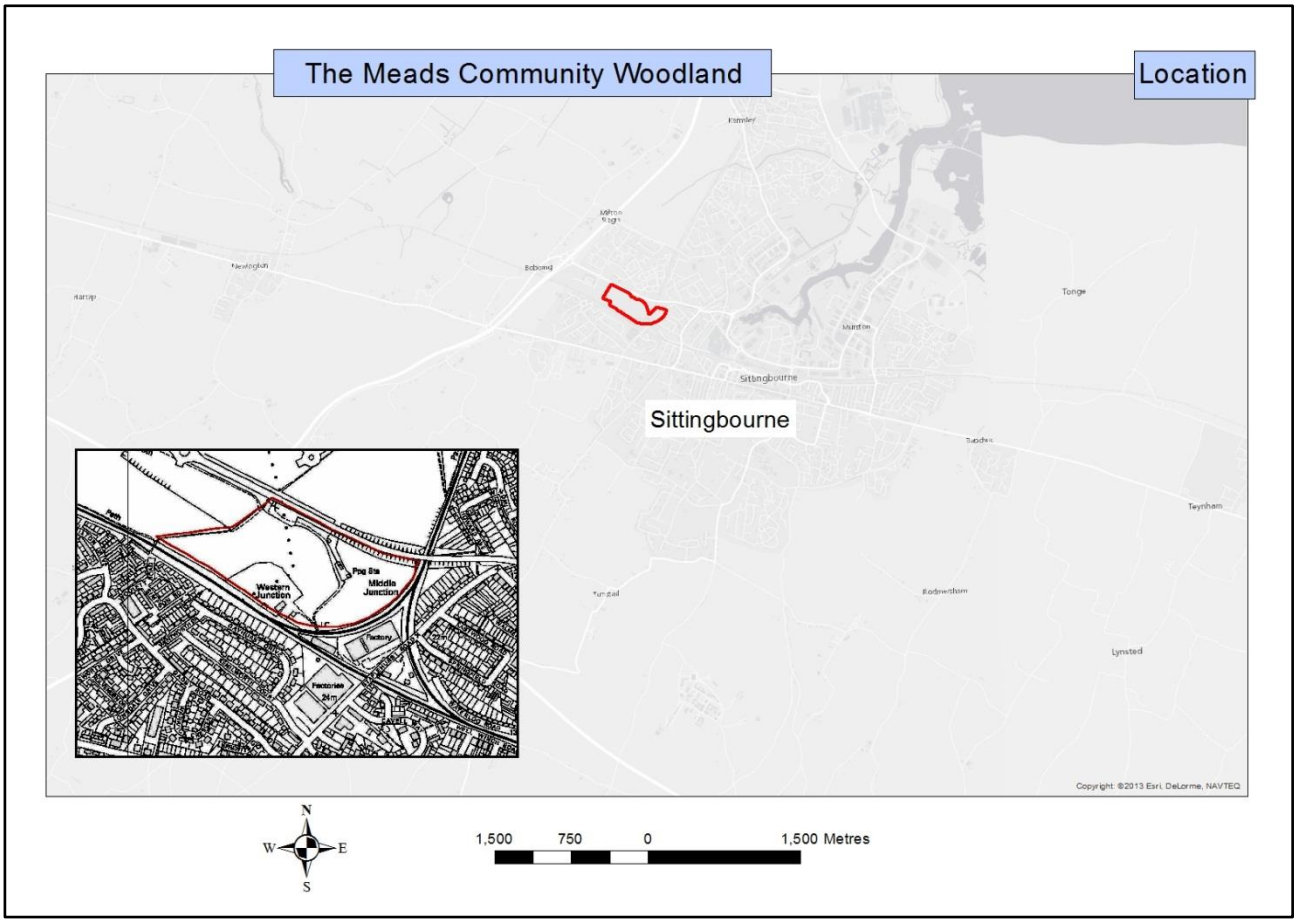



Figure 1: Location of The Meads Community Woodland

## 1.2. Links to strategy documents

There is a selection of strategic documents at a national, county and district level that are relevant to the purpose, aims and objectives of The Meads Community Woodland.

### 1.2.1. National

Although many documents could be quoted in this section, for the sake of brevity, just one national level document will be referenced.

#### 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)[1]

This is the overarching plan for the environment over the next 25 Years. It is a high-level document but has some clear goals:

*1. Clean air.*
*2. Clean and plentiful water.*
*3. Thriving plants and wildlife.*
*4. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought.*

[1] 25 Year Environment Plan - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

*5. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently.*
*6. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.*

*In addition, we will manage pressures on the environment by:*
*7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change.*
*8. Minimising waste.*
*9. Managing exposure to chemicals.*
*10.Enhancing biosecurity.*
The Meads Community Woodland contributes to most of these goals. The ecosystem services benefits of a wood like The Meads should be valued highly and be recognised for the contribution they make at a local and district level.

### 1.2.2. County level

#### Kent Environment Strategy (2016)[2]

This is a high-level document outlining environmental priorities for Kent County Council. The vision for this document neatly encapsulates the value of green spaces like The Meads to local communities:

> *"The county of Kent is benefitting from a competitive, innovative and resilient economy, with our natural and historic assets enhanced and protected for their unique value and positive impact on our society, economy, health and wellbeing."*

#### Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy (2020-2045)[3]

This strategy looks specifically at targets for biodiversity over the next 25 years, linking broadly with the government's 25 Year Environment Plan

The goals of this document relate to the quality of terrestrial habitat, how connected it is and how much of it there is. This management plan looks to contribute to these goals.

#### Kent Nature Partnership Strategic Priorities and Action Plan (2018-2023)[4]

This document sits below the Environment Strategy (KES) as the mechanism for delivering the biodiversity elements of the KES. The document highlights four priorities, all of which are relevant to The Meads Community Woodland and which the area is delivering:

*Priority 1 - Strengthening the consideration of biodiversity within local plans and the growth agenda*
*Priority 2 - Embedding natural capital into planning and decision making*
*Priority 3 - Taking forward the health and nature agenda*

[2] Kent Environment Strategy - https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/kent-environment-strategy
[3] Kent Biodiversity Strategy - http://www.kentnature.org.uk/uploads/Kent%20Biodiversity%20Strategy%202020%20-%202045.pdf
[4] KNP Strategic priorities and Action Plan - https://www.kentnature.org.uk/uploads/files/About-Us/Kent%20Nature%20Partnership%20-%20Strategic%20Priorities%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018%20-%2023.pdf

*Priority 4 - Improving the quality, extent and connectivity of our high value habitats*

### 1.2.3. District level

#### Swale Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan (2020)

Swale Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and released this action plan in 2020 to help The Council become carbon neutral by 2025 and for the borough to be carbon neutral by 2030. As well as these ambitious targets this document commits to make space for nature as a key priority, and safeguard our wild places, ancient woodlands and hedgerows.

Of the ten priorities outlined by the document the two that are most relevant to The Meads Community Woodland is:

- *Tree planting on council land (target; 148,100 trees or 60 acres of woodland) to offset 20% of council emissions.*
- *Improve facilities and incentives for walking and cycling.*

#### Swale Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy (2018-2022)[5]

This strategy assesses the provision of open space in the borough, how it fits into planning policy and local strategic planning and identifies an action plan. The plan acknowledges that the funding situation is difficult at present but also makes the following recommendation:
*"Destination (Strategic) Sites should be recognised through protection and enhancement."*
The recommendation goes on to state:
*"The Council should seek to ensure the role and quality of these sites through continued enhancement so providing a diverse range of features."*

The strategy action plan also states that the following targets will be put in place:

a. *To invest at least £100,000 capital spending per year for 5 years on existing open spaces through developer contributions, grants, capital works and disposals.*
b. *To invest £500,000 in a rolling programme to refurbish several play areas during the life of the strategy.*
c. *To achieve at least 3 Green Flag parks and open spaces in the next 5 years.*
d. *To review our open space portfolio and identify relevant sites for investment, disposal or alternative uses by September 2018, linked to our successful programme of Community Asset Transfer and in consultation with the relevant Ward Members.*
e. *To actively promote our open spaces in partnership with other agencies and voluntary groups as places to sustain and improve health and wellbeing.*

[5] Swale Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy - https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s10121/Appendix%20I%20-%20SWALE%20BOROUGH%20COUNCIL%20OPEN%20SPACES%20AND%20PLAY%20STRATEGY%20FINALSENT%20TO%20CABINET.pdf

f. *To increase the amount of open space under a wildlife management regime by 5 hectares and by December 2022.*
g. *Seek improvement of horticulture in our open spaces to enrich the biodiversity*
h. *To increase community involvement in open space management by providing support to new or existing community groups.*
i. *To ensure actions in relation to Local Plan Policy DM 17 are put in place to protect existing open space and private playing fields, to help negotiate new open space in future housing developments and to continue the designation of Local Green Space across the Borough.*
j. *Look at new methods of operation and potential commercial ventures to help meet the ongoing cost of maintaining open space facilities*
k. *A Borough wide review of public conveniences to also consider an audit of existing Changing Places toilets provision.*

These priorities form the basis for this management plan's approach to The Meads Community Woodland.

### Health and Well Being Improvement Plan (2020-2023) – currently only available in consultation form

This document highlights the importance of good health, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the importance of taking regular exercise. Green spaces play an important part in how people take their exercise. One of the priorities identified in this document is:

> *"Work with Leisure and Technical services and Comms to consider how we use and promote our open spaces to encourage physical activity and improve wellbeing."*

### Swale Biodiversity Action Plan (updated 2016)[6]

This plan focuses on the habitats and species that make Swale's biodiversity special. It includes priority habitats relevant to The Meads Community Woodland:

- *Woodland*
- *Wildflower grassland*
- *Built up areas and gardens*

These are all habitats that are found at or adjacent to The Meads Community Woodland

[6] Swale Biodiversity Action Plan - https://www.swale.gov.uk/assets/Strategies-plans-and-policies/Biodiversity-Action-Plan-2016.pdf

Swale Green Grid Strategy (2016)[7]
This document examines how the borough's green spaces can be enhanced and monitored via a partnership of organisations.

There are also other documents relevant to The Meads Community Woodland:
Swale Volunteering Strategy (2013-2016)[8]
Swale Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement (2018-2022)[9]

## 1.3. Information gathering

This management plan was compiled with specific reference to information gathered from stakeholders and members of the public over the course of the Woodland Wildlife Hidden History project managed by the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership. The following sources of information were used to assess opinions and a summary of the information that was contributed can be found in appendix III:

- Consultation during the introductory phase of the project (2014/15)
- Consultation for The Meads futures (2016)
- Stakeholder telephone conversations conducted in December 2016
- E-mail consultation in December 2016
- Public prioritisation and consultation event on 22nd January 2017
- Further consultation with staff and local stakeholders including Councillor James Hunt and Bobbing Parish Council took place in autumn 2021 to inform the updated plan.

## 1.4. How to use this management plan

Management plans are not designed to be static documents that never change. They are part of a process that involves identifying aims and objectives, putting a plan into place and then reviewing the success of the plan, adjusting as necessary. A typical management flow diagram can be found below.

[7] Swale Green Grid Strategy - https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s6079/Green%20Grid%20Strategy%202016%20proof%20Aug%202016.pdf
[8] Sale Volunteering Strategy - https://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Strategies-plans-and-policies/Swale-Volunteering-Strategy-May-2014.pdf
[9] Swale Cycling and Walking Guidance Statement - https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s11291/Item%208%20Appendix%20I.pdf

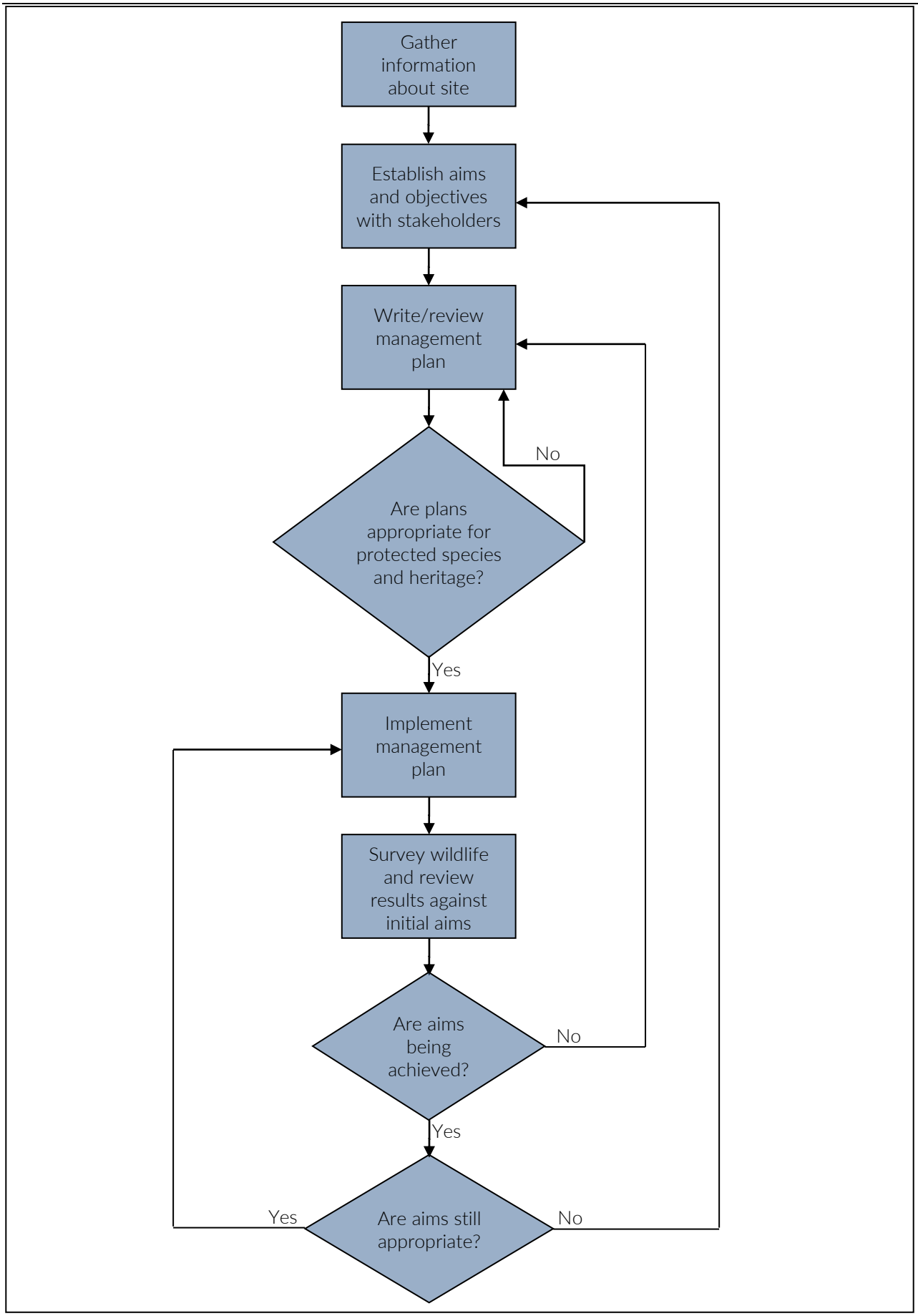



Figure 2: Management plan flow diagram

# 2. Site description

The Meads Community Woodland is a new wood that was planted in the late 1990s and consists of a wooded area with managed pathways as well as a small area of grassland. The site is owned by Swale Borough Council and provides local accessible green space for the communities of west Sittingbourne, particularly the estates of Sonora Fields and Grove Park. The trees are currently all of a similar size due to the fact that they were planted around the same time. However, there are varying sizes dependent upon the local conditions and species planted with the tallest trees now approaching 12m in height. This provides a closed canopy in areas where the density of planting is high but areas of open canopy where planting density was lower or where failure rates have been high.

The western side of the wood (compartment 1) is predominantly grassland that is cut once a year. Significant areas of good reptile habitat and areas with exceptional archaeological potential have been lost since the last management plan due to a school being built on what was the western part of The Meads Community Woodland.


Figure 3: The Meads Community Woodland and compartment numbers


Figure 4: Additional relict farmland features and other points of interest

## 2.1. Designations

There are no statutory designations on the site. However, lowland deciduous woodland is considered to be a Natural England Priority Habitat under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). As the site develops and further biological recording takes place a body of evidence that supports Local Wildlife Site designation may become available.

## 2.2. Urban green space and links to the wider countryside

The importance of urban sites such as The Meads Community Woodland is greater than the sum of the land given over to wildlife on the site itself. These areas provide essential green space that acts as a refuge to wildlife which, in turn, will increase the amount of wildlife in nearby gardens. These spaces also provide important areas of recreational space for local residents and access to wildlife. Additionally, despite extensive house building in this part of Sittingbourne there are currently still physical links to the wider countryside provided by The Meads. These allow for the movement of wildlife both to and from The Meads to adjacent sites. Equally, sites like The Meads can be used as 'stepping stones' by more mobile animals such as birds as is illustrated by sightings of the migratory firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*). The most important habitats found adjacent to The Meads Community Woodland are:

- The playing fields belonging to Grove Park School and Gore Court Cricket and Rugby clubs and associated hedgerows to the south-west of the site. These go on to link with Rose Hill wood, a more mature area of deciduous woodland.
- The road margins of the A249 provide some of the largest extents of semi-natural habitat in the area and continuous habitat links for reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates.
- Farming areas to the west of Sittingbourne. Although these areas are degraded from a biodiversity perspective as they are predominantly arable the remaining hedgerows do provide links to the wider countryside.

## 2.3. Site usage

The woodland is in a heavily populated part of Sittingbourne with housing on three of the four sides of the woodland. This is the closest open greenspace for residents of the Sonora Fields estate to the north of the woodland and is well used by dog walkers and those looking to find peace and tranquillity in an urban area and it is valued as a place to go with family.

There is a surfaced footpath that runs through The Meads Community Woodland that provides pedestrian access underneath the railway line and to The Grove School. Hence, it is well used and the woodland is a part of the daily journeys of many schoolchildren and parents alike.

The Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership has run the Woodland Wildlife Hidden History project which ran from 2014 to 2017 and encouraged community participation in events at both The Meads Community Woodland and the nearby Rose Hill Woods. This has been built on and litter picking events have been run by both Swale Borough Council and a team of local volunteers. Discussions with local councillor James Hunt in 2021 suggest there is appetite for more volunteer involvement at the site.

## 2.4. Biological recording and protected species

The Meads Community Woodland is a new habitat and there are very few records available for the site. Although a database search was made to the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre few of these records can be directly attributed to The Meads Community Woodland itself. Therefore, it is crucially important to ensure that all records that are made at the site are sent to the appropriate recording group and/or the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre.

Whilst the overarching aim of nature conservation management within The Meads is to enhance habitats for all species groups, there are specific species that require attention in their own right due to their protected status. This section will identify those species that

have been recorded on site, are protected and which legislation they are covered by. Other important, but not protected, species will be dealt with in the assessment of habitats.

Table 1: Protected species

| Species | Locations (if known) | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019**<br>This is the highest level of European designation and provides protection against killing, injury and disturbance. The breeding and resting habitat of these species is also protected | | |
| Common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) | Although no bats have been recorded on the site of The Meads all of these species have been recorded within 1km of the site. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that bats use the site for foraging and as the trees mature, roosting will become increasingly likely if it does not already take place. The consequence of the likely presence of bats is that the removal of larger trees or any built structures should be approached with caution. | |
| Soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) | | |
| Serotine bat (*Eptesicus serotinus*) | | |
| Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*) | | |
| Noctule bat (*Nyctalus noctula*) | | |
| Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) | | |
| Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) | Unconfirmed but from a reliable source. Records of dormouse have been reported from The Meads Community Woodland. Although the site is not near ancient woodland it was previously farmland connected to open countryside and these records should not be discounted. Further survey work to confirm presence or likely absence should be prioritised. | |
| **Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) – protection under section 9.1 of the act**<br>Species identified under schedule 5 of the act have protection against killing or injury although their habitat is not protected. | | |
| Grass snake (*Natrix helvetica)* | Not recorded on site but thought likely to be present. | Any works that include mechanical control of long grasses or other vegetation should be avoided between March and October as should major ground disturbance in winter months where reptiles may be hibernating. |
| Viviparous lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) | Both species are abundant throughout the site. Slow-worms and viviparous lizards were introduced to compartment 1. | |
| Slow-worm (*Anguilis fragilis*) | | |

| Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) – protection under section 1.1 of the act<br>Wild birds are protected against killing as well as damaging or destroying nests and eggs. | | |
|---|---|---|
| All wild bird species | Found throughout the site. | Vegetation management of potential nesting sites should not take place during the breeding season (usually March to August) unless using hand tools and checks are made for nests. |

| Other protected species |
|---|
| Stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), common frog (*Rana temporaria*), smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) and common toad (*Bufo bufo*) are protected from being sold or advertised for sale. These species are all thought to be present on site. However, this has little impact on the management of the woodland. |

Managing sites with protected species needn't be overly restrictive. There are simply certain activities that should be avoided. Kent Bat Group, Kent Mammal Group and Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group can offer advice when needed.

## 2.5. Non-native invasive species

There are also a number of non-native invasive species that have been identified at or near The Meads Community Woodland. These species have the potential to spread rapidly and threaten the status of native species. Those identified include:

- Harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*) – a threat to native ladybirds.
- Winter flowering heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*) – moisture loving winter flowering plant that can dominate if left unchecked.
- Marsh frog (*Pelophylax ridibundus*) – a large and noisy frog (in late spring) that is thought to compete with native frogs and toads.
- Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) – a rapidly spreading tree that can shade out regeneration of native species.
- Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) – a garden escapee that can thrive in woodlands. Provides little in the way of habitat for invertebrates or other wildlife.

Whilst little can be done about ladybirds and marsh frogs, non-native invasive plants should be removed if safe to do so and where this does not compromise protected species

## 2.6. Archaeology

During the construction of the Sonora Fields housing estate extensive archaeological work was undertaken. This revealed a considerable number of Anglo-Saxon graves, a Neolithic wooden henge, Bronze Age barrows and Roman earthworks. Although no excavations were

made on the site of the community woodland it would not be an unreasonable assumption that there is a wealth of archaeological material at the woodland. The implications of this are that extensive earthworks should be avoided without professional archaeological assistance and planting should be avoided in the one area of known archaeology. Excavations are likely to reveal potentially significant archaeological features but care needs to be taken as the conservation of artefacts could be very expensive. Interpretation of known archaeology will enhance the understanding of the site and this has been implemented using interpretive panels and a replica Neolithic wooden henge.

## 2.7. Infrastructure and interpretation

Currently, infrastructure and interpretation consist of the following:

- One surfaced path running from the north of the site to the south-west of the site;
- A series of mown paths for public use around the site;
- One recreated Neolithic wooden henge that once existed near the site produced as part of the Woodland Wildlife Hidden History Project managed by the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership;
- The Woodland Wildlife Hidden History project has also installed further interpretation panels on the site in 2017;
- A vehicular access route provided by access to the water pumping station which is an asset of Kemsley Paper Mill owned by DS Smith.


Figure 5: Interpretation and replica Neolithic henge

## 2.8. Habitats

In order to make appropriate management decisions it is necessary to assess the habitats that are found at The Meads Community Woodland. This ensures that any future management does not compromise the wildlife and protected species on the site. The site can be split into broad habitat types.

### 2.8.1. Secondary woodland

The majority of compartment 2 of the site is secondary woodland. This term is used to describe areas of new woodland that have been planted since 1600AD. Places that have been woodland since before 1600 are known as ancient woodland and are generally considered to be more important for wildlife than secondary woodland. Compartment 2 was planted with trees in the late 1990s. All of the trees that were planted were native species and include English oak, hornbeam, ash, cherry, field maple, dog rose and hawthorn. Other species have colonised these areas such as blackthorn, elder and willow. As these trees were planted very close together little sunlight reaches the woodland floor and the ground flora is limited as a consequence. However, the margins of the woodland allow spaces for species to colonise and the trees themselves will provide habitat for insects and birds. As the trees grow older and dead wood begins to appear within the trees their value for wildlife will increase.

Figure 6: Secondary woodland with desire lines appearing within them

### 2.8.2. Glades and paths

The areas that are not dense secondary woodland within compartment 2 are either glades where trees have not been planted or paths that are mown on a regular basis. The glades are usually mown annually to keep them open or are areas between trees that have not been colonised by scrub. The areas that are not short grass or a closed canopy of trees offer the most value for biodiversity. These are the areas that most of the flowering plants are found including pyramidal orchid, bird's foot trefoil, red bartsia and oxeye daisy. The sunlight, warmth and often sheltered conditions within these areas make them the best places within The Meads to find butterflies, dragonflies as well as reptiles. Small mammals such as woodmice and field voles are also likely to do well in these habitats. These spaces are especially important as they provide woodland edge habitat which is vitally important for wildlife but these open areas also make the area feel more open and less dangerous to visitors. These areas must be kept open as a priority for both of these reasons.

Figure 7: Glade at The Meads Community Woodland

### 2.8.3. Grassland

Compartment 1 has become much smaller since the 2017 management plan was written as a school has been built on the area to the west of The Meads. This can be clearly seen in the

aerial photography used to create maps in this plan. This area was used as a reptile receptor site prior to the building of the school and this population had to be moved again when the school was built which is unfortunate and should have been avoided. This makes the small area of grassland that remains even more important. This area still retains a reptile population and the grassland area is cut once a year. The western section of compartment 1 adjacent to the public footpath is scrubbing over and is providing nesting habitat for birds.

The long and complex grass sward is ideal for reptiles and the habitat had been enhanced for them by the addition of hibernacula which are holes in the ground that have been filled with rubble and wood before the grass turves are replaced on the top. They provide underground refuges for animals to hibernate during the winter. Although most of the hibernacula have been lost additional hibernation sites could be added to support existing populations. This kind of habitat is also suitable for small mammals and many invertebrates though the long grasses do tend to limit the diversity of flowering plants that are able to colonise such areas. The grassland at the site is surrounded by hedgerows which offer excellent opportunities for animals to shelter and they are likely to be some of the most important parts of the site for nesting birds.

Figure 8: Grassland

## 2.9. Compartments

In order to assist with management planning and implementation, The Meads Community Woodland has been split into different compartments that reflect both the geography and habitats found on site. Each compartment will have its own specific management objectives that need to be implemented.

### Compartment summary

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Grassland | 0.68 hectares |
| 2a | Secondary woodland | 4.19 hectares |
| 2b | Secondary woodland with glades | 4.15 hectares |


Figure 9: Compartments at The Meads Community Woodland

# 3. Management aims and objectives

## 3.1. Aims

The management plan has two overarching and linked aims:

Biodiversity. To maximise the potential for wildlife to flourish at The Meads Community Woodland and to examine the resources available to achieve this.

People. To make The Meads Community Woodland a place that is well used, well valued and looked after by the local community.

## 3.2. Objectives

The management of the site has specific objectives that work towards achieving the aims identified above. The actions detailed will all contribute to the implementation of the objectives. These objectives have been established through public consultation, discussions with key stakeholders including Swale Borough Council and the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership and the implementation of sound, key principles of nature conservation management and the conservation of archaeology. These objectives will form the basis of the management plan for the next five years.

1. Increase biodiversity within habitats to maximise the number of native species that thrive in the woodland;
2. Enhance the site for visitors. Make The Meads a place visited by more local residents who understand both the wildlife and historical value of the site;
3. Have a better understanding of the range of species found at The Meads Community Woodland;
4. Carry out works that do not conflict with protected species and habitats regulations;
5. Control the spread of invasive species within the woodland;
6. Maintain the woodland as a safe place for people to enjoy;
7. Facilitate the active participation of local communities in the management of The Meads.

# 4. Threats and constraints

The Meads Community Woodland has many strengths and is clearly valued by local people. There are many regular users of the wood, Swale Borough Council is committed to the ongoing management of the site and the number of species that have been recorded is going up. As the woodland and grassland develops, more species will be attracted to the site and improved management will help this further. However, there are threats to both the nature conservation value of the site and local people's willingness to use the woodland.

## 4.1. Threats

- Vandalism and anti-social behaviour do impact The Meads and some of those involved in consultation events have often mentioned not feeling safe at times. However, vandalism is an issue that must be considered when installing interpretation and furniture. Additionally, arson should be considered when managing the woodland itself. Acts of vandalism should be dealt with promptly. The 'broken window' principle states that areas that appear to be well cared for attract less acts of anti-social behaviour.
- Litter and dog faeces are always an issue on urban sites and The Meads is no different. Litter is often particularly bad along the surfaced path that runs from the Jenny Wren to the tunnel under the railway. Minimal resources are available to deal with this and it creates a very bad first impression of the site. This is an area where community involvement could be of particular use and the appointment of a volunteer warden either officially or unofficially could also help.
- Local authorities are currently under significant financial strain. A lack of resources could compromise the ability to effectively manage the woodland. External funding applications, volunteers and continued support for the woodland can help to mitigate for these financial pressures and will form a key part of the management plan.
- Invasive and/or non-native species will exploit open space and should be controlled as they can become dominant if unchecked. This is not currently a major problem in most areas of the site but the impact of new management regimes should be monitored.
- *Chalara fraxinea* (Ash die back) has been identified at The Meads Community Woodland. Ash is abundant within the site and the disease will have an impact. However, this will create natural glades and increase the amount of standing deadwood, both of which offer opportunities for wildlife. The trees are not particularly large and are unlikely to pose a threat to public safety.
- A lack of volunteers will threaten the effective implementation of this management plan. Opportunities to recruit more volunteers and possible committee members for a 'Friends Of' group should be pursued actively and are being facilitated by local Councillors and the Parish Council.

## 4.2. Constraints

Although listed as constraints as these protected species limit certain activities, constraints should be seen as positive features of the woodland. The presence of constraints indicates that current management and conditions afford the privilege of The Meads Community Woodland being chosen by species that are considered so valuable they are protected by legislation.

- Bats carry the highest level of protection and any works on the site should not impact upon their breeding and resting habitat. However, only the largest trees on the site are likely to provide potential roosts for bats. These trees should be left untouched where safety concerns allow. To minimise the likelihood of impacting bat populations felling should take place between September and November and only after a visual inspection of trees.
- Reptiles are protected from harm by law and management activities must not lead to injury or death. Mechanical mowing of long grass and vegetation during the active season for reptiles should be avoided. The management plan will also identify actions that can enhance reptile habitat.
- All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected from damage and destruction. As a consequence, potential nesting sites should not be mechanically managed during the nesting season (March to August). All but tree felling that is essential for safety reasons should also take place outside the bird breeding season.
- Dormice have been reported though not confirmed at The Meads. Dormice also carry the highest level of protection provided by UK legislation. However, the management activities prescribed within this document are unlikely to impact upon dormouse resting and breeding habitat. The regular management of trees and the creation of glades is likely to benefit the species by increasing the diversity of flowering and fruiting plants that provide food for dormice.

# 5. Management prescriptions and rationale

Each of the compartments has specific objectives and these will be used as the rationale for each of the prescriptions. Although compartment 2 is split into two sub-compartments they will be dealt with together as the management prescriptions for each are very similar. The work plan which sits alongside this document will list all of the prescriptions, when they should be done and who can carry them out.

## 5.1. Management prescriptions throughout the site

Certain operations apply across the whole of the site.

### 5.1.1. Invasive species control

Although invasive species do not pose a major problem at the current time, vigilance and eradication of non-native species now can prevent time consuming and/or expensive work in the future. The following species are viewed as the most important at this point in time:

- Sycamore. Although uncommon at the present time it is worth felling small sycamore trees and hand pulling saplings when they are seen.
- Cherry laurel. This garden escapee often finds its way into woodlands and can become a major problem. Cutting plants where it is seen is appropriate at this stage so that the spread by sexual reproduction can be limited. The use of herbicides should only be considered if the plant spreads rapidly and threatens to dominate in areas.
- Winter flowering heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*). This plant can be mown to prevent flowering and this will also weaken the remaining roots.

These activities could make ideal volunteer tasks.

- Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*) is present on site but, contrary to popular opinion it is not a notifiable weed (in fact there is no such thing as a notifiable weed), and there is no obligation to remove it if it poses no threat to livestock. Ragwort is native, provides valuable nectar and pollen and is the host plant of the cinnabar moth which is found at The Meads. Having said this, ragwort is prolific on site and the reduction of ragwort levels in some places could be considered

### 5.1.2. Giant hogweed

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) has been reported on site but not confirmed. It is important that the presence or absence of the species is established. If the species is found to be present then chemical control by contractors is recommended. The sap of the plant is photosensitive and can cause painful blistering of the skin.

Cherry laurel

Sycamore

*Petasites fragrans*

Figure 10: Invasive plants at The Meads Community Woodland

### 5.1.3. Monitoring wildlife

An essential element of assessing the impact of management activities is to monitor wildlife. Some of this can be carried out by the volunteers where the skills exist and training can be provided. Developing relationships with some of the recording groups can help both build skills within a volunteer group and help generate more information about species distribution within the site. It is important that any recording that does take place is submitted to the recording groups and/or the Kent and Medway Biological Recording Centre.

### 5.1.4. Minimal intervention areas

Areas of woodland should be identified as minimal intervention areas. There are species that benefit from the habitat provided by a high canopy and this should be allowed to develop naturally. These areas should not be managed with the exception of work to prevent hazards to human health and should be located away from areas that are well used by the public.

### 5.1.5. Clearance of litter

Removing litter from the site is a relatively quick (if unrelenting) way of improving the image of the site to local residents. It can be done independently by people who visit the site on a regular basis.

### 5.1.6. Maintaining public access

There is a good network of paths throughout the woodland. Consultation showed that there was overwhelming support to maintain the existing network of paths and the intensity of mowing that these currently enjoy. Maintaining these encourages the public stay on these paths and not to venture into more environmentally sensitive areas. It also allows zonal ride management to be implemented and this will be explored in greater detail in the compartment management prescriptions.

#### 5.1.7. Interpretation

The interpretation of the site consists of a henge which the community were involved in installing and carving. This has been added to with some seating and several interpretation panels that provide an insight into the wildlife and history of the site. Support for this during the consultation phase of the Woodland Wildlife Hidden History project was overwhelming and will be a welcome addition to the site. Interpretation events such as plays and guided walks and uses of new technologies such as virtual tours, self-guided walks using geolocation based 'apps' should also be considered. The Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership have also been working with James Hunt to create an interpretive mural in the railway tunnel at the south-western end of the public footpath just outside the woodland.

#### 5.1.8. Community engagement

There is currently no Friends of The Meads Community Woodland group though consultation suggests that the creation of just such a group would be supported. Work by local Councillors and the Parish Council are working hard to create a regular group of volunteers, which would be a massive boost to the woodland. The group can help with management work, act as 'eyes and ears' on behalf of Swale Borough Council and can help promote the woodland to local residents. This has support from local councillors who may support the group financially as well as politically. There is also a Sonora Fields Neighbourhood Watch group that could be used as a basis for the group and the Community Centre has offered to host meetings and support the group. Volunteers at Milton Creek Country Park could be asked to help with this group and have machinery certification that would allow the use of chainsaws, brushcutters etc.

### 5.2. Compartment 1: Grassland

The compartment consists of a small area of land to the west of the surfaced path that runs through the site and to the east and south of the newly built school. However, the remaining grassland provides good habitat for wildlife.

#### 5.2.1. Management of area for reptiles

A management plan for the area was in place before the school was built but management is now restricted to an annual cut of the grassland area. This does keep the area open and prevent trees from establishing but is not ideal for reptiles.

It is suggested that only half of this area is cut every year, leaving half of the area uncut, providing year round shelter for reptiles and encouraging the retention of areas where invertebrates and small mammals can overwinter.

Additionally, hibernacula and dead hedges or log piles can be created in this compartment which will provide extra habitat features for the animals in this area.

- Dead hedges can be produced with brash if any felling work takes place in the woodland. They are easy to construct and can also be used to help keep people from certain sensitive areas (though by no means a barrier). They are a possible fire risk.
- Reptile hibernacula are easy to create and have no cost. They are holes in the ground filled with rubble and wood and then covered with soil that create places for overwintering animals including reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates.

#### 5.2.2. Woodland

There is a small amount of woodland in compartment 1 that is adjacent to the surfaced footpath that divides the two compartments. This should be managed in a way that enhances the reptile receptor site and helps to create a more open feel for the people using the surfaced footpath. The following is recommended in order to retain the open feel to the footpath.

- Thinning. An open canopy feel should be retained within this area to assist with the provision of cover for reptiles. Invasive trees should be cut as a priority and then diseased and possible dangerous trees next. Once these trees have been removed additional trees should be removed that leave a range of different tree species and sizes of tree whose canopies do not touch in all directions. This leaves space for trees to grow outwards as well as upwards and for sunlight to hit the woodland floor that will increase the amount of grass and herbs. It is recommended that the majority of trees are removed so that the remaining area is a mixture of shrubs, trees and open grassland.
- Coppicing. The trees nearest the footpath should be coppiced to the ground on a 5 year rotation. All trees where the trunk is within three metres of the path should be cut and left to regrow.
- Arisings. Where safe to do so, arisings should be left in habitat piles or burnt to reduce the risk of arson. This decision should be made with Swale Borough Council.

#### 5.2.3. Interpretation

If reptile management is maintained in this area, it is recommended that interpretation that reflects this management should be installed where finances allow.

## 5.3. Compartment 2: Woodland

Compartment 2 consists of two sub-compartments, 2a and 2b. Although they will both be dealt with together in the management plan the reason for splitting the compartment into two is that compartment 2b contains nearly all of the more open areas of the woodland.

### 5.3.1. Thinning of the woodland

The trees at The Meads were planted very close together. This is standard forestry practice as it helps trees to grow up straight and fast as they compete for light. However, this is usually followed by a thinning of the trees to allow the dominant trees to continue their growth unhindered. This has never been done at The Meads Community Woodland and as a consequence very little sunlight hits the woodland floor, there is little structure in the vegetation and the wildlife potential is limited as a consequence. Sadly, many of the trees were planted in rows which also lends an 'artificial' feel to the woodland. It is recommended that thinning takes place in as much of the woodland as possible as resources allow with the exception of the minimal intervention area. It should be done prioritising the removal of trees as follows:

- Invasive and non-native trees (including sycamore and cherry laurel)
- Diseased and potentially dangerous trees
- Up to 50% of remaining trees so that the trees remain:
    - Retain a diverse range of species
    - Retain a range of sizes and shapes of tree
    - Have an open canopy structure that allows light to hit the woodland floor. The remaining trees will soon close the canopy but this will allow a greater structural diversity within the woodland

### 5.3.2. Glade creation

One of the most important parts of a woodland for its wildlife are open spaces. This not only increases the amount of woodland edge that wildlife thrives in but also creates a more open feel for people and gives them space to play in and explore. This is something that gained a lot of support during the consultation process. Additional glades could be created by cutting all vegetation in an area and then managing in a variety of ways including:

- Regular mowing to provide a space for people to use
- Twice yearly cut to promote botanical diversity
- Cut every two or three years to promote invertebrate, small mammal and reptile habitat
- Leave to re regrow and recoppice the area every seven to ten years.

### 5.3.3. Ride management

Wildlife benefits when the interface between different habitat types (grassland and woodland in our example) is 'soft' and gradual. To help achieve this zonal ride management can be adopted to grade the change from grass to woodland and this is shown in the figure 12 on page 30[10].

[10] Managing Woodland Open Space for Wildlife. - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/707669/ewgs-on011-ride-mangt.pdf

# The Meads Community Woodland - Management


Figure 11: Management prescriptions for The Meads Community Woodland

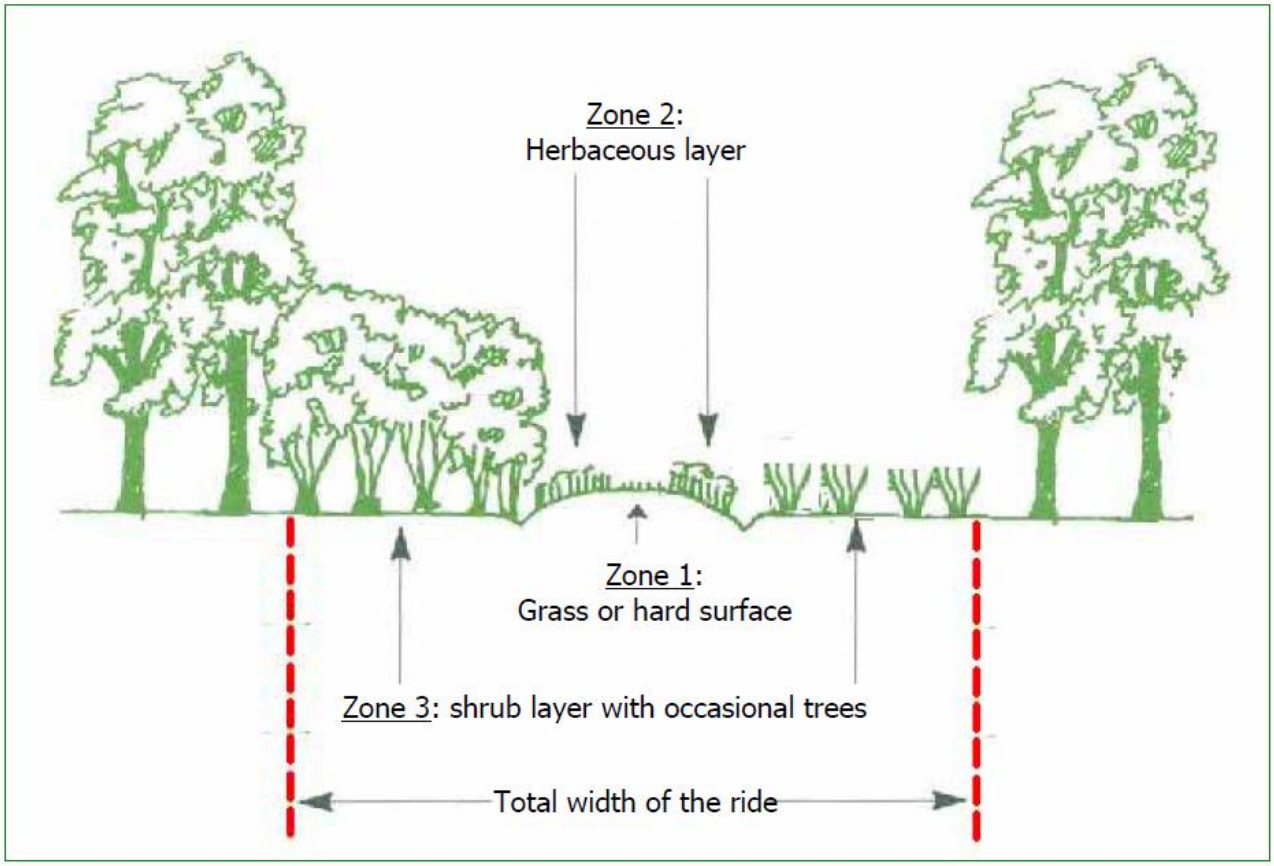



Figure 12: Three zone ride management. Source (Forestry Commission)

Zone 1 would be well managed grass paths that maintain easy public access, zone 2 would be cut twice a year in spring and autumn and zone 3 would be cut every five years and allowed to recoppice. The cost of implementing this across the entirety of the woodland for all paths would be prohibitive so the immediate suggestion is that this is implemented where possible around the main circular path. This received support during the consultation process not only because of the benefit to wildlife but many people also wanted to see more open paths to help stop the woodland from feeling so intimidating and more open. It was also felt that this may help the paths from becoming quite as muddy in the winter which is another reason stated by people that limited their use of the woodland.

### 5.3.4. Paths

The consultation asked the public and stakeholders whether they were happy with the current mowing regime of the paths or whether an alternative way of keeping paths open could be considered. Generally respondents were happy with how things are at the moment and it is recommended that the current mowing regime of the actual paths is maintained. The only exception to this is that paths could be widened at the sections of the main circular path nearest to the surfaced path to make the path more inviting and less likely to become muddy. Support was also expressed for adding a culvert to the ditch on the main circular path where the hedgerow crosses it making access for buggies, prams etc. difficult.


Figure 13: Paths at The Meads Community Woodland (both formal and informal)

### 5.3.5. Tree shelters

Tree shelters were put around the trees when they were planted but these no longer serve a purpose and may even damage the trees if they do not split and 'suffocate' the tree by restricting the exchange of gases through the trunk and continually keeping the tree wet. These can be removed during litter picks or as separate activities.

### 5.3.6. Interpretation

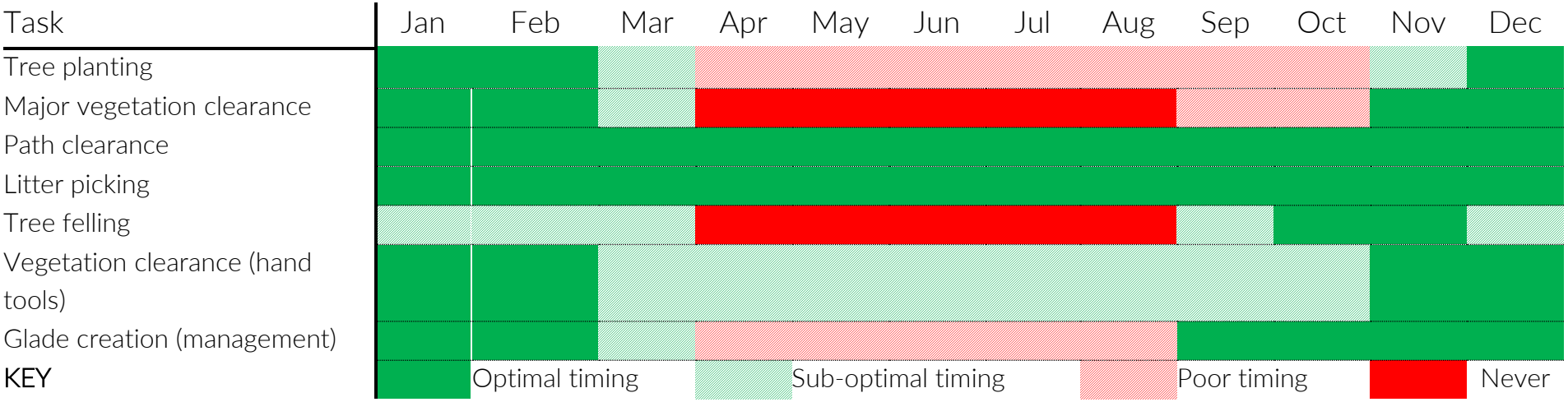
The recreated henge is a welcome addition to the site, particularly due to the level of public involvement in its creation.

### 5.3.7. Furniture

Considerable support was shown for adding benches during the consultation as well as picnic tables and additional litter bins and dog foul bins. However, concern was raised as to whether vandalism would be an issue and the general consensus was that if additional furniture was added then it could be added near to the surfaced path where it was in full view. The issue of bins is one of financial resources and needs to be considered carefully.

# 6. Appendix I: Timing of conservation tasks

Table 2: Optimal timing for conservation activities



# 7. Appendix II: Species list

The following is a list of all of the species that have been recorded at The Meads Community Woodland. These records have been reported by volunteers, seen by White Horse Ecology in 2021, Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership officers or form part of a 2006 survey undertaken by Kent Wildlife Trust. As such, it is a fairly rudimentary list and should not be seen even as a baseline survey but as incidental records submitted during site visits.

| Species | Scientific name | Compartment (where known) | Date last recorded |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ***Birds*** | | |
| Eurasian Sparrowhawk | *Accipiter nisus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Long tailed Tit | *Aegithalos caudatus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Common Swift | *Apus apus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Greenfinch | *Chloris chloris* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Black Headed Gull | *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Wood Pigeon | *Columba palumbus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Carrion Crow | *Corvus corone* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Blue tit | *Cyanistes caeruleus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Robin | *Erithacus rubecula* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Chaffinch | *Fringilla coelebs* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Great tit | *Parus major* | | 07/05/2016 |
| House Sparrow | *Passer domesticus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Magpie | *Pica pica* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Dunnock | *Prunella modularis* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Firecrest | *Regulus ignicapillus* | | 2014 |
| Collared Dove | *Streptopelia decaocto* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Starling | *Sturnus vulgaris* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Blackcap | *Sylvia atricapilla* | | 07/05/2016 |
| Wren | *Troglodytes troglodytes* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Blackbird | *Turdus merula* | | 07/05/2016 |
| | ***Plants*** | | |
| Field maple | *Acer campestre* | 2 | 03/09/2015 |
| Sycamore | *Acer pseudoplatanus* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Yarrow | *Achillea millefolium* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Horse chestnut | *Aesculus hippocastanum* | 2 | 03/09/2015 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agrimony | *Agrimonia eupatoria* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Cow parsley | *Anthriscus sylvestris* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Pyramidal orchid | *Anacamptis pyramidalis* | 2b | 03/09/2015 |
| Lesser burdock | *Arctium minus* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Mugwort | *Artemisia vulgaris* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Daisy | *Bellis perennis* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Buddleja | *Buddleja davidii* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Shepherd's-purse | *Capsella bursa-pastoris* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Welted Thistle | *Carduus crispus* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Pendulous Sedge | *Carex pendula* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hornbeam | *Carpinus betulus* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Sweet chestnut | *Castanea sativa* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Rosebay willowherb | *Chamerion angustifolium* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Fat hen | *Chenopodium album* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Creeping thistle | *Cirsium arvense* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Spear thistle | *Cirsium vulgare* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Old man's beard | *Clematis vitalba* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Dogwood | *Cornus sanguinea* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hazel | *Corylus avellana* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hawthorn | *Crataegus monogyna* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wild carrot | *Daucus carota* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Teasel | *Dipascus fullonum* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Willow herb sp. | *Epilobium sp.* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Beech | *Fagus sylvatica* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Ash | *Fraxinus excelsior* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Common fumitory | *Fumaria officinalis* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Cleavers | *Galium aparine* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Cut-leaved crane’s-bill | *Geranium dissectum* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hedgerow crane’s-bill | *Geranium pyrenaicum* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wood avens | *Geum urbanum* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Ground-ivy | *Glechoma hederacea* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Ivy | *Hedera helix* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hogweed | *Heracleum sphondylium* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Perforate St John's-wort | *Hypericum perforatum* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Holly | *Ilex aquifolium* | 2 | 03/09/2015 |
| Common ragwort | *Jacobaea vulgaris* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Walnut | *Juglans regia* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Prickly lettuce | *Lactuca serriola* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| White dead-nettle | *Lamium album* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Red dead-nettle | *Lamium purpureum* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oxeye daisy | *Leucanthemum vulgare* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Bird's foot trefoil | *Lotus corniculatus* | | 11/06/2015 |
| Apple | *Malus sp.* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Common mallow | *Malva sylvestris* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Spotted Medick | *Medicago arabica* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Corn Mint | *Mentha arvensis* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Red Bartsia | *Odontites vernus* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Bristly oxtongue | *Picris echioides* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Hawkweed oxtongue | *Picris hieracioides* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Ribwort plantain | *Plantago lanceolata* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Greater plantain | *Plantago major* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Balsam poplar | *Populus balsamifera* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Poplar | *Populus sp.* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Creeping cinquefoil | *Potentilla reptans* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Selfheal | *Prunella vulgaris* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wild cherry | *Prunus avium* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Cherry (cultivar) | *Prunus sp.* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Blackthorn | *Prunus spinosa* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Turkey oak | *Quercus cerris* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| English oak | *Quercus robur* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Lesser celandine | *Ranunculus ficaria* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Creeping buttercup | *Ranunculus repens* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wild mignonette | *Reseda lutea* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Dog rose | *Rosa canina* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Bramble | *Rubus fruticosus agg* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Dock sp. | *Dock* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Broad-leaved dock | *Rumex obtusifolius* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wood dock | *Rumex sanguineus* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Goat willow | *Salix caprea* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Elder | *Sambucus nigra* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| White campion | *Silene latifolia* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Swedish whitebeam | *Sorbus intermedia* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Lesser stitchwort | *Stellaria graminea* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Tansy | *Tanacetum vulgare* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Dandelion | *Taraxacum officinale agg.* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| Small-leaved lime | *Tilia cordata* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Common lime | *Tilia x europaea* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Upright hedge-parsley | *Torilis japonica* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Red clover | *Trifolium pratense* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| White clover | *Trifolium repens* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stinging nettle | *Urtica dioica* | 1, 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Vervain | *Verbena officinalis* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Germander Speedwell | *Veronica chamaedrys* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Wayfaring-tree | *Viburnum lantana* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Guelder-rose | *Viburnum opulus* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Common vetch | *Vicia sativa* | 2 | 26/08/2021 |
| Smooth tare | *Vicia tetrasperma* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |
| **Insects** | | | |
| Peacock | *Aglais io* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Ringlet | *Aphantopus hyperantus* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Meadow brown | *Maniola jurtina* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Marbled white | *Melanargia galathea* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Large white | *Pieris brassicae* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Green veined white | *Pieris napi* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Small white | *Pieris rapae* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Comma | *Polygonium c-album* | | 30/03/2015 |
| Gatekeeper | *Pyronia tithonus* | | 03/09/2015 |
| Cinnabar moth | *Tyria jacobaeae* | | 03/09/2015 |
| **Mammals** | | | |
| Common dormouse | *Muscardinus avellanarius* | | 07/05/2016 |
| European rabbit | *Oryctolagus cuniculus* | | 07/05/2016 |
| **Reptiles** | | | |
| Slow-worm | *Anguilis fragilis* | 1, 2b | 15/08/2015 |
| Viviparous lizard | *Zootoca vivipara* | 1 | 26/08/2021 |

# 8. Appendix III: Summary of public consultations (2021 updates appended)

## The Meads Summary

Comments in RED are from phone interviews, comments in black are from consultation events

### How often

| | |
|---|---|
| More than once a week | 10 |
| Once a week | 1 |
| Once a month | 1 |
| Once a year | 1 |
| Not for years | |
| Never | |

### Why do you go?

| | |
|---|---|
| Dog walk | 7 |
| See henge | 1 |
| Part of Sittingbourne in Bloom | 1 |
| Family walks | 5 |
| Meet friends | 2 |
| Walk | 1 |
| Cycle | 1 |

### What do you like?

| | |
|---|---|
| Local | 5 |
| Wildlife | 7 |
| Community feel | 4 |
| Events | 1 |
| Henge | 1 |
| Peace and tranquillity | 3 |
| **Generally clean** | **2** |

### Prioritisation Exercise (22/1/17)

Respondents allowed one green dot to show support and one red dot for least favourite

More litter bins/poo bins

YES 2 NO 1

Friends Of group

YES 1 NO 0

Thin trees

YES 3 NO 0

Permanent glades for wildlife and people

YES 3 NO 0

Construction of a pond

YES 0 NO 5

Ride management

YES 2 NO 2

Respondents also given the opportunity to rank six suggested actions

Numbers below show number of people who ranked ideas in each position

| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| More litter bins/poo bins | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Friends Of group | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Thin trees | 4 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Permanent glades | 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction of a pond | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| Ride management | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Heritage | 1 |

### What puts you off

| | |
|---|---|
| Muddy paths | 1 |
| Overgrown paths | 4 |
| Feels unsafe, particularly at night | 4 |
| Nothing | 1 |
| Dog fouling | 3 |
| Occasional motorbikes | 1 |
| Rubbish | 1 |
| Access as no parking on site (dangerous road if participants for events coming by car) | 1 |

# IDEAS

| | YES | NO | DON'T MIND | 2016 (of 16 respondents) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| More litter bins | 8 | | 3 | 2 |
| Picnic benches | 10 | | 2 | 12 |
| Maps | 4 | | 7 | 10 |
| Information signs (wildlife and history) | 11 | 1 | 1 | |
| Surfaced paths | 5 | 5 | 1 | 8 |
| Seating | 9 | | 2 | 5 |
| Trim trail | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Children's play area | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| More events | 9 | | 3 | |
| Wildlife pond | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Meadow | 8 | | 3 | |
| Volunteer activities | 8 | | 3 | |

### What would you like to see?

| | |
|---|---|
| Toilets (at new school) | 1 |
| Pedestrian crossing from Community Centre | 2 |
| Car park | 1 |
| More events | 3 |
| Community involvement | 2 |
| Summer solstice fair or similar | 4 |
| Fire pit for young people | 1 |
| Events for young people | 1 |
| Tree thinning | 3 |
| Play area outside wood (Velum Dr) | 2 |
| Dog bins | 10 |
| No development | 1 |
| No development on the field area | 1 |
| Lighting on footpaths | 3 |
| CCTV | 1 |
| Gate at Jenny Wren entrance | 1 |
| Children's trail | 1 |
| Rubbings trail | 1 |
| Clearer entrance and exit signs | 1 |

# MANAGEMENT

### Mowing

| | |
|---|---|
| Keep mowing as is | 13 |
| Stop mowing | 0 |
| Only cut some areas every 2 or 3 years | 1 |
| Other | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Don't mind | 0 |

Long grass makes trousers wet

Cut more often to reduce fire lighting hazard 2

Increasing floral and habitat diversity outweighs the risk of fire

## Trees

| | |
|---|---|
| Leave as they are | 2 |
| Cut some (thin plus glades) | 10 |
| Other | 0 |
| Don't mind | 1 |

Trees planted too close together

Some areas very dark

Like the idea of making habitat more wildlife friendly

Coppicing and woodland management will give us the best space possible 2

## Support for Friends of Group 11

Graeme Tuff

Small section to be retained in woodland where school is going. Unsure about what plans are for archaeology and/or reptiles

Paths need opening up in areas

Thinning needed - perhaps near main path

Blenwood schedules can change - some budget as school area lost

In favour of pond and/or scrape
More varied grassland management favoured with zonal ride management
Open to ideas re furniture but in areas overlooked by passers by
Walking routes would help
Friend Of group would be supported
Keen on activities

Ali Corbel

The road and car parking are issues
Seated area
Bat and bird boxes
Littering is an issue
Clearing some paths to make more accessible would be good
Friends Of group supported (join forces with Sonora Fields Neighbourhood Group)

FIONA (Trustee of CC)

Keen to support local group and could help with storage, meetings.
Has coffee morning where volunteers can be targeted
Squirrel Lodge Nursey use for Forest School activities
More for older children would be good
Walks important - can help with advertising
Work in partnership with local schools and children's centres
More path clearance to keep paths clear and less muddy
Interactive or static display about wildlife and/or archaeology

Bob Bicker

Too many trees, needs thinning to create diversity of tree size.  50% of trees need to go
Create more open areas
Grasses can swamp flowers
Vandal proof benches and picnic areas

Regular Warden visits
Family friendly features favoured
Litter and dog poo bins
Dog poo a problem
James Hunt
Access poor because of Staplehurst Rd
Overgrown feel to footpaths
Friends Of group should be separate from Rose Hill
A map on site would help
Waymarked trail
Culverts over ditches for main paths
Fire site
Benches and tables near main path
Litter is a problem
Supports interactive interpretation at the Community Centre
School may be able to share car park at weekends
Supports Friends of group and could support with members grant
Friends Group should have support to build skills
Andrew Richardson
Says school site will require £100,000+ of archaeological works
Rest of site has little archaeological value probably
Look after henge now constructed
Trees need to be thinned
Bottlenecking of paths at either end of main paths make it uninviting
Friends Of group would be a welcome bonus
Mike Baldock
Says new community could use a Parish Council to help galvanise community spirit
Could be a Friends Of group
Anti-social behaviour makes The Meads less inviting than Rose

Hill
Does not support opening up the woodland around the henge
Supports glades and thinning
Paths good as they are
Picnic tables would be welcome
Graeme Lloyd
More dog bins
People other than dog walkers need a reason to go there (Henge helps)
Outdoor fitness area or trim trail might help
More variation in trees needed
Interpretation may help
Walking trails plus app
Widen paths
In favour of Friends Of group and using Community Centre
Themed events (Halloween and Easter)
Staplehurst Rd a problem (speed reduction)
No houses on site
Richard Emmett
Not enough made of the fact that it is a sacred site
Could focus on fact that it is an ancient meeting site

## 2021 Updates

As part of the 2021 refresh of these management plans Councillor James Hunt, Bobbing Parish Council and Swale Borough Council Ranger, Kris Staples were consulted about their views about the future of the Meads Community Woodland. These views are summarised below.

### Bobbing Parish Council

Felt the site was very important. An initial comment was that the Parish Council would like to see the possible inclusion of a Ranger to oversee the Woodland, similar to that at the Milton Creek Country Park. This was felt to be particularly important as there have been incidents of vandalism, damage to trees, etc., in the woodland.

### James Hunt

Stated that great progress has been made and that there are volunteers interested in helping out at the site and that people take time out to pick up litter on the site. Small tasks could be organised for volunteers to get involved with and that support could be given from chainsaw operating volunteers based at Milton Creek. The site is ideal for school visits and these should be encouraged. Also stated that fires are a problem on site and that the installation of fire pits in communal areas might help to alleviate this. Ragwort pulling was also a priority and something that volunteers could become involved with.

### Kris Staples

Would like to see a lot more happening at The Meads Community Woodland. Budgetary pressures make it difficult for him to commit much more time to The Meads as his focus needs to remain on Milton Creek and Oare Gunpowder Works. However, volunteers from Milton Creek could potentially be persuaded to help out at The Meads. His priorities for the site are ragwort pulling and thinning of some of the trees as well as glade creation.