

Old Park Hill Nature Reserve, Dover Kent Wildlife Trust's Newest Nature Reserve



Emily Neighbour

Old Park Hill is one of the Kent Wildlife Trust's newest nature reserves situated on the outskirts of Dover Town adjacent to Whitfield Village. It has magnificent views across Dover and the coast of France and is a good site to find butterflies, reptiles and wild flowers. The reserve covers some 36 ha [90 acres] of old chalk grassland with peripheral woodland.

The Trust established Old Park Hill as a nature reserve under a leasehold agreement with the Dover Harbour Board in 2011 which had acquired the site from the Ministry of Defence in 1987. Historically it had been used as a barracks and more recently as the training centre of the Junior Leaders of the Royal Engineers. For decades the site was largely neglected and grazing had ceased with consequent loss of habitat due to alien scrub invasion, particularly by aggressive non-native species such as Holm oak and sycamore. More recently there had been an increase in anti-social activities including fly-tipping, vandalism and off-road motor bike riding.

In 2015 The Kent Wildlife Trust was awarded a grant by The Big Lottery Fund, through the "Reaching Communities" Programme, to run for three years until the end of 2018. The main aim of the project is to restore the species rich native grassland but a key requirement for the funding was that it should involve the local community.

Scrub clearance of the site started in 2016 with the help of local volunteers and the site was then fenced to allow grazing to prevent regrowth and promote grassland flowers and animals. Konik ponies were used initially

and currently there are Highland cattle on the site and soon sheep as well. Both cattle and ponies are happy to eat scrub regrowth and coarse plants like thistles and bramble. The Trust also manages two Roadside Nature Reserves on the southern and western slopes that support many rare species and will act as sources to help recolonization of the nature reserve as the habitat improves. In August 2017 four Adonis blue butterflies were recorded sunning themselves during a guided walk attended by local families which showed that the chalk grassland had already begun to improve. It was particularly pleasing as the logo of the Kent Wildlife Trust is the Adonis blue!

Many locals have visited the site over the last two years, often on a regular basis. Some have been given free training in practical scrub clearance and scientific monitoring, but also there have been opportunities to gain more transferable skills such as project delivery and education.



As part of the Hill at the Heart project pupils from local schools have visited the reserve to spend time in nature, to hear about the conservation and management of the site and to learn about the wildlife and plant species that are native to the chalk grassland. Students have also taken part in "Forest School". These offer regular, exciting outdoor programmes of woodland adventure which aim to increase the students' understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world. New interpretation boards have recently been installed at the 4

entrances to the reserve welcoming visitors and providing information about what they might expect to see whilst walking through the different landscapes. The colourful boards included artistic input by children from local schools with one pupil designing the project logo.

The project is funded until the end of this year. It is not as yet clear whether the initiative will be carried on. New funding is actively being sought as the local commitment and involvement has been very high.

There is a regular programme of free events open to the public to encourage visitors to discover this, until recently, little known

and under-appreciated hill in the heart of Dover.

If you would like to know more, please contact the Hill at the Heart Project Manager, James Traynor, in Dover on 01622 357883/ 07717 803059 or email James.Traynor@kentwildlife.org.uk You can keep up to date with the project by visiting (and following) Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/OldParkHill>

The reserve can be accessed on foot at the following points (nearest postcodes):
Car park off Monks Way (CT16 2DL), Bottom of Whitfield Hill (CT16 3BQ), Via Khartoum Square (CT16 2EU), Off Old Park Hill (CT16 2BW)

MEMBERSHIP NEWS **Sheila Cope**

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE (if you do not pay by standing order)

£10 joint for 2 members at the same address, £6 single membership.

Our Marketing Group has met twice since the publication of the last Newsletter and has discussed the need to modernise subscription paying and recording by means of greater use of the internet while at the same time retaining the existing options of using standing order, cheque or cash. The Group also intends to explore the means by which articles in former Newsletters may be made accessible on line since at present a great resource remains hidden and almost impossible to access. Further methods of advertising our existence are also being investigated. Considerations of security are essential of course and are due to become more complex with the imminent introduction of the Data Protection Act in May. Expert advice on these matters is being obtained.

Deborah Gasking has distributed membership packs containing information about the Society, former Newsletters and

invitations to join, to non-members in the Elms Vale area and we are grateful to her for instigating this experiment. It follows on from her presence at events in the town where she has publicised the Society and recruited additional members.

We have welcomed Mrs G. Haq and Ms A. Tomalak to the Society together with five returners.

We are pleased to add Mr Chris Blackburn to our list of Area Distributors and thank him for volunteering to cover North Whitfield which is fast becoming an expanding area.

We send our condolences to the families and friends of those members whose deaths have been notified this year. They are: Mrs Audrey Thorn, Mrs Sylvia Stewart, Mrs Veronica "Ronnie" Philpott, Mr Bill Newman, Mr Maurice Palmer, Mrs Daphne Stoker and Mr D W Moynan.