



OLD CHALK NEW DOWNS

Final evaluation report



Scenic view of Kent's North Downs, Birling

Claire Readey and Neil Smith

December 2022



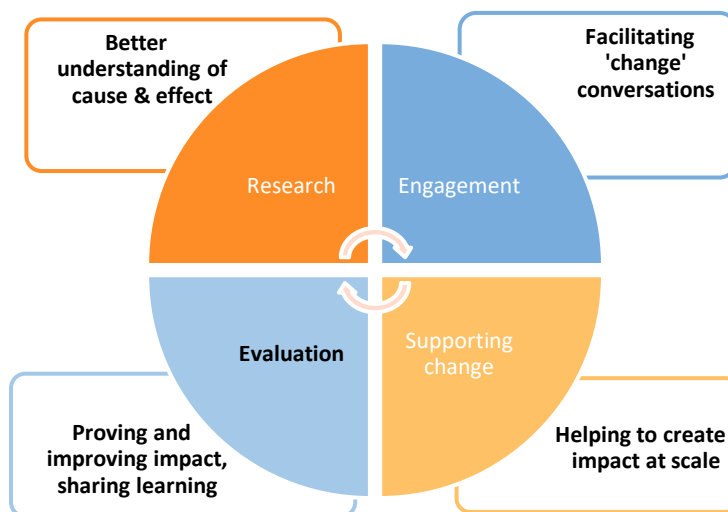
Resources for Change Ltd
Directors: D Jones, M King, N Smith, S Sullivan
VAT number: 996 4504 72 Company Number 7310220
Registered Address: Cwrt Isaf Farmhouse, Llangattock, Crickhowell, Powys NP8 1PH

CONTENTS

ABOUT RESOURCES FOR CHANGE	3
INTRODUCTION	4
THE OLD CHALK NEW DOWNS PROJECT (OCND)	4
EVALUATION OF THE OCND PROJECT	8
APPROVED ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES	12
THE CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT AND IMPORTANT DELIVERY FACTORS	18
SUMMARY OF LEARNING	20
MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION	21
RECOMMENDATIONS	25
THE LEGACY OF THE OLD CHALK NEW DOWNS PROJECT	27
LEGACY AND SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING BY THE OCND TEAM	29
SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS	32
OVERVIEW	32
PERFORMANCE AGAINST PROJECT TARGETS AND OBJECTIVES	32
ACTIVITY ACCOUNTS	39
SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS	54
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	59
OVERVIEW	59
APPENDIX	71

ABOUT RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

R4C is a socially responsible, employee-owned consultancy with an excellent reputation for innovatively creating constructive interactions between people and places. To achieve this, we focus our work in 4 areas:



We have developed a reputation for ‘bridging the gap’ between sectors and creating real, and long-lasting, results. In short, this means we:

- Act at Grassroots level – with our significant hands-on experience of engaging communities and civil society
- Support the Managers – bringing practical experience of projects, partnerships and improving delivery
- Work with the Strategists – by advising, evaluating, and supporting policy and strategic programme delivery.

We work extensively to support organisations in receipt of NLHF, GRCF and other funding, to deliver heritage and environmental projects, including a considerable body of work relating to monitoring and evaluation. This includes preparation of monitoring and evaluation strategies, working as ‘lifetime evaluators’, evaluation mentoring support, carrying out interim and final evaluations, and supporting legacy planning.

The report authors

Neil Smith is a director of Resources for Change and an evaluation specialist, leading multi-year and end of project evaluations for a wide range of projects and funders, including many NHLF-funded partnerships and projects. Neil led the quantitative analysis, process recording and presentation parts of the report.

Claire Readey is an associate of Resources for Change who works with us to produce high-quality evaluation reports. Claire has a background in chalk landscapes from Chilterns AONB. Claire led the interview and analysis process.

INTRODUCTION

THE OLD CHALK NEW DOWNS PROJECT (OCND)

Purpose of the OCND programme

The long-term vision of the OCND Project was to deliver a more coherent and connected chalk habitat landscape across the North Downs, addressing habitat fragmentation and degradation. The scheme aimed to do this through:

- Increasing and improving chalk habitats' size, extent and condition
- Linking existing habitat patches by creating habitat corridors, buffers and steppingstones
- Ensuring the restoration and protection of the historic landscape to re-connect and protect the threatened habitats and increase biodiversity in the scheme area
- Using chalk grassland and downland habitat to engage a wider range of audiences with their natural heritage e.g., through volunteering, seasonal events, walks, talks and training days
- Developing a project website as an online record of the area's natural heritage, to allow people to add old photographs, stories and memories of the area
- Adding all survey work and data to the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre

A more detailed overview of the project and its activities is in the 'Approved activities, outputs and outcomes' section below. The project received £1.4m in funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver against its proposed Activity Plan.

Problem statement

The OCND project recognised that much of the North Downs landscape from Kemsing to Detling has degraded. The OCND website describes the problems as follows:

"Much of this precious landscape has been lost or become fragmented, making it difficult for its unique wildlife to spread and survive. Many people have lost connection with nature and their local environments, which has led to ill health and what is often called a "nature deficit syndrome".

The Old Chalk New Downs project looks to address these issues through work to improve, restore, and reconnect threatened chalk grassland habitats, while addressing the loss of people's connection with their natural environment through a variety of awareness raising and engagement schemes."

Project themes

The project worked through three main themes to structure its activities to restore chalk grassland and downland habitat and reconnect people with their natural heritage:

1. **Managing the OCND** – improving the chalk downland landscape
2. **Learning about the OCND** – educating a wide range of audiences about chalk downland

3. Accessing the OCND area – improving access to the downlands of north Kent

Project partners

The project was delivered through a partnership led by Kent County Council, involving a number of significant natural heritage stakeholders in Kent. The project steering group consisted of these project partners alongside a KCC manager. They were reportedly instrumental in making project decisions during the development phase. The same steering group members were also keen to continue involvement into the delivery phase of the project.

Kent County Council

The OCND project was hosted by Kent County Council (KCC), an administrative body that governs most of the county of Kent. KCC is one of the largest local authorities in England, with 12 District Councils and 300 town and Parish Councils. KCC has a duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006, Section 40 (1) to conserve biodiversity. Its environmental strategy provides the main rationale for the project by recognising the importance of connectivity, showing a commitment to improve and enhance functional habitat networks and protect and enhance the natural and historic landscape in the county.

Kent Wildlife Trust

KWT were instrumental in helping to develop the Land Management Packages that the project offered to landowners. The project team called upon KWT's skills and knowledge to help structure various parts of the project, including the survey and monitoring and volunteer programmes.

Kent Downs AONB

Kent Downs AONB offered the project advice and guidance from previous experiences through the Valley of Visions, HLF funded habitat improvement project. They have also offered their expert advice on specific sites which has helped develop the capital works activities. The Kent Downs AONB is the lead partner for the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership.

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP)

MVCP carried out pilot school workshop consultations with schools identified in the project area to enable the development of the seasonal school workshops programme. They have also identified a number of school ground improvements that the project aimed to deliver in the capital works programme. MVCP's were asked to share their combined specialist knowledge of the area's various conservation organisations and landowners to help the development of activities and capital works.

Medway Council, Tonbridge & Malling Council Gravesham Council

Having three councils as partners was intended to ensure strategic buy-in from those organisations responsible for planning matters which could impact the OCND project area and its setting. The partnership also allowed for collaborative working on volunteering, community engagement and access.

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre

The Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre were to help with the location of important species records for the development and delivery phases. Having the records centre as a partner was designed to ensure that all data and information gained through the project would be available to share with other interested parties as required.

High-level project and evaluation activity timings

The original timeline for the project specified a 4-year term from March 2018 to March 2022. The project was granted an extension to allow for the impacts on delivery of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Time period	Original project plan	Activities – actual	Contextual factors
Year 1 (Q1) 2017	Appoint external evaluator and agree evaluation programme	R4C appointed February 2018 Evaluation activity began in March 2018	
Year 1	Complete Year 1 Condition Assessment for each site	Mid-term evaluation completed at project's request in April 2019	Evaluation brought forward to help with legacy planning and further funding applications
Year 2 2019 – 2020	Complete Year 2 Condition Assessment for each site		Covid pandemic and lockdowns
Mid-term review (Q4 year 2 / Q1 year 3)	Consultant mid-term review monitoring and evaluation programme		See above – mid-term evaluation completed early
Year 3 2020 – 2021	Complete Year 2 Condition Assessment for each site		Covid pandemic and lockdowns impacts continued
May 2021 - Original project end			
Year 4 2021 – 2022 March First project extension	End of Project Evaluation and Summary Report		

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

<p>Year 4 March – December 2022 Second project extension</p>		<p>End of Project Evaluation and Summary Report</p>	<p>Substantial draft evaluation report required 30th November; final evaluation report 14th December; staff contracts ended December 31st 2022</p>
<p>After project completion</p>	<p>Complete HLF Evaluation Questionnaire</p>		

EVALUATION OF THE OCND PROJECT

Overview

Resources for Change provided the Old Chalk New Downs team with an evaluation handbook in April 2018 (provided in an annex). As well as giving practical advice and information on evaluation, this also provided structure and practical tools to help carry out the evaluation. This was backed up with a training session at Trosley Park with the team and many of the delivery partners.

The original evaluation timeline was as follows:

- Baseline data collection – June 2017 or retrospectively, as required (by the project team)
- Inception, evaluation readiness review and evaluation handbook – January to March 2018
- Evaluation training event April 2018
- Mid-term review data review; analysis of outputs and outcomes – June to August 2019
- Mid-term review reporting - September 2019
- Ongoing support – April 2018 to May 2021
- Final Evaluation data collection – March to May 2021
 - Outputs and outcomes analysis
 - Key informant interviews
 - Draft evaluation report and sustainability plan
 - Evaluation validation workshop
- Final Evaluation reporting and Sustainability Plan – June to July 2021

In practice, the mid-term evaluation was brought forward and the overall project timeline was extended to December 2022. The deadline for the evaluation report was for a draft report to be provided on Wednesday 30th November and a final version by Wednesday 14th December 2022.

Evaluation aims and objectives

Resources for Change adopt the Lottery evaluation model, broadly looking to ‘tell the story’ of the project, identify important learning and make subsequent recommendations. This relies upon project teams gathering information as the project progresses, storing this in an accessible way and making it available to us at the end of the evaluation.

The project team and the partners identified at the evaluation workshop in April 2018 that they wanted to learn the following from the evaluation:

- To know that participants have learnt – improve the quality of their experience, to know if they also enjoyed themselves
- Are we doing things the best way? Can we improve our work practices?
- Answer what can be learnt from others
- Learn whether we are making a difference
- How are we delivering events – how successful?
- Improve working together

R4C recognise also that we should do the following for the funders:

- Demonstrate return on investment
- Demonstrate their outcomes have been delivered

Evaluation methods

The evaluation adopted the following approach:

1. The completion of an evaluation readiness review to establish the level of knowledge, confidence and systems relating to evaluation which the team already had in place.
2. The development of a handbook and toolkit for use by the project and the delivery partners to address any deficit identified through the readiness review.
3. Regular gathering of basic project information to be recorded in the evaluation journal.
4. The mid-term review:
 - a. Quantitative analysis of the monitoring data shared with R4C.
 - b. Qualitative analysis of interviews conducted by the evaluators.
 - c. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the project so far.
5. A report was provided in April 2019 which identified a range of strengths and weaknesses.

Main findings of the Mid-term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation identified a range of findings, abridged below, with a brief update developed as part of the end of project evaluation in blue under each:

Monitoring data

Monitoring data should be more consistently and thoroughly collected to aid analysis and learning – it has been hard to produce the report from the available information. From an evaluation perspective, monitoring data is very patchy, and this makes it hard to make an overall assessment of progress.

This improved a little but suffered from some setbacks. Our assessment is that the project team just did not have the time to capture, store and make sense of feedback across the project's many activities. Impact of Covid on M&E came across very clearly in the interviews, especially the changes in staffing. The project team had multiple staff changes and periods of no one in post as recruitment ensued. This was also evident with delivery partners, while handover's notes were provided between staff members, long gaps between successful recruitment and no systematic recording/evaluating system caused some continuity issues.

The project team provided a summary for each activity via an updated activity plan which provided headline numbers and updates with some feedback. R4C conducted 24 interviews in November 2022 to gather qualitative data to supplement this.

Good initial outcomes

The project was achieving good initial outcomes for the chalk downlands with immediately visible results from the capital works that should have led to increased quantity and improved quality of chalk downland. There was increased engagement with people, children, communities and some landowners but there were opportunities to do more in this regard to ensure that good progress with habitats was strongly linked to and supported by compelling engagement work. Improved access improved the experience of existing countryside users and outreach work increased the number of new users to the area from urban settlements.

The project created momentum by following through on the more 'concrete' elements of the project where capital spend had made an immediate impact.

It was able to achieve maximum impact when it focused on sites with capital investment, and therefore chose to focus efforts on engagement based on those sites. For example, the project paid for a boardwalk and access improvements at Castle Lake. This gave real momentum to community access at a time when Covid was increasing outdoor engagement. It helped to build lots of momentum in the local community group, inspiring more people to get involved and raised the profile for all concerned through local and social media. This proved to be an efficient and effective way for working for the project team.

Strengths to build on

The project had many strengths and there were therefore good opportunities for the project to make stronger the quantity and quality of the outcomes it achieves. Among these strengths were the building of new and strengthening of existing relationships.

The team used their skills in building strong relationships to good effect, for example by exceeding the target for land management packages and developing the Farming Cluster. These activities rely heavily on the ability to build trust and relationships.

Delayed and reduced performance risked the project's overall vision

The project's overall vision was at risk from delayed or reduced performance from key project outcomes, chiefly the Landscape Management Packages (LMPs) and the capital works programme more generally.

The team addressed the problems relating to completing the LMPs and exceeded the adjusted target of 10 by achieving 16 agreed LMPs. This is a significant achievement achieved in part by better engagement with Kent Wildlife Trust and other partners, as well as private landowners.

Significant weaknesses needed to be addressed

There were other significant weaknesses that could be broadly grouped as communications failings (promotion, inter-activity and more outside the project) and 'content' failings e.g., there was a strategic overview, but it was not effectively communicated to key audiences. Improved clarity and quality of important project messages are vital for the legacy of the project. It is notable that the strengths and weaknesses workshop was the first time the delivery partners have met collectively for 10 or more months.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Improvements in this area varied. The team communicated effectively with target audiences to help deliver important project goals. Improvements with the delivery partners were harder to gauge but our impression is that small improvements may have been made. Improvements in communication, or better still 'engagement', with the steering group members was less successful. Our impression is that this is more to do with mismatched priorities between the partners than any other issue.

There are opportunities to get the project back on track

There were strengths on which to build, and potential opportunities to make more of. There was goodwill from delivery partners to help achieve this, but activities with smaller relative budgets are unlikely to deliver the planned number of outcomes. There was scope for the project to move budget lines to address this.

Sensible steps were taken to reprofile budgets and to focus on activities which were more likely to be deliverable, whether that be because of restricted resources or waning interest from delivery partners. The focus of the project team understandably became one of delivery above all else.

Overall, our assessment is that the project team did really well to manage a number of challenging factors and still maintain a focus on project delivery, fulfilling the conditions of their grant.

APPROVED ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Overarching purpose and aims

As laid out in the introduction, the project had five main aims, with the first aim articulating the overarching purpose of the project:

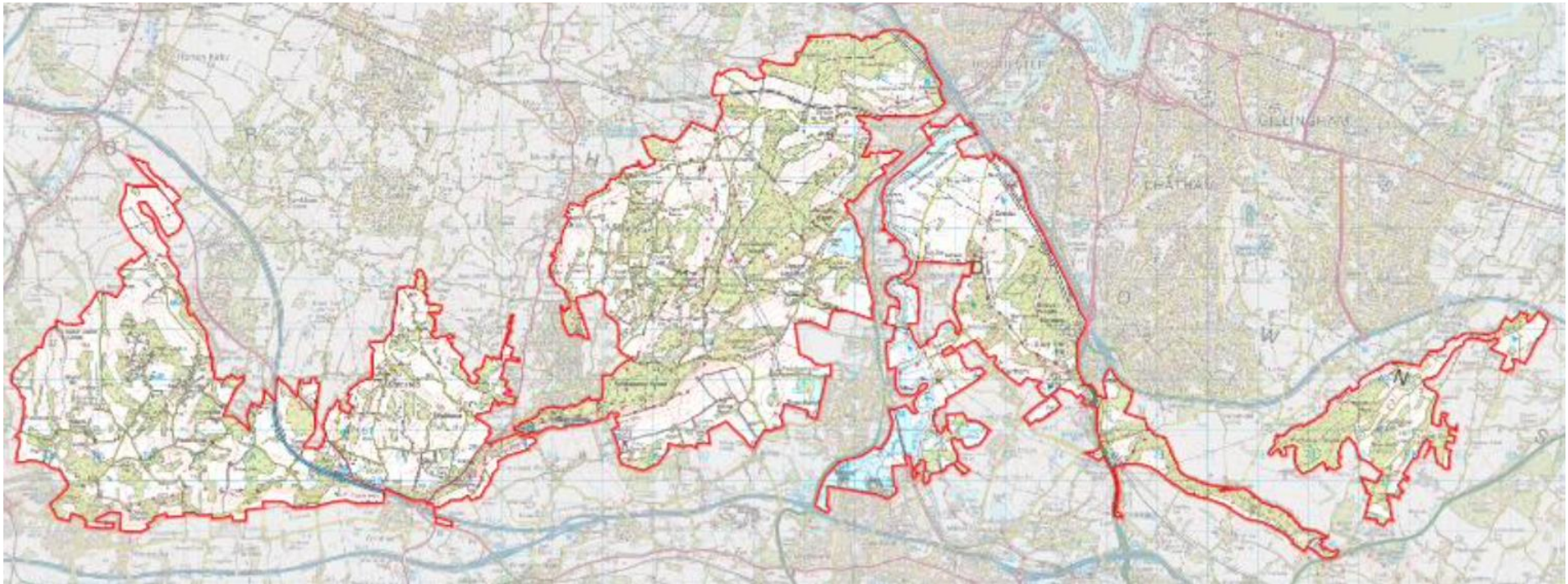
1. To re-connect and restore chalk grassland and other Downland habitats by addressing management along the scarp between Kemsing Down and Detling Hill (AO1).
2. To locate historic routeways (e.g., transhumance routes) that act (or could act) as species corridors so they can be promoted, used and protected by the public and administrative bodies such as Parish Councils (AO2).
3. To encourage appropriate use of chalk Downland for better enjoyment by changing perceptions and addressing negative behaviours such as environmental crime (AO3).
4. To connect people with the historic and current landscape by exploring people's values and perceptions of the chalk Downland heritage (AO4).
5. To enable and support organisations involved in spatial planning to make better informed decisions that will encourage and maintain habitat connectivity (AO5).

The project sought to achieve its purposes and the objectives through 49 projects and activities:

- Managing the OCND – Land restoration, surveying and management projects
- Learning about the OCND – Knowledge, education and training projects; surveying and monitoring activities; promotion and media activities
- Accessing the OCND area – Protection, rights of way, tours and walks activities

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

It sought to implement the activities over a wide geographic area running roughly 18 miles from west to east, covering almost 10,000 hectares, as shown in the following map. The area covers significant road infrastructure and urban settlements, as well as a large amount of farmland and downland, in varying condition.



The tables below provide a summary of the planned activities, the desired outputs and the desired outcomes. The full version is in the appendix and the project's achievements for each area are detailed in the 'summary of achievements' section.

HLF Outcome mapping

The project mapped it's planned outcomes against the HLF outcomes of the time against a simple code, as follows.

HLF Outcome		Code
Outcome for Heritage	Better managed	H1
	In better condition	H2
	Better interpreted & explained	H3
	Identified recorded	H4
Outcome for People	Developed skills	P1
	Learnt about heritage	P2
	Changed their attitudes, behaviour	P3
	Had an enjoyable experience	P4
	Volunteered time	P5
Outcome for Communities	Environmental impacts will be reduced	C1
	More people and a wider range of people will be engaged with heritage	C2
	Your local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	C3
	Your local economy will be boosted	C4
	Your organisation will be more resilient	C5

Managing the OCND

This part of the project focused on land restoration, surveying and management projects to improve the quantity and quality of chalk downland in the project area.

MANAGING THE OCND		
This project theme sought to meet the following HLF outcomes, as coded in the table above: H1, H2, H3, H4; P1, P2, P3, P4, P5; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5		
LAND RESTORATION VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES (Practical Habitat Management)	LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	LAND SURVEYING AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES
Chalk Grassland Management	Land Management Packages for landowners within Priority One target areas for capital works	Survey and Monitoring of Land Management Packages - Packages offered to all landowners in the project area
Chalk Grassland Wildflower Management	OCND Connectivity Grant Fund to enhance, create habitat or improve access in the area	Habitat Evaluation and Monitoring Programme - Indicator Species Survey Programme
Hedge Planting / Laying		Historic Hedgerow Survey Programme using online interactive map to upload survey data
Woodland Glade Clearance		Re-run of the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool
Woodland & Tree Management		
Pond Creation & Management		
Ragwort Management		
Habitat Corridor Restoration		
Volunteer Coordination Programme - Coordination of Volunteer Groups on practical management tasks		

Learning about the OCND

This part of the project focused on learning and education activities in the project area, helping people to engage with and better understand the local chalk downland landscape and habitats, and also developing practical skills and experience.

LEARNING ABOUT OCND		
This project theme sought to meet the following HLF outcomes, as coded in the table above: H1, H2, H3, H4; P1, P2, P3, P4, P5; C1, C2, C4, C5		
Knowledge: Education and Training Activities	Volunteer Surveys	Promotion and Media Activities
School Seasonal Workshops - Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter Workshops run with five schools identified in the project area	Volunteer Survey Scheme Coordination - Set up and manage coordinated surveys using Indicator Survey Programme Guidance using students and local conservation volunteer groups.	Create and Manage OCND Website
Student Bursary Scheme and Traineeship	Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Run species monitoring training events.	OCND Interactive Map - 'Your Place in the Past'
The Importance of Pollinators Workshop - Workshop tailored to individual audiences	Pollinator Survey Techniques.	Facebook, Twitter & Email Updates & E Bulletin: OCND Project Updates; KCC articles for website
Ecosystem Services Training Day - How to use these services to plan for the future	Hedge Laying Course	Facebook, Twitter and email, review on-line discussions weekly
Teacher Training Outdoor Learning	Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Hedgerow surveying	Project Launch - Leybourne Lakes Country Park
Chalk Grassland Fun, Trosley Country Park		Volunteer Celebration Summer BBQ
Eye Spy ID Days Leybourne Lakes, Trosley Country Park, Ranscombe Farm, Birling Estate, Boxley Warren		Volunteer Celebration Winter Warmer
Summer/Winter Education Days		Project Completion Celebration Event
Invertebrate Study Day Ranscombe Farm		
Wildflower Study Day Ranscombe Farm		

Brushcutter Training Course		
-----------------------------	--	--

Accessing the OCND

This part of the project focused on helping people to access and appreciate the OCND area, in different seasons and through different flora and fauna.

SECTION THREE: ACCESSING THE OCND

This project theme sought to meet the following HLF outcomes, as coded in the table above: **H1, H2, H3; P2, P4, P5; C1, C2, C3, C4**

Downland Protection Initiative	Trosley Guided Spring Walk	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Chalk Walk
Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)	Trosley Guided Autumn Walk	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Butterfly Walk
On Site Self-Guided Trails	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Bee Walk	Parish Walks

Partnership working / generic activities- project management

The project team planned at a high level for project management activities, including engagement with the steering group.

Project Meetings and Partnership Working and Generic Activities

This element of the project sought to meet the following HLF outcomes, as coded in the table above: **P1, P2, P3 P4, P5; C2, C5**

Project Steering Group Meetings	Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Sustainability Programme	Create and update OCND Project contact database as a result of workshops, roadshow events and online surveys
---------------------------------	---	--

THE CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT AND IMPORTANT DELIVERY FACTORS

Introduction

This section outlines important background and context which influenced the project's delivery, either positively or negatively. It is not an exhaustive list, but a summary of the main factors. It is fair to say that the project, in common with other lottery-funded projects, has faced more large-scale challenges in the last two years than we have seen in other projects evaluated over the last 10 years or so. The crucial factor in overcoming these challenges has been the resilience, determination and creativity of the project team as they've pivoted delivery and made effective contingency plans to maintain momentum. Nevertheless, covid-19 lockdowns inevitably made some activities harder as contact between people was restricted.

Covid-19

As everyone knows, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the period since March 2020 has been enormously challenging for everyone, with conditions only easing in the last year or so. Within the project context, lockdowns and social-distancing restrictions have meant that project activities specify – especially schools' activities, training and walks - were impacted for much of the duration of the project until July 2021, with various social distancing restrictions in place until December 2021. It is important to note that this period was characterised by considerable uncertainty – as the pandemic itself, government restrictions and lockdowns, and predictions for its likely course – remained in a state of flux, rendering delivery challenging.

There was some disruption to activity because of Covid restrictions and infections e.g., in organising group activities and in maintaining volunteer confidence. These issues were largely addressed by much of the activity being outdoors where Covid risks and restrictions were less of a barrier.

Challenges for the project team

The project manager left the team in June 2021. Whilst he was replaced from within the team, preserving some continuity, there was a loss of four years of strategic background and county-level knowledge. Also, the team was generally tightly resourced and still had to deliver a delayed and extensive activity plan. Varying degrees of engagement from the steering group and delivery partners also made delivery more challenging. There were some impacts on the evaluation e.g., with some records not kept for the walk-based activities or records of event attendances. However, our clear impression is of a small team left largely unsupported to deliver as best it can whilst partners' other priorities take precedence. There was scope to adapt and develop the project to ensure a good fit with the strategic goals of partners and the County Council.

ELMS uncertainty and impact on farmers and landowners

The Environmental Land Management Scheme, or ELMS, has been in development as a replacement for Common Agricultural Policy farming and land management payment regimes since 2017. The scheme has still not been implemented and so business planning has proved very difficult for farmers and landowners. In this context, asking this same audience to sign up to a Land

Management Package covering the next 10 years is challenging – the funding certainty of decades will change, but no-one knows when. The policy priorities, which are expected to be heavily weighted in favour of nature-recovery and better habitat management, should align neatly with what the OCND project was trying to do. However, these policy aims are now in doubt.

Equipment, supplies and contractors

In common with conservation projects across the country, and as we have observed in other evaluations, for example for The Tree Council or Surrey Wildlife Trust, there has been a shortage of contractors with the right skills, equipment and experience for conservation-focused interventions. Material supplies have also been erratic, especially during and after Covid. Finding officers / employees with the right conservation skills is also hard, as is finding conservation grazing herds of sheep and cattle (grazing animals can access areas which people and machines find it hard to go e.g., steep banks). Whilst some of the impacts of these shortages can be filled with volunteer time, these still require organising and supervising.

County policy on the environment

The Kent Environment Strategy is the local framework for delivery of environmental priorities in the county. It was originally developed in 2011 and reviewed in 2015 to reflect social political changes and was adopted by the leaders of all 12 district councils and Medway early in 2016. The strategy seeks to prioritise ‘challenges and opportunities for innovation, jobs, growth and the natural environment’ including ‘conserving and enhancing the quality and supply of the county’s natural assets.’ As part of this, ‘increasing functional habitat networks’ was identified as an effective way of doing this, providing the policy backing for projects such as Old Chalk New Downs which has habitat connectivity very much at its heart.

OCND was one of four initiatives across Kent ‘designed to achieve a large-scale habitat network across the project area.’ Whilst acknowledging the important role the council has played in employing the OCND team, there is little information on what has been done to connect the work of the four projects, or what further support KCC have provided to the project. This may not have actively hindered the project, but it could well have led to missed opportunities.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING

Old Chalk New Downs - in numbers



Connectivity Grants

4 hedgerow grants, 3 grazier grants, 2 footpath grants. 13 grants for habitat, connectivity and community access improvements to grasslands and woodlands

22 Partner sites

Volunteer time

Thousands of hours of volunteer time given to the project over four years of activity

3,118 Days

Hedgerow Surveys

60 field assessments and 200 remote QGIS assessments by staff and volunteers

260 Surveyed

Grassland Surveys

Chalk grassland surveys completed by staff, contractors and volunteers

100 Surveys

Guided Parish Walks

Working with parishes to promote walking routes in the OCND area

218 People

Hedgerows

Replanted, planted from scratch, repaired

7,423 Metres

Land Management Packages

Improving the quality and quantity of chalk downland through 10-year agreements with landowners and land managers

16 Completed

Schools Engagement

Improving connectivity and understanding

150 Workshops with
3,500 Students

Media engagement

Sharing, informing, promoting, building audiences far and wide

3,000 posts

34 blog entries

16 newsletters

5 annual reports

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

Overview

This project has successfully delivered against its primary aim:

‘To re-connect and restore chalk grassland and other Downland habitats by addressing management along the scarp between Kemsing Down and Detling Hill.’

To make progress against this aim, the project has achieved significant outcomes in a wide range of areas, including:

- Delivering its high-level objectives, especially in relation to landscape connectivity through the development of hedgerows and chalk grassland
- Educating landowners, showing them the benefits of managing the land in ways which provide benefits for nature, people and agriculture
- Enhanced and supported small businesses, such as graziers, to expand and grow by connecting them to landowners and educating both on the potential mutual benefits
- Supported securing external funding to help deliver project objectives and deliver other benefits, as well as removing barriers to more and better environmental outcomes
- Reached out to schools successfully, developed curriculum linked resources and engaging with a large number of students
- Created a pathway for a conservation trainee to secure employment and provided enhanced and wider opportunity for student volunteers to grow and expand their skills
- Delivered a large and varied programme of activities across a large geographic area, often in challenging conditions, and achieved a large number of project outputs
- Provided opportunities for volunteers to make meaningful contributions to their local environment, learning skills and making new friends

Significant strengths and achievements of the OCND project

In addition, there are other aspects of the project which warrant particular mention:

Knowledgeable, experienced and resilient staff have been the project’s greatest asset

The success of the project is down to the dedication and perseverance of the project team, who were able to achieve the planned outputs and outcomes. They have successfully built on the work done earlier in the project, building excellent relationships with landowners and land managers in the OCND area. This is vital to the project’s long-term goals and legacy – changing attitudes and behaviours to land management – and pushing through the challenges to achieve success.

The team built strong relationships and a good reputation with wider stakeholder groups, and achieved a wealth of important outcomes, proving in the process to be determined, flexible and adaptable. They maintained a high level of visibility in the project area, providing the resources and expertise necessary to support and guide stakeholders important to the project’s ambitions. It is

encouraging to hear that this expertise and experience will remain in the region as the two main team members have been offered new employment opportunities.

Creating opportunities for people to meet each other, share knowledge and make contacts

It is notable in the interview feedback how many smaller landowners and farmers feel isolated and unsupported. They often want to improve the way they manage their land for both greater commercial success and to be kinder to nature, but do not know where to go for help and support. The project team have been effective at supporting them directly, but also at creating opportunities to bring people together so that they can learn from each other. We have seen in other projects how farmers and landowners learn best from each other, with some expert input, especially where they are working on similar land. Grazing a steep chalk escarpment is very different from grazing a wet valley bottom, and so opportunities to learn from others who face the same challenges as you is invaluable. The project did this effectively, in some cases greatly reducing people's feelings of isolation, encouraging them to continue.

The project team have been effective at equipping landowners and others with the skills and knowledge on how to manage and restore chalk grassland when previously they didn't know how. The project overall has been effective at addressing this knowledge deficit, developing resources and promoting learning between people and organisations.

Developing a Farm Cluster

Building on the previous point on better connecting landowners and managers, the project team more specifically led engagement with smaller landowners and land holdings in key chalk downland areas, bringing together a burgeoning network which has led to positive impacts from training, sharing best practice and expertise. New networks formed amongst landowners themselves, and between landowners and contractors, with the end of project conference being a networking highlight. This was highly valued and more of this type of networking could have enhanced project outcomes in the earlier years of the project, notwithstanding Covid challenges.

The legacy of an emerging farmer cluster can deliver long-term benefits if a lead partner is identified and funding streams are secured. Building networks between landowners and contractors, and then connecting them to funding sources has the potential to deliver further project benefits. The grazing report illustrates this potential in what is a complex habitat and funding environment.

Carefully targeting investment

Carefully targeted capital and revenue investment has kickstarted important changes for chalk downland areas, building momentum and inspiring partners. This has been evident in the work with schools and the Castle Lakes project (run by Leybourne Parish Council), and also with other activities by funding, for example, fencing and gates, path and scrub clearance. The lake project involved a parish council buying land from Whitbread, installing a pond and improving access, boosting community engagement and helping to raise awareness of the project in general. Some of this work may sound mundane, but small practical interventions can make a big difference e.g., getting a new water trough in place can unlock land which would benefit from conservation grazing.

Delivering 16 Landscape Management Packages

Completing landscape management packages takes significant time and effort, first to identify potential landowners with which to work, then to build a relationship and trust, whilst competing with other demands on the landowner's time (of which there continue to be many and much uncertainty e.g., around the future of ELMS). The project team has been particularly good at doing this and has built an excellent reputation in the local landowner community. There are significant long-term benefits of having 10-year plans in place for the OCND area's habitats, flora, fauna and funga¹.

Crucially, there are 10-year agreements in place with the relevant landowners and land managers to ensure the LMPs are delivered on, supported by monitoring from Kent County Council. This also applies to the grants for capital works and connectivity grants.

The Downland Protection Initiative

This has been a successful and popular initiative which has made a real difference to landowners and farmers in the OCND area, helping them to take practical steps to secure their land and property. The emphasis has been on providing practical support, which is easy to follow, developed by listening carefully to local stakeholders and partners.

Increasing volunteer capacity and effort

The project engaged with a large number of volunteers and secured an important amount of voluntary time and effort to the benefit of the chalk downland area. This demonstration of how to harness the potential of volunteers is a significant outcome for the project, providing benefits for the people involved, and ensuring the completion of project activities which benefit nature. There is a legacy which could be built upon, continuing to introduce people to volunteering opportunities. Voluntary effort has been particularly important to the surveying and monitoring activities, helping to complete 360 hedgerow and grassland surveys in the OCND area.

Reflections on what could have been better in the project

Number of planned activities

The project committed to a large number of activities and, in practice, the volume of work proved hard to deliver, putting an unsustainable strain on the small project team. They were spread too thinly; for example, each activity had a 'transaction cost' in terms of communications and coordination which ate into delivery time – the more activities there are, the greater the impact on the available time. Funding applications encourage ambitious projects, but the resulting project can then be unrealistic, then either requiring reprofiling or strenuous efforts to deliver some things which were not well conceived in the first place.

Partnership working and the delivery partners

The partners were integral to the successful delivery of the project, but too often the OCND core team struggled to get full engagement. Commitment waned as partners' priorities changed

¹ Funga and fungi have recently been added to the kingdoms of life, with Flora and Fauna, reflecting the importance of their role in nature and conservation

following the grant application. Arguably, there were too many partners, with each again bringing a 'management overhead' in terms of maintaining engagement and activity. Inevitably, the OCND team has, at times, had to prioritise direct delivery, taking time and energy away from other work.

There may not have been sufficient strategic alignment between partners following the inevitable shifts in emphasis for the different organisations, but these could have been better managed to ensure that the OCND project delivered as well as it could, linking realistically to other work in the county. The steering group could have played a more active and supportive role in helping the project to achieve its goals.

Staffing

As explained in the 'Context for the project and important delivery factors', the continuity of the project team proved challenging at times, but this was also reported across partner organisations too as they wrestled with staff changes during and after Covid. In some instances, project activity stalled as organisations looked for the right staff resources to fulfil commitments. This is against the backdrop, also mentioned above, of shortages in the conservation sector of people with the right skills and experience. If someone leaves, they can be hard to replace in a timely fashion.

Data and baselines

The ideal evaluation demonstrates change against a meaningful baseline; this is the same for effective conservation work – knowing what the starting position is before designing interventions to change the situation. However, this was not really present in this project other than at a high-level i.e., the project's problem statement summarises the overall position, but more detailed and helpful data on the situation at the local level was patchy. Likewise, evaluations need information in order to provide a full account of activity and to draw out the learning. The monitoring of data was not comprehensive for a number of reasons, including erratic reporting from delivery partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis of the learning in this project and our wider experience of lottery-funded projects and partnerships, we offer the following recommendations for consideration by everyone involved in the project.

The OCND project team have developed a legacy plan with a range of actions, many of which will help to meet the recommendations which focus on continuing good work done by the project.

Consider focusing on fewer, more targeted activities with fewer, more engaged partners

There is significant pressure on funding applicants to promise ever more outputs and outcomes as they compete to secure vital grant funding. The OCND project activity plan details around 50 activity areas including substantial challenges such as securing 16 Landscape Management Packages (LMPs) and 10-year commitment to maintain all the capital and connectivity grant funded works. The LMPs and other works will deliver benefits for the local environment for at least 10 years, if the agreements are followed through, whereas other initiatives arguably deliver less direct and enduring conservation benefits.

The project did engage widely with schools, but efforts at wider public engagement did not reach large numbers of people and were resource intensive. There is a debate to be had about the value of engagement with smaller audiences, many of whom may already be interested in conservation, at the expense of more direct support for farmers and landowners.

We assert that a tighter focus on conservation activity, with a proportionate amount of focused community engagement, combined with closer working relationships between partners, will deliver greater benefits for nature and, in due course, for communities. Delivery partners need to maintain a strong strategic alignment with the project's objectives.

Commit to the Farm Cluster

Farmer Cluster needs ownership and leadership, sustained funding and resource for it to be successful – keep the good work going

The excellent work of the team in building trust and relationships with a sometimes-difficult stakeholder group should be more widely appreciated. The opportunity is now to maintain and develop the farm cluster, realising its potential to secure more and wider benefits for landowners and nature. This is a good fit with the County Council's strategy and with the aims of conservation organisations in the area who want to do more for nature and at a larger scale.

Engagement with landowners and farmers is a very good way of influencing farming and land management practice to deliver important conservation goals. It needs a partner to step forward to keep things going and to help secure funding. There is definitely interest amongst this stakeholder group in taking this forward, but it needs support, coordination and the careful use of expert advice.

Continue with networking events more generally

The Farm Cluster is a specific networking intervention, but more generally the project was successful at facilitating networking, whether through training, the end of project conference or working with Parish Councils. It is important not to underestimate the effectiveness of physical events as a mechanism for connecting people, which in turn builds goodwill among stakeholders, builds reputation and builds the project profile. All of these things help to create favourable conditions for successful project delivery.

Maintain the Downland Protection Initiative

Post-Covid, recreational use and anti-social behaviour has increased in the North Downs

This has been a successful and popular initiative which has made a real difference to landowners and farmers in the OCND area, helping them to take practical steps to secure their land and property. The initiative should continue to provide the toolkit and the Country Eye app, working with existing and perhaps new partners to increase use and awareness. Could key partners take more of a role to promote the materials through their websites and social media channels? Related to this is the success of the work done by the project team to increase awareness of the Countryside Code – this ought to be a good candidate for a specific, county-wide initiative involving the significant conservation organisations in Kent, including the council itself.

Stronger partnership agreements and accountability

The needed to sustain the strategic buy-in from all partners to enable better delivery

At times, it appears that the project team had to develop and refine activities through the process of delivery, when perhaps more engagement from partners would have flattened the learning curve. The level of interest and engagement from the steering group membership varied, with some members involvement reducing in the latter half of the project. Organisational priorities can change, but the OCND project retained a good alignment with council environmental strategy throughout. It would have been more sustainable for the project if partners had updated their commitments in line with changing goals (if, indeed, this was the issue). Similarly, commitments made towards delivery goals needed to be honoured or redefined if circumstances had changed. Clarity either way would have given the project team the space to make any necessary changes to the scope of activities.

Keep the learning going

The project has developed a good range of high-quality materials

The website provides an ideal mechanism through which to make available the project's resources. The legacy plan states that KCC will maintain the static website, so all relevant materials need to be easily available before the 'changeover.' Similarly, the project should make sure that the scientific and biodiversity data is accessible for academics to build on for future projects. The Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre will hold the monitoring data, but this too could be available from the website, along with any other relevant reports and learning e.g., the article on biodegradable tree guards and grazing report.

THE LEGACY OF THE OLD CHALK NEW DOWNS PROJECT

We describe legacy as what remains once the funding ends, and we separate it from sustainability, which is more about how the legacy can be built upon or maintained. We describe outcomes as typically being more medium to long-term in nature and as being closely related to the outcomes and activities, whereas we see impacts as being longer-term and more closely linked to the cumulative effect of the outcomes.

We identify the legacy of this project as having the following main legacy elements, followed by the main elements of the project's own legacy plan and how they intend to ensure the legacy is sustained

The physical / capital investment work

The project has invested in capital assets to improve access to chalk downland and to help preserve it, putting in place access gates, installing or repairing stock fences, and installing grazing troughs. The life of such items will vary depending on the location, maintenance, amount of use, materials used, plant growth (trees and shrubs can lift fences) and vandalism, but typically they should last at least five years and may last 15 or 20 years if conditions are right. Maintenance is the crucial factor and this is hard to control once the funding ends.

Work at 33 sites and 16 Land Management Packages / Plans

The work on 33 sites across the project area to restore and / or better manage downland habitats (these include chalk downlands, lowland meadows and woodlands), all with Land Management Packages (plans) or other agreements in place which commit the landowners to a 10-year programme following the initial work. In many ways, this is the most significant legacy outcome of the project but it does rely on the landowners sticking to the agreement. Other factors may cut across these agreements in the near future e.g., ELMS, but the changes may well be positive. The sites involved do include land owned by organisations who are more visible and accountable e.g., KCC, KWT, National Trust, Plantlife, West Kent Downs Countryside Trust and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. Monitoring the privately owned land may prove harder without resources.

Hedgerows

The project supported the planting of nearly 7.5 km of hedgerows. As for the capital assets mentioned above, the conditions in which the hedgerows exist and, in particular, the maintenance regime they are subject to will determine the lifespan and quality of the hedges. Regardless, this is a significant legacy outcome for the project, improving connectivity, providing flood management and other services to the landowners who have taken part in this activity.

Surveys / monitoring data

The project has completed 236 hedgerow and 100 grassland (chalk downland) surveys, the results of which have been stored with the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre. This establishes a useful baseline for use by other projects, organisations and agencies, and should improve the quality of future interventions in the project area.

The Farm Cluster

There is an opportunity for a significant and enduring legacy outcome from the development of and support to the fledgling farm cluster, bringing a range of helpful conservation and commercial benefits to this part of Kent. The groundwork has been done and there is something to build on.

Downland Protection Initiative

This initiative has been popular with landowners, especially during and since Covid lockdown periods and increased use of the countryside, not all of it positive or constructive. Designed to address fly-tipping problems which were degrading the margins of chalk downland areas, the initiative developed to provide useful tools and advice to landowners:

- a) 60 signs encouraging more responsible use of the countryside for six landowners.
- b) The Country Eye app, promoting the reporting of problems such as fly-tipping, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, promoted through QR codes on posts.
- c) The 'Securing the Landscape, OCND landowners toolkit' and group

This is a valuable project outcome which addresses important problems.

Engagement with schools

The project held workshops with 3,500 school students and whilst the benefits of this are hard to measure, based on sheer scale alone this activity should have an impact on the students' understanding, attitudes and, hopefully, behaviours in relation to the environment in general and the local chalk downland landscape in particular. This is their local landscape.

Volunteer engagement and contribution

The project supported significant amounts of voluntary effort with more than 3,100 days contributed to project activities for a notional value of at least £150,000 (at £50 a day – some volunteers may have been more skilled and have a higher daily value). What matters more is that a good number of people have been encouraged to make a difference to the landscape, and this deserves to be continued in some way. Volunteering is not a free activity – it requires organisation and coordination – and so how this will be maintained is both an opportunity and a challenge.

Project Profile

The project has built up a reasonable profile on social media e.g., with more than 450 Instagram, 600 Twitter and 520 Facebook followers. Many of these followers are other organisations and landowning interests and so social media has served as a valuable showcase for the work of the project. There is scope to use this profile to further promote good conservation practice in the area, making use of the web-based reports and resources on the website.

LEGACY AND SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING BY THE OCND TEAM

The project team have developed a legacy plan which records their thoughts on how the legacy can be maintained beyond the term of the programme. This section draws heavily on this document to provide this information, included here to help provide a complete overview of the project's achievements. The plan is in effect also a sustainability plan as it identifies actions and partners who can play a role in continuing the good work of the project, or who can play an important support and monitoring role e.g., in relation to the Land Management Packages.

The project team identified four key parts to the legacy:

1. Land management
2. Monitoring
3. Community Engagement
4. Partnership Working

Land Management

The legacy plan identifies three parts to the land management legacy and sustainability, and actions to safeguard the legacy.

Annual check in with landowner regarding current management status

The legacy plan states that the site monitoring and management will be through:

- a) Annual check in with landowner regarding current management status.
- b) Biennial survey to review effectiveness of management of site.
- c) Land management support.

The annual check will be done from 2023 by Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council. They will coordinate this check in and compile the responses.

Biennial survey to review effectiveness of management of site

Landowners will be expected to complete a simple survey, with the Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council, Natural England, Medway Valley and Mid Kent Downs Countryside Management Partnerships and Kent Wildlife Trust coordinating to complete these where the landowner does not. Natural England will assume survey responsibility for SSSI sites not completed by landowner; and the remaining partners will share the other sites. The Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council will manage the coordination of this.

Land Management Support

All landowners will be reminded of their expected actions and the support available. The Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council will be the first of point of contact for landowners. Where issues are identified, land management advice will be provided by Kent Wildlife Trust, Medway Valley Countryside Management Partnership and Natural England. Natural England

supporting SSSI sites and Kent Wildlife Trust / Medway Valley Countryside Management Partnership taking responsibility for sites they provided the original land management packages for.

The Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council will manage the coordination of this and deal with any issues of non-compliance in regard of the funding agreements.

Monitoring

The plan recognises that habitat monitoring has been a key component of the OCND project, combining expert and volunteer effort to provide ‘a lasting legacy.’ Chalk grassland surveys will continue on a biennial basis at 33 sites across the project area, and so will the butterfly transect surveys, continuing to involve volunteers.

The plan records that the future of the Hedgerow App, its use and continued hedgerow data collection is still being considered by partners, but that all data will (continue to) be collated and held by the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre.

Community Engagement

The legacy plan splits this into two main areas, as follows.

Communication and project resources

The legacy plan identifies four main areas of activity once the project ceases:

- a) The website will remain in place (but will not be updated)
- b) All project resources and reports will be available from the website
- c) The OCND mailbox will stay in place to help manage queries
- d) There will be a list of contacts for advice related to areas of the project’s work

These actions will be managed by the Natural Environment & Coast Team at Kent County Council.

Schools

The intention is to continue to support outdoor learning through further training in 2022, with the aim of ensuring schools can continue the work themselves. The OCND education pack will remain available on the OCND website.

Partnership Working

Networks and clusters

There is significant interest from landowners and managers in setting up a farm cluster in the OCND area. The project team has done much of the groundwork for this and Kent Wildlife Trust and the Medway Valley and Mid Kent Downs Countryside Management Partnerships have agreed to continue this facilitation, providing support as required.

‘The ambition is that within 6-12 months of the project’s completion, a farm cluster within this area will have been established with farmers and landowners collaborating on landscape scale conservation and shared issues in this regard.’

The network of conservation graziers can be supported by KWT's wilder grazing initiative.

Downland Protection Initiative

The successful work of this initiative will continue through:

- a) Shared signage across the project area, promoting responsible use of the countryside. Approximately 60 signs for six different landowners will be installed before the end of the project.
- b) The Country Eye App continues with third party management, as during the project. Promotion of Country Eye app through QR codes on posts throughout the landscape remain.
- c) The Securing the Landscape, OCND landowners toolkit will continue to be available from the OCND and project partners' websites. Pete Morris, North Downs Way, will act as a point of contact, with the support of Securing the Landscape group.

The role of the DPI was examined further through the project's 'Landscape Survey report' in summer 2022, details of which are in the 'Significant Additional Achievements' section below the summary of achievements in the next section. This identifies the further potential of the DPI toolset.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

OVERVIEW

This section of the report details the main achievements of the project against the agreed key performance indicators, including the headline targets for planting hedgerows.

The project undertook a large number of activities with a small team directing contractors and partners to help deliver the majority of the outputs and outcomes. The team and the partnership has achieved a lot, as shown earlier in the report on the infographic 'OCND project in numbers'.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST PROJECT TARGETS AND OBJECTIVES

MANAGING THE OCND		
Land Restoration Volunteer Activities (Practical Habitat Management)	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Chalk Grassland Management	Amount of work achieved: 1. Area cleared or restored 2. Number of trees coppiced or pollarded 3. Number of ponds restored 4. Length of hedge planted 5. Number of volunteers attending, skills learnt/improved, knowledge gained, better understanding.	22 Partner Sites worked with on capital works. 1km ² of chalk grassland restored via scrub clearance and installation or repair of stock fencing, access gates and grazing troughs. 4 ponds created. 7,423m of hedgerow planted.
Chalk Grassland Wildflower Management		
Hedge Planting / Laying		
Woodland Glade Clearance		
Woodland & Tree Management		
Pond Creation & Management		
Ragwort Management		
Habitat Corridor Restoration		
Volunteer Coordination Programme - Coordination of Volunteer Groups on practical management tasks	Amount of work achieved: 1. Area cleared or restored 2. Number of trees coppiced or pollarded 3. Number of ponds restored 4. Length of hedge planted 5. Number of volunteers attending, skills learnt/improved	3,118 days of volunteer time given

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Land Management Packages	1. Complete at least 10 packages a year and carry out monitoring of these sites annually.	16 Land Management Packages completed in total.
OCND Connectivity Grant Fund	1. 22 Connectivity Grants awarded / approve four applications per year.	22 Connectivity Grants awarded, including 4 hedgerow grants, 3 grants for local graziers, 2 grants for footpath improvements to the North Downs Way. The remaining 13 were for habitat, connectivity and community access improvements on grassland and woodlands.
LAND SURVEYING AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
Survey and Monitoring Element of Land Management Packages	1. Complete at least 10 packages a year 2. Carry out monitoring of these sites annually.	All 16 Land Management Packages sites were surveyed on sites where managers took on the responsibility.
Habitat Evaluation and Monitoring Programme - Indicator Species Survey Programme	Production of an effective, simple to use survey technique and programme. Data integrated into the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	Rapid Condition Assessments were carried out on chalk grasslands, lowland grassland and woodland sites. Methods were repeatable, and survey training has been provided to site managers wishing to continue with ongoing monitoring.
Historic Hedgerow Survey Programme	Ground truth of at least 50% of target hedgerows surveyed and 20 volunteers trained.	Hedgerow surveys were carried out with a total of 11 volunteers, three staff members and one ecologist. A hedgerow survey app was created and 56 hedgerows were assessed in the field and 180 remotely using QGIS and google maps making a total of 236 surveys. Volunteers needed support and most surveys were carried out by staff.
Re-run of the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool	Completion of assessments. Data integrated into the Kent &	It was not possible to rerun the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool. All species data collected

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

	Medway Biological Records Centre	has been shared with the KMBRC. The Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool was lacking original baseline data. Surveys conducted during the project time have allowed for different analyses of change and quality - provided in the OCND Chalk Grassland, Hedgerow and Butterfly Transect reports.
SECTION TWO: LEARNING ABOUT OCND		
Knowledge: Education and Training Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
School Seasonal Workshops - Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter Workshops	At least 4 workshops completed each year for five schools.	150 workshops delivered to 3,500 students across 13 school, exceeding project goals by 87%.
Student Bursary Scheme and Traineeship	At least 20 students to apply for funding and carry out project work in the project area OR at least 1 nine-month traineeship. Where applicable Data integrated into the KMBRC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total 51 students engaged 2. One nine-month traineeship completed leading to full time employment within KCC 3. Three, three-month traineeships supported across partner sites 4. Two Student bursaries granted 5. Four short course student bursaries awarded 6. 41 students in attendance across 5 OCND short courses
The Importance of Pollinators Workshop - Workshop tailored to individual audiences	At least 8 people to attend courses	Three importance of pollinator training events delivered to 36 attendees in total. One pollinator importance/identification course was delivered virtually to 10 attendees.
Ecosystem Services Training Day - How to use these services to plan for the future	At least 8 people to attend courses	Two ecosystem service training course delivered with 30 attendee's total. Ecological report writing course delivered to 14 attendees.
Teacher Training Outdoor Learning	At least 8 teachers to attend courses	Four teacher training courses delivered to a total of 41 teachers from nine schools.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Chalk Grassland Fun, Trosley Country Park	At least 8 people to attend each event	Six discovery days delivered with a total of 146 attendees.
Eye Spy ID Days Leybourne Lakes, Trosley Country Park, Ranscombe Farm, Birling Estate, Boxley Warren	At least 8 people to attend each event	Five eye spy days delivered throughout the project with a total of 40 attendees.
Summer/Winter Education Days	At least 8 people to attend each event	Twenty guided walks delivered to a total of 218 people.
Invertebrate Study Day Ranscombe Farm	At least 8 people to attend each event	Three invertebrate days were held with the final day focusing on beetles. 25 attendees in total.
HIGHER LEVEL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Wildflower Study Day Ranscombe Farm	At least 8 people to attend each event	Wildflower and orchid studies days delivered with a total of 17 attendees.
HIGHER LEVEL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Brushcutter Training Course	At least 8 people to attend each event	5 brush cutter training courses delivered to a total of 23 individuals. One brush cutter volunteer day organised with 5 attendees.
Volunteer Surveys	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Volunteer Survey Scheme Coordination - Set up and manage coordinated surveys using Indicator Survey Programme Guidance using students and local conservation volunteer groups.	At least 40 surveys to be carried out through the delivery phase. Data integrated into the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	100 chalk grassland surveys have been completed by a combination of staff, contractors and 20 volunteers. 60 hedgerow surveys have been completed onsite by a combination of staff, students, volunteers and contractors. Butterfly transect surveys have been set up across four OCND sites, at least one season of surveys for each site has been carried out.
Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Run species monitoring training events.	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	Chalk grassland training sessions run in 2018, 2021 and 2022. Three butterfly transect survey days run, with identification training included, 17 attendees total. Three hedgerow survey and tree/flower identification courses were run with a total of 21

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

		attendees. Additional training provided in the field to three trainees and two volunteers. 26 people trained in total.
Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Pollinator Survey Techniques.	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	Five pollinator survey training days delivered with 34 attendees. Three butterfly transect survey days run with 17 attendees total.
Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Hedge Laying Course	At least 8 people are trained during the project's delivery.	Two hedgelaying courses and one follow up hedgelaying day were delivered in 2020 to a total of 26 attendees.
Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Hedgerow surveying	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	Three hedgerow survey and identification courses were run with a total of 21 attendees. Additional training provided in the field to three trainees and two volunteers. 26 people trained in total.
Promotion and Media Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Create and Manage OCND Website	Creation of the website Website visits	Website was created and managed through the project.
OCND Interactive Map - 'Your Place in the Past' Develop interactive map as part of the main website containing all data from Map Regression Analysis completed in Development Phase.	At least 200 visited site, at least 20 people contributed to site	Four interactive maps have been created on the OCND website depicting, Capital Work Sites, Historic Boundaries, School Grounds Projects and Connectivity Grants Sites
Facebook, Twitter & Email Updates & E Bulletin: OCND Project Updates Provide KCC's Promotion Team with regular news articles for the website	At least 6 articles released	34 blogs 2 published articles 1 tv interview 1 radio interview 4 press releases 16 newsletters 5 annual reports Over 3,000 social media posts
Facebook, Twitter and email, review on-line discussions weekly; respond to individuals if required to do so	Note positive and negative comments	See comments and feedback spreadsheet
OCND Teacher and School Children Workshop Forum - An	Teachers from at least 8 schools involved in Forum,	No forum set up - Dropbox account with OCND School Pack

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

online community for students & teachers involved in the workshops	Children from at least children from 8 schools involved in Forum	has been shared with Schools throughout Kent.
PROJECT LAUNCH - LEYBOURNE LAKES COUNTRY PARK Welcome event to promote project and attract interest from potential landowners and volunteers.	1 Number of attendees 2 Number of contacts added to list 3 Feedback from people at the event	Project launch was held at Leybourne Lakes.
Volunteer Celebration Summer BBQ Thank you event for existing volunteer groups to meet and opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Morning of practical management followed by BBQ.	1 Number of attendees 2 Number of contacts added to list 3 Feedback from people at the event	Two volunteer celebration BBQ's were held with 36 attendees across the two days.
Volunteer Celebration Winter Warmer Thank you event for existing volunteer groups to meet and opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Morning of practical management followed by Bonfire & Food	1 Number of attendees 2 Number of contacts added to list 3 Feedback from people at the event	Two winter warmer days held with 5 volunteers attending each day.
Project Completion Celebration Event Thank you event to everyone involved in the project from start to finish	1 Number of attendees 2 Number of contacts added to list 3 Feedback from people at the event	End of Project conference delivered with 83 attendees representing 26 different organisations and stakeholders.

SECTION THREE: ACCESSING THE OCND

	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Downland Protection Initiative	Number of incidents responded to and solved.	Country eye app supported and promoted through markers placed on PROW and capital work sites.
Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)	Completion of plan, number of routes improved.	Improvement works completed on 10 routes - SR48, path 5 (no number), MR206A, MR190, NS265, KH64, KH94, MR181, SR22
On Site Self-Guided Trails	Completion of plan, number of routes improved.	Improvement works was conducted with the addition of interpretation boards and

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

		updated maps throughout Trosley Country Park. Two Storymaps were also created for virtual viewing and self-guided walks.
Trosley Guided Spring Walk	At least 8 people on the walk	Four guided walks delivered, 8 attendees.
Trosley Guided Autumn Walk	At least 8 people on the walk	Four guided walks delivered.
Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Bee Walk	Not specified	Two bee walks delivered to 12 attendees.
Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Chalk Walk	Not specified	Four chalk walks delivered to a total of 35 people.
Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Butterfly Walk	Not specified	Public butterfly walk run in 2017 to 11 attendees.
Parish Walks	At least 2 Parishes to promote routes in their area and include on website	Twenty guided walks delivered to a total of 218 people.
Project Meetings and Partnership Working		
	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Project Steering Group Meetings	Number of meetings held	15 Steering Group meetings held
Generic Activities		
	Desired outputs / measurement	Achievements
Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Sustainability Programme	Programme set up, reviewed and report written.	OCND Legacy plan completed in Aug 2022.
Create and update OCND Project contact database as a result of workshops, roadshow events and online surveys.	At least 200 people on database	OCND contact data base created. Over 300 people included.

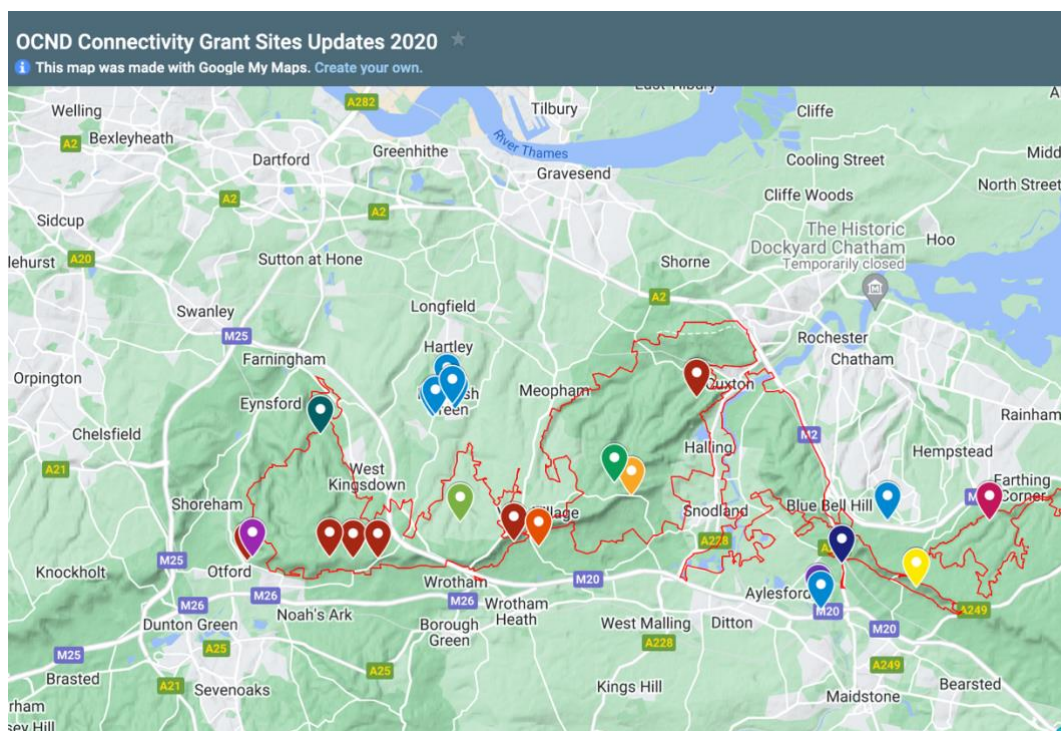
ACTIVITY ACCOUNTS

The project undertook a large number of activities and the following provides a brief overview of each where the information is available, based largely on the notes from the project team.

Section One – MANAGING THE OCND

Land Management Activities

This includes the connectivity grants, of which there were 22 in all: 4 hedgerow grants, 3 grants for local graziers, 2 grants for footpath improvements to the North Downs Way. The remaining 13 were for habitat, connectivity and community access improvements on grassland and woodlands. The following map shows locations for some of connectivity grants.



Land Management Packages (plans)

The project completed 16 LMPs against a target of 10, working with a range of partners to achieve this. The following table provides a summary list of the sites for which an LMP was produced, with other relevant information. The LMP with South East Water for three of their sites is a good example of the benefits which can come from these arrangements, increasing the amount of land they manage for the benefit of nature by 288 hectares / 25%:

*"We currently manage 1,172 hectares of our estate for the benefit of wildlife and to enhance biodiversity. The purpose of this measure will be to **increase this to at least 1,460 hectares** of our estate. This will result in 67% of our landholdings being managed to protect wildlife and enhance biodiversity."*

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Site	Contractor	Date Completed	Outcomes
Cobhambury Farm	KWT	May-18	No outcome information provided by KWT
Harvel House Farm	KWT	May-18	
Kester	KWT	Jul-18	
Purvil Wood Cottage	KWT	Oct-18	
St Clere Estate	KWT	Oct-18	
Strawberry Bank	KWT	Jul-18	
Austin Lodge	Paul Cobb	Aug-19	Owner went on to work with Natural England and the Kent Wildlife Trust on future use of the land and Countryside Stewardship/rewilding options.
Burham (SE Water)	Lesley Mason	Sep-19	SE Water: "Following the botanical survey work and then following discussions with our Grounds Maintenance Team we introduced a late season cut and collect regime on these sites. We are currently working on a Biodiversity ODI (from 2020 to 2025) called protecting wildlife and enhancing biodiversity. This performance commitment will protect the current wildlife value of our sites and produce a net gain in biodiversity and wildlife through active conservation work on the land we own." See quote above.
Halling (SE Water)	Lesley Mason	Sep-19	
Kemsing (SE Water)	Lesley Mason	Sep-19	
Forstal Field (Young Farmers Association)	White Horse Ecology	Aug-20	Young Farmers had an 'OCND Connectivity Grant' and land manager training events. Rotational grazing established, plans to develop the woodland habitat on site.
Walderslade Woods (Walderslade Woodland Group)	White Horse Ecology	Oct-19	Ongoing management plan for the grassland areas now in place. They also applied for a Connectivity Grant from OCND. Volunteers from the group have attended land manager training events including brushcutter and first aid training.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Summer House	MVCP	Aug-20	Management plan in place, 2 Connectivity Grants from OCND, grazing agreement to manage the grassland. Working with the AONB unit towards a further FiPL application and joining farm cluster.
Luddesdown Vineyard (Vineyard Farms Ltd)	Dr M Spencer	Nov-20	A partner site in the OCND project. Hedge planting work to gap up old hedgerows and restored connectivity.
Luddesdown Vineyard II	Dr M Spencer	Jan-21	Following the second land management package, the vineyard employed a full time Conservation Manager and a Farm and Conservation Assistant dedicated to management of their conservation areas.
Castle Lake (Leybourne Parish Council)	White Horse Ecology	Jan-21	Leybourne Parish Council delivering on plans for a new community green space. Connectivity Grant from OCND to fund a tree health survey, interpretation boards and footpath works. Worked with PROW to improve the existing. Management agreement with SWS Fisheries for the fishing lake.

The table also illustrates the variety of partners and habitat areas which the OCND project has supported.

Capital Works site

There were 22 capital works sites (which received the majority of the funding), another 22 Connectivity Fund (small grant) sites, and also PROW works. Separately and detailed above were 16 LMPs, some of which became capital sites or Connectivity Fund sites, but not all.

Land Surveying and Monitoring Activities

This covered the surveys required for the Land Management Packages, the Rapid Condition Assessments for chalk and other grassland, the hedgerow surveys and the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool.

The project team report that the ongoing surveys for the Land Management Packages were only carried out on sites where site managers took on the responsibility. For the rapid condition assessments, the team report that the methods were repeatable, and survey training was provided to site managers wishing to continue with ongoing monitoring. For the hedgerow surveys, 11 volunteers worked with three staff members and an ecologist. A hedgerow survey app was created

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

and 56 hedgerows were assessed in the field and 180 remotely using QGIS and google maps making a total of 236 surveys. Volunteers needed support in the field and most surveys were carried out by staff.



In addition, chalk grassland surveys were carried out between 2018 and 2022 by a combination of project staff, volunteers, site staff, and ecologists. 100 chalk grassland condition assessments were completed, with an additional 20 lowland meadow condition assessments. Findings from chalk grassland surveys have been published in the Transactions of the Kent Field Club Vol 21

It was not possible to rerun the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool. The team report that the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool was lacking original baseline data. Surveys conducted during the project time have allowed for different analyses of change and quality - provided in the OCND Chalk Grassland, Hedgerow and Butterfly Transect reports. All species data collected was shared with the KMBRC.

Section Two – LEARNING ABOUT OCND

There were 11 activities in the Knowledge: Education and Training Activities

School Seasonal Workshops

150 workshops delivered to 3,500 students across 13 school, exceeding project goals by 87%. The school workshop programme was extended to include schools outside the project area. Themes were changed in response to the increase in countryside access during the covid-19 pandemic to include the Countryside Code and raise awareness of countryside access. Countryside Code workshops were very popular leading to delivery partners searching for further funding.



The project produced a wealth of high-quality and attractive education and engagement materials for children and schools.

School Bursary Scheme and Traineeship

A total of 51 students were engaged. One nine-month traineeship was completed leading to full time employment within KCC. Three, three-month traineeships were supported across partner sites. Two student bursaries were granted and four short course students bursaries awarded. 41 students attended 5 OCND short courses.

Engagement of students through the student bursary scheme proved challenging. Diversification of the scheme to include traineeships and short courses improved engagement and resulted in a higher level of engagement and interest from students.

The Importance of Pollinators Workshop

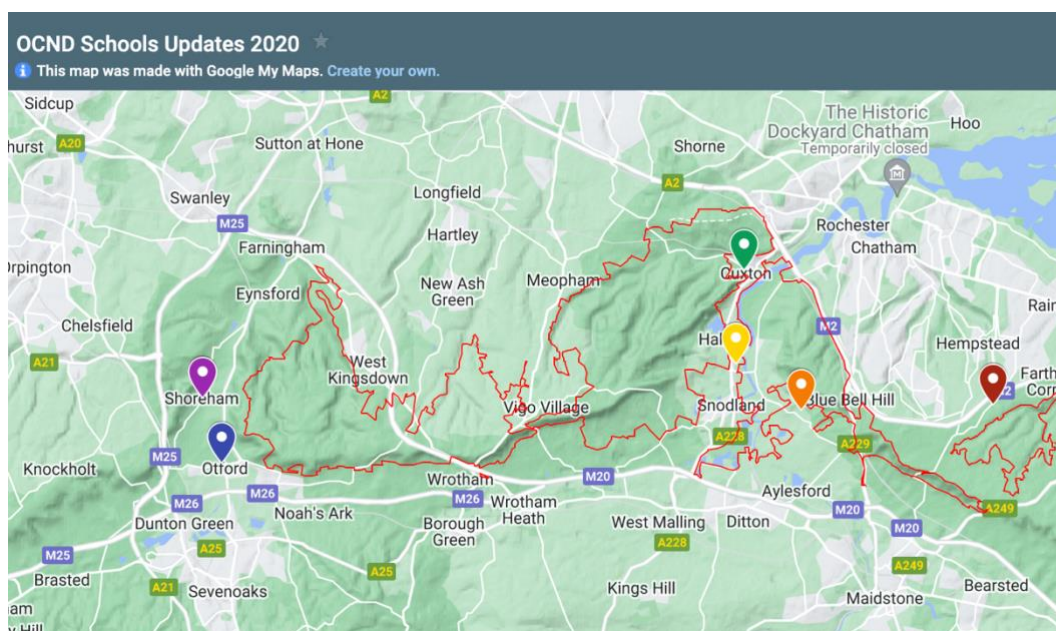
Three importance of pollinator training events delivered to 36 attendees in total. One pollinator importance/identification course was delivered virtually to 10 attendees. The team reflect that the courses were well attended. The final in person course was cancelled due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, but a virtual course was held in its place with a focus on identification.

Ecosystems Services Training Day

Two ecosystem service training courses were delivered with 30 attendees in total and the ecological report writing course was delivered to 14 attendees. The project reports that all courses were well attended and the feedback was predominantly positive, with all attendees indicating that the knowledge acquired would be of use in future work.

Teacher Training Outdoor Learning

Four teacher training courses were delivered to a total of 41 teachers from nine schools. There was difficulty engaging with OCND project teachers outside of their own schools. The first teacher training course had six attendees, all from schools outside the project area. The final three were delivered within school grounds. There was positive feedback from all the teachers stating that they intended to deliver outdoor classes more often. The following map shows some of the locations for the school grounds projects.



Chalk Grassland Fun, Trosley Country Park

Six discovery days delivered with a total of 146 attendees. The records for these events only included the number of children in attendance, so no numbers for adults were recorded. Additional days were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, although in October 2020 the park delivered the event by splitting the day into 12 small workshops where one family could book onto each session.

Eye Spy ID Days, Leybourne Lakes, Trosley Country Park, Ranscombe Farm, Birling Estate, Boxley Warren

Five eye spy days were delivered throughout the project with a total of 40 attendees. The attendees were primarily children with their parents in attendance. Bookings for Ranscombe farm struggled and poor weather reduced the attendance numbers compared to other bookings. There was

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

positive feedback from attendees. Some dates cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.



Primary School students looking out from Kent's North Downs, Burham.

Summer / Winter Education Days

Twenty guided walks were delivered to a total of 218 people. The majority of attendees were aged over 50. The circular walks were more popular than linear and sites with easy parking saw the largest number of attendees. A wide range of environmental topics were covered to increase inclusivity, including 'Birding by Ear' for the Association for the Blind.



School children enjoying OCND educational activities.

Invertebrate Study Day, Ranscombe Farm

Three invertebrate days were held with the final day focusing on beetles with 25 attendees in total. The courses were delivered during 2017, 2018 and 2019. The remaining course was cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the remaining funds re-allocated. The courses were well attended and received positive feedback.

Wildflower Study Day, Ranscombe Farm

Wildflower and orchid studies days were delivered with a total of 17 attendees. Courses were delivered in 2018 and 2019, but the remaining course was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the remaining funds were re-allocated. The courses were well attended and received positive feedback.

Brushcutter Training Course

The brush cutter training courses were delivered to a total of 23 individuals. One brush cutter volunteer day organised with 5 attendees. The course numbers were restricted due to health and safety regulations. All the attendees have gone on to use their brush cutter skills for work or voluntary positions.

There were 5 activities in the Volunteer Survey Scheme Training part of the project

Set up and manage coordinated surveys using Indicator Survey Programme Guidance using students and local conservation volunteer groups.

100 chalk grassland surveys were completed by a combination of staff, contractors and volunteers. 60 hedgerow surveys were completed onsite by a combination of staff, students, volunteers and contractors. Butterfly transect surveys were set up across four OCND sites, and at least one season of surveys for each site was carried out.

Most surveys were undertaken in the second half of the project providing baseline data for landowners and continued monitoring.

Species Monitoring Training Events

Chalk grassland training sessions ran in 2018, 2021 and 2022. Three butterfly transect survey days ran, with identification training included, for 17 attendees in total. Three hedgerow survey and tree/flower identification courses were run with a total of 21 attendees. Additional training was provided in the field to three trainees and two volunteers. 26 people were trained in total.

The Butterfly Transect training was well attended and transects were set up across four OCND project sites with ongoing volunteers for each.



Bumblebee on a flower, importance of pollinators training

Pollinator Survey Techniques

Five pollinator survey training days were delivered to 34 attendees. The surveys were well attended and transects were set up across four OCND project sites with ongoing volunteers for each.

Hedge Laying Course

Two hedgelaying courses and one follow up hedgelaying day were delivered in 2020 to a total of 26 attendees. Both hedgelaying courses were well attended with participants networking and learning new skills. The attendees were landowners, volunteers and conservation sector staff.

Hedgerow Surveying

Three hedgerow survey and identification courses were run with a total of 21 attendees. Additional training was provided in the field to three trainees and two volunteers. 26 people were trained in total. The training courses were well attended with 11 volunteers going on to assist with OCND hedgerow surveys.

There were 9 activities relating to promotion and media activities

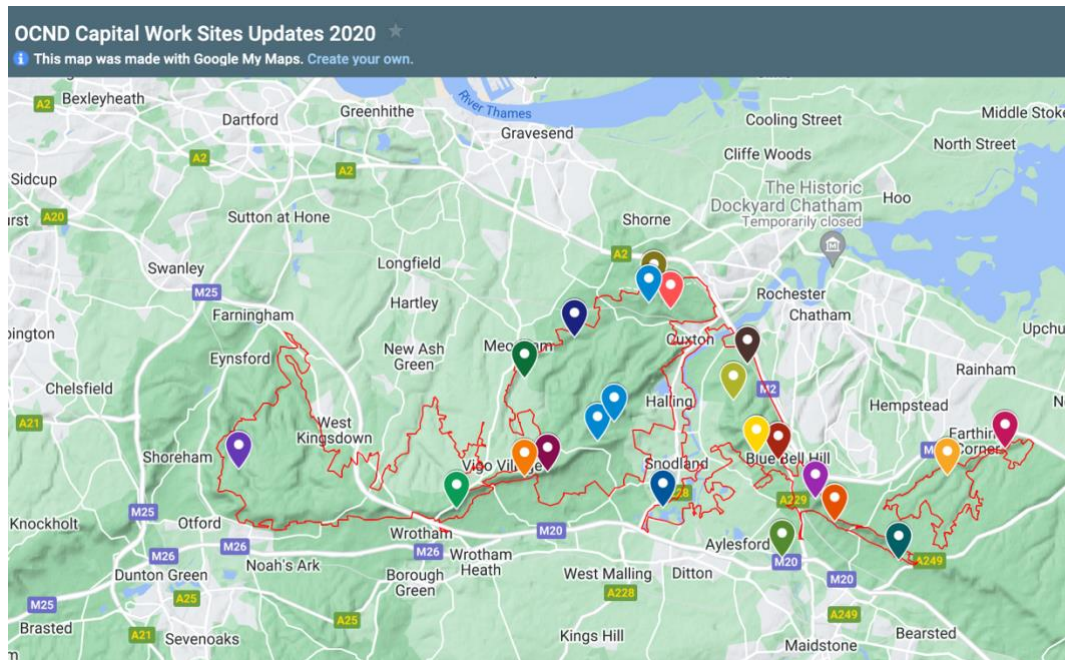
Create and manage the OCND website

The website was created and managed throughout the project. Bursary's, grants and activities were all advertised via the project website and other social media platforms. In total, the website had 13,112 unique users between October 2017 and November 2022 with an average of 20 users per day.

'Your Place in the Past' interactive map

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Four interactive maps were created on the OCND website depicting, Capital Work Sites, Historic Boundaries, School Grounds Projects and Connectivity Grants Sites. Information on each site and grant is accessible by clicking on pins embedded within the map. The number of site visits is reportedly unknown but promotion and verbal communication from partners indicates that the maps have been viewed. An example map showing the mapping of the capital works sites is below.

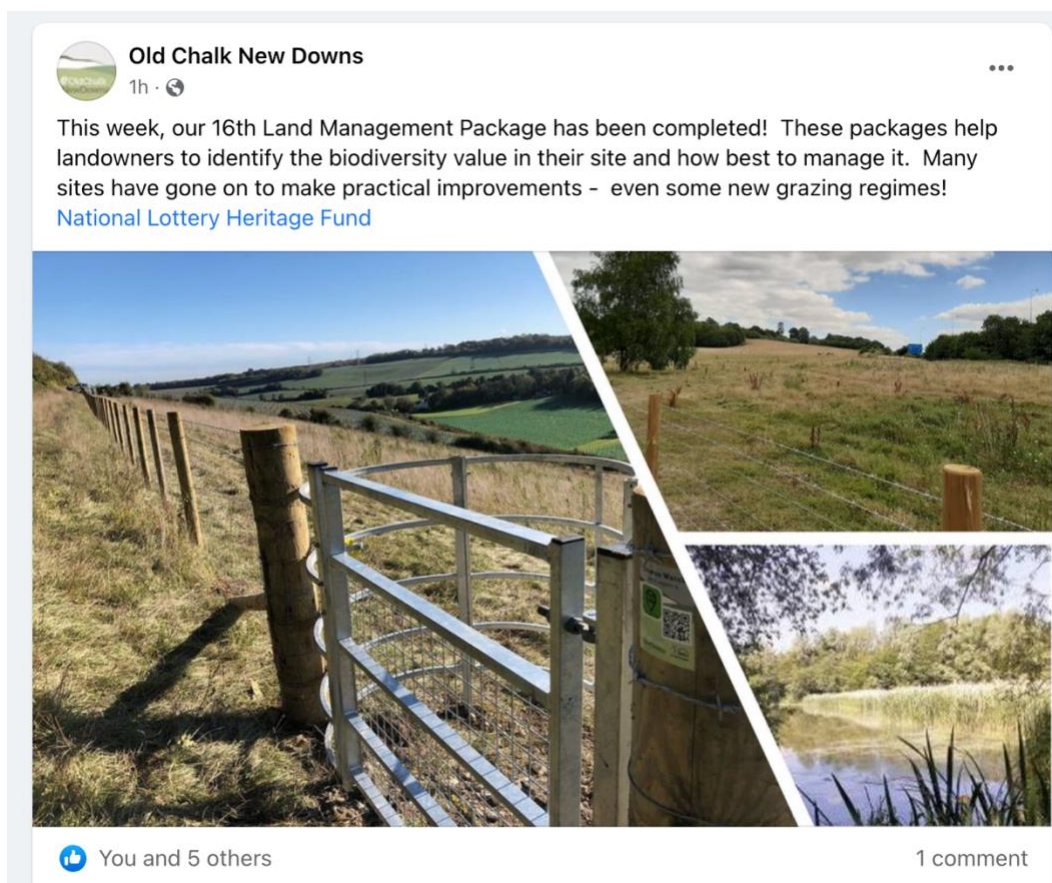


Facebook, Twitter & Email Updates & E Bulletin: OCND Project Updates

The team report the following headline stats for this project activity:

- 34 blogs
- 2 published articles
- 1 tv interview
- 1 radio interview
- 4 press releases
- 16 newsletters
- 5 annual reports
- Over 3,000 social media posts

The project team have engaged through multiple media streams to increase accessibility to the project including: the OCND website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, direct mail outs, TV, radio, magazine articles and internal KCC marketing. The following Facebook post shows a good example of the capital works funded by the project.



In all, the project's Facebook page had 38,168 views whilst the project's Twitter account had 55,600 page views and 425,488 impressions.

Responding to social media comments

OCND Teacher and School Children Workshop Forum

No forum was set up, but instead a Dropbox account with the OCND School Pack was shared with Schools throughout Kent.

Capacity for teachers to engage with activities such as a forum outside of their own institution proved difficult. This was made evident with the teacher training courses. It was decided not to create a new forum and instead focus on the workshops and inhouse training, which has seen positive responses and more teachers delivering with classes outdoors. The OCND School pack has been shared via Dropbox and all activities are available via the OCND website.



Capital works and training activities at Nashenden Down

Leybourne Lakes Country Park Welcome Event

The OCND Project launch was held at Leybourne Lakes. The event was well attended but exact figures of attendees were not recorded. Two new volunteers signed up with community groups. While the majority of attendees were already visiting the park, several local councillors and landowners specifically visited to attend the event and learn about the project.

Volunteer Celebration Summer BBQ

Two volunteer celebration BBQ's were held with 36 attendees across the two days. Both events were well attended with a wide range of volunteers attending, including individuals volunteering for partner organisations. Some volunteer celebrations activities were cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

Volunteer Celebration Winter Warmer

Two winter warmer days held with 5 volunteers attending each day. All volunteers were directly volunteering for the OCND Project. Other volunteer activity days were cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

Project Completion Celebration Event

The conference was well attended and feedback during and after the events was predominantly positive with attendees networking and gaining new contacts throughout the day.

Section Three – ACCESSING THE OCND

There were 9 activities in the Knowledge: Education and Training Activities

Downland Protection Initiative

The Country Eye app was supported and promoted through markers placed on PROW and capital work sites.

The ‘Securing the Landscape’ toolkit was available from the OCND website, published as a ‘one stop shop’ toolkit for people and landowner affected by rural crime. The toolkit allows people to find information about rural crimes and explains how to report crime and what methods landowners can use to help prevent the crimes from happening.

SECURING THE LANDSCAPE TOOLKIT

REDUCED VERSION / EXTRACTED FROM MAIN REPORT (MVCP)



Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Improvement works completed on 10 routes - SR48, path 5 (no number), MR206A, MR190, NS265, KH64, KH94, MR181, SR22. PROW improvements slowed in 2020 due to low capacity and losing match funding in the PROW team due to a large footpath collapse along the River Medway.

On-site Self-Guided Tours

Improvement works were conducted with the addition of interpretation boards and updated maps throughout Trosley Country Park. Two Storymaps were also created for virtual viewing and self-guided walks. The five new interpretation boards at Trosley Country Park include information on natural heritage and history of people on the Downs. The boards are placed throughout the park and depict maps with five self-guided walking and training routes.

Trosley Guided Spring Walk

Trosley Park is a Kent County Council country park. Four guided walks were delivered with 8 attendees. Attendee data is only available for one event.

Trosley Guided Autumn Walk

Four guided walks were delivered. Attendee data is not available.



Attendees on grazing workshop, Trosley Country Park

Ranscombe Farm Led Walks – Bee Walk

Ranscombe Farm is a Plantlife nature reserve. Two bee walks were delivered to 12 attendees. Two additional walks were assumed to have been carried out but there is no data to support attendee numbers.

Ranscombe Farm Led Walks – Chalk Walk

Four chalk walks delivered to a total of 35 people.

Ranscombe Farm Led Walks – Butterfly Walk

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

Public butterfly walk run in 2017 to 11 attendees. As for the Bee Walk, two additional walks were assumed to have been carried out but there is no data to support attendee numbers.

Parish Walks (this overlaps with the Summer / Winter education days and the report is the same)

Twenty guided walks were delivered to a total of 218 people. The majority of attendees were aged over 50.



Kent Wildlife Trust Site Visit, walking along the downs

The circular walks were more popular than linear and sites with easy parking saw the largest number of attendees. A wide range of environmental topics were covered to increase inclusivity, including 'Birding by Ear' for the Association for the Blind.

Project Meetings and Partnership Working, Generic Activities

There were 3 areas of activity in this area

Project Steering Group meetings

15 steering group meetings held.

Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Sustainability Programme

OCND Legacy plan completed in Aug 2022. Kent County Council will oversee monitoring of project sites and provide a point of contact for landowners post project.

Create and update OCND Project contact database

OCND contact data base created. Over 300 people included. A separate contact list was created as well as the generic contact database to enable targeted marketing.

SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

A project of this duration provides opportunities for lots of activities. Some of these are day-to-day in their nature, but others become significant outcomes in their own right. The following details a few of the outcomes which have local and even national importance.

Biodegradable tree guards

The project team conducted research and published a paper² which examined the benefits of biodegradable tree guards in comparison to plastic tree guards. The work adds to other research being conducted in this area by The Woodland Trust and others.



Cardboard tree guards at Luddesdown Vineyard, deployed as part of the Old Chalk New Downs project. Jenny Price



Plastic tree guards are commonly used in planting schemes as they are much cheaper than biodegradable options. Lyndsay Wayman-Rook

² 'Cardboard tree guards: a suitable and sustainable alternative to plastic?' Conservation and Land Management, Winter 2021, Vol. 19, No. 4. Jenny Price and Lyndsay Wayman-Rook

The project trialled biodegradable cardboard tree guards as an alternative to plastic. This is an important area as tree guards commonly used in the UK are usually plastic. As many as 200 million tree guards were used across the UK between 1980 and 2020, some 5 million a year. This represents a large amount of plastic consumption and a continuing, long-term pollution risk as many tree guards are not retrieved from planting areas or are designed to breakdown in situ. After a few years, the plastic guards no longer provide a helpful micro-climate but start to hinder growth.



Hedgerow planting, biodegradable cardboard tree guards.

The project team researched the options and costs for biodegradable alternatives, identifying that the more environmentally friendly options were '2.5 to 4.5 times as expensive' as the plastic tree guards. The project's hedge planting work provided an opportunity to test the different options and make a fuller comparison beyond cost alone. In an 18-month period, the project supported the planting of 9,000 trees across seven hedgerows on three different sites. Feedback was gathered from contractors and land managers, and field observations were gathered as well. This allowed the team to compile a wide-ranging comparison of the positive and negative aspects of the four main types used in the comparative study.

The study established that the cardboard guards did provide a viable alternative to plastic guards, but the costs are significantly higher and the guards require two, not one, supporting cane.

Grazing Plan

In 2018, the team commissioned Farm Wildlife to write a brief study³ on the feasibility of establishing 'clustered' grazing on at least three landholdings in order to provide habitat management services which would otherwise require mechanical scrub management. Making more and better use of conservation grazing is one way of improving habitat outcomes for chalk downland, whilst reducing the need for costly mechanised methods – costly because they require

³ Trosely to Paddlesworth Farm Escarpment Grazing Plan report, December 2018, Farm Wildlife / Paul Cobb

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

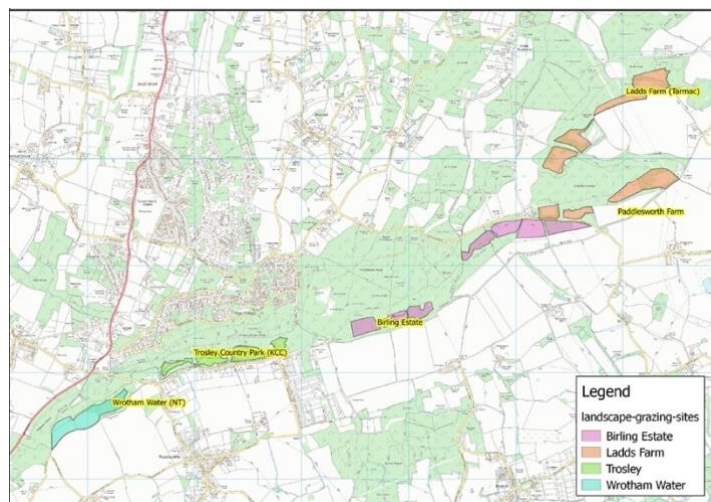
human operators. These mechanical interventions are often less effective on steep land where it is hard, for example, to operate brush cutters safely. The study assumed that economies of scale could be achieved by organising conservation grazing across several landholdings and landowners, and that a specialist conservation grazer could deliver better outcomes than the resident farmers. This is relevant to the OCND aims of ‘improving the coherence of the landscape and connectivity of chalk habitats by increasing their size, improving condition, and restoration of sites in locations where they have historically existed.’



Sheep grazing on North Downs, Birling

The study hoped to demonstrate the long-term economic and logistical benefits of working together, as well as the desired conservation outcomes for chalk downland. It is notable that much of the land in the study has a designation e.g., SSSI, in turn supported by Natural England which recommends grazing as a suitable landscape management tool. The areas in the study are shown in the following map, all placed along the North Downs escarpment where grazing should be a good option. However, the grazing on this land is poor quality (so animals tend to lose weight and require costly

supplementary feeding) with poor vehicle access for animal movements and sometimes no mains water for the stock. The land is largely not viable for commercial grazing – less of a concern for the council and the National Trust, but an important consideration for the private landowners. The study looked in the round at the opportunities to make conservation grazing viable in the area.



The study established that a good number of graziers were interested in a grazing scheme in this area. There were two main viable options which the OCND project could support to show the benefits of the approach for better managing chalk downland. Links between the areas would be challenging and cooperation would be an important part of the scheme. Additional funding would be needed to make the scheme workable e.g., through Countryside Stewardship payments.

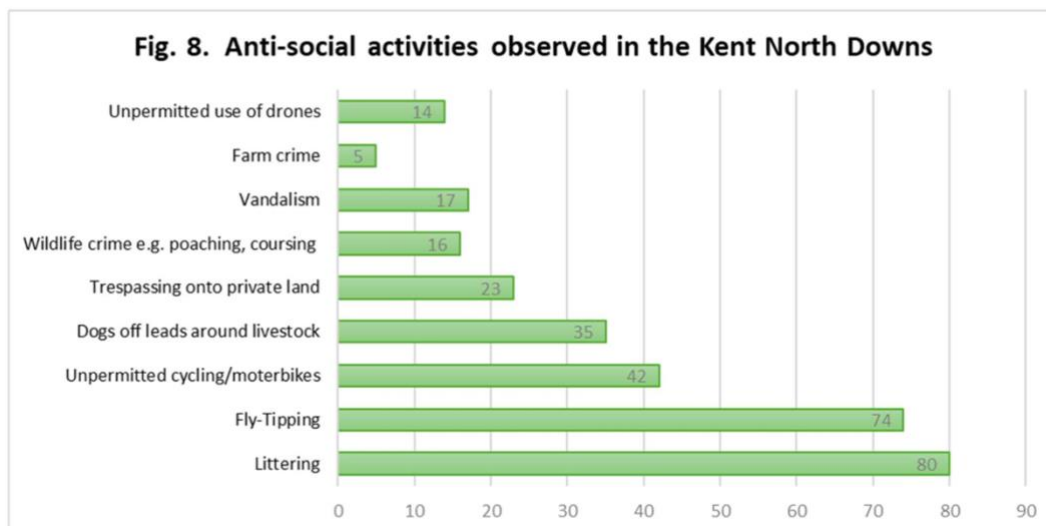
As such, there were no clear conclusions to the study but a set of recommendations with funding opportunities identified which could underwrite the physical infrastructure needed (fences, gates etc.) and which could subsidise the grazing activity.

OCND Landscape Survey Report

In the summer of 2022, the OCND project team carried out a landscape questionnaire, targeting recreational users, landowners and land managers of the North Downs, against the backdrop of increased use of the area during and following Covid-19 lockdowns. The North Downs area saw ‘record numbers of visitors and increased crime and anti-social behaviour.’ The project had already invested in support to rural communities through the Downland Protection Initiative (DPI). This supported the Country Eye app to report on rural crime and Public Rights of Way issues, the Securing the Landscape Toolkit for landowners and managers and improved signage on PROWs and public sites. The survey gathered 99 responses through in-person and online survey across 15 questions. This provided a helpful indication of how often and for what purpose people visit the area, as well as levels of awareness of the DPI tools.

Key conclusions were that most of the respondents had made a recreational visit to the North Downs (89%) but did not live in the area (62%, but 94% from Kent overall). 25% of them were visiting the area more since the pandemic. 75 to 80% of them had seen evidence of fly-tipping or littering respectively in the North Downs, whilst levels of awareness of Securing the Landscape (24%) and Country Eye (34%) were relatively low. However, it is unclear if the results were cross referred

to see if where those who were aware of these DPI tools were from the area or not. Interestingly, 46% of the respondents were unable to provide one or two questions on the Countryside Code accurately. Awareness of the different habitats in the North Downs was more encouraging with nearly 60% of the responses identifying ancient woodlands and chalk grassland. General awareness of KCC wildlife initiatives was low at between 25 to 32%.



Whilst the report did not make specific recommendations, there was discussion of some actions in relation to the OCND project:

1. Covid led to changes in behaviour which saw significantly increased recreational use of the area.
2. Whilst most of this use does not cause a problem, other than through 'wear and tear' on the landscape and PROW infrastructure, rural crime and ASB continue to be a problem, as does a lack of awareness of the Countryside Code.
3. Landowners and managers report increased problems, but awareness of the DPI tools is still low, and so there is an opportunity for OCND partners to promote the Country Eye app and Securing the Landscape toolkit more actively. The need for this is demonstrated by 86% of survey respondents having seen rural crime, but only 11% of them had reported it via the app.

Kent Field Club transactions

Established in 1955, the Kent Field Club is the natural history society for Kent, with members who are professional experts and keen amateurs, all enjoying the observation of the county's wildlife together. The OCND team have published survey data in the club's transactions, volume 21, with a report under submission for volume 23.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

OVERVIEW

This section of the report provides detailed analysis of the qualitative evidence gathered from the project's participants and beneficiaries. The evidence was gathered by using a semi-structured interview approach, with a standard set of questions asked of each interviewee, and follow-up questions asked in line with the responses. The answers are not attributed to named individuals in this report, although it will be obvious in some cases where the feedback has come from. The analysis is structured around the questions asked of the different groups with evidence and quotes.

The evidence gathering approach is described below by detailing the stakeholder, method and questions asked. The analysis of the responses from each of the stakeholder groups follows this.

The questions used in the semi-structured interviews were:

1. What do you think went well and why?
2. What did not go so well and why?
3. What would you do differently next time and why?
4. What do you think has been the most significant outcome so far? Why?
5. What are your thoughts on the legacy of the OCND project?

Follow-up questions were asked in response to the answers to these initial questions. The interviews were typed as people spoke for later analysis.

What do you think went well and why?

The OCND Project Team

The project team received extremely positive feedback. They were particularly valued for:

- Being visible, on site and accessible making the time to get involved. There were particularly valued by landowners and land managers.
- Being proactive – connecting people - putting landowners in touch with contractors, for example, highlighting other funding partners could apply for, or promoting partners' events and walks as part of the OCND project
- Being knowledgeable – a resource of expertise and experience which all partners could draw on
- Being supportive – helping partners apply for funding
- Being inclusive – removing barriers to support and empower landowners ensuring they felt able and equipped to engage with the right networks, and ultimately, better manage their land.
- Running and organising the project well across multiple aspects – from practical site delivery to coordinating volunteer work parties and events, being resilient in the face of Covid

The OCND project team was viewed positively as being an enduring and constant support and resource over the project, and there was a real value in having a dedicated person they knew they could turn to for advice.

Multiple landowner partners described a desire to know how to manage land better, but not knowing who to get advice or support from or attempting to get that support (particularly from local authorities) and failing. The feeling of being unsupported prior to engagement by the OCND team was, in some cases, a source of mental health stress and anxiety, with landowners describing feeling 'overwhelmed' and 'anxious' about the state of their land:

"Other people have come and gone. Jenny and Lyndsay were both engaged and engaging. I can't praise them highly enough".

"They haven't just helped – they empowered you to do it yourself"

"Their inclusion is fantastic. I did feel really heard, understood and supported by (the OCND Project Team). That, to me, made a big difference."

The energy of the Project Team has rubbed off on others – partners described feeling empowered and enthused to drive the work forward.

"The whole (Project) team had a real tenacity to deliver – they were committed and determined for success."

The OCND team 'identity' came across strongly – branded t-shirts and a sense of working together was really positive.

The practical support, information and guidance to help landowners manage and care for the land to benefit wildlife and nature

This advice was widely and strongly valued across all the stakeholders. Those who had directly benefited from support and training – both from the OCND team themselves, and through provisions of workshops, education and generic training – were extremely positive about their experience. Examples given by grant recipients include being told about a plant identifying app which was really well received by the young people involved with that organisation.

Another grant recipient described how OCND project intervention had a bigger impact than they expected. Not only had project funding enabled them to repurpose some unused land and convert it to grazing, but the investment also helped reduced cost for the organisation (needed to buy less commercial feed) and improvement in animal welfare as a result (happier grazing animals, a more varied diet). Many grant recipients described surprise and pleasure in these unexpected benefits. For some, this outcome was helpful in justifying involvement with the project (e.g., to previously sceptical board members).

Some landowners were aware they lacked both the knowledge or capacity to manage their land appropriately and described feeling utterly overwhelmed and despondent about the state of their land. OCND provided the capital funding, practical support and links to contacts which means they were able to get their land back under control and are equipped and resilient enough to be able to continue that journey. One landowner commented:

"We haven't just had a grant, we've also had information, knowledge and practical help"

For another landowner, after 24 years attempting to manage the land with little support or external help, meeting the OCND team was transformative.

“We have had a lifetime without support. We would have sold and moved on because we couldn't cope. Now we can stay.”

The capital investment into sites, ecological reports and plans was transformative, with immediate benefits for nature, landowners and people.

Funded site assessments and specialist reports and management plans, with recommendations / plans for appropriate management, was resoundingly one of the biggest bonuses reported by interviewees.

One landowner stated that getting a Management Plan in place for the site has given weight and credibility to their aspirations for the ongoing management of the site:

“We now have evidence and justification for what needs to happen – they're not just random ideas.”

Recipients of capital work were positive about the quality of capital work undertaken. Strategic partners reflected on the benefit of the capital funding acting as a catalyst to attract further funding – for example, on one site, Natural England funding additional fencing on neighbouring plots.

Involvement with the project helped sustain and grow local contractor businesses – their networks and work increased, and they were also able to secure additional funding to fund a livestock trailer – which means they could transport greater numbers of livestock more efficiently and cheaply.

A number of grant recipients observed the capital investment resulting in increased engagement – for example, the creation of a new pond at one site was a big draw for visitors, giving enhanced opportunities for volunteering and engagement, as well as the ecological benefits of the pond itself.

Grant recipients described increased engagement opportunities directly attributable to the capital work: more people have been engaged with the site – from the website publicity to the physical improvements to the accessibility of the site which were funded by the project.

There has been a marked reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour, which the interviewee believed was largely due to the capital investment in hedgerows – described as ‘massively effective’ creating visible ‘ownership’ of sites as well as a physical deterrent.

The Project helped build and develop relevant skills and learning across all audiences – landowners, students, volunteers.

Almost all respondents celebrated the project having helped build skills, knowledge and expertise. From landowners reporting developing the knowledge by attending workshops and courses required to manage their land differently – volunteers developing specialist skills – or younger people learning more about the importance of the chalk landscape – the experience was positive.

One landowner described being so inspired after attending a course – she bought hedge cutting tools herself and has the confidence to use them.

“It has educated us” (landowner)

One partner, who worked with young people, observed:

“It was something a bit different” (for the young people).

A student volunteer described her involvement with the project as an opportunity to consolidate different aspects of her learning – with botanical surveys and rapid assessments and ID training noted as particularly valuable.

People found the training and events really useful. Skills-based training was particularly valuable – e.g., a tractor licence, specialist tools handling – as this provided a skilled resource back into the host organisation for future work. (One respondent would have liked the chalk grassland training to have been more in-depth.)

The “Securing the Landscape” toolkit was viewed as a great resource for landowners – although there was uncertainty on its uptake and use.

The Project was felt to have been successful in engaging more people and raising awareness across all project audiences

(Although most engagement work has had its challenges, and results have been mixed)

SCHOOLS ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The elements of schools’ engagement reported as positive by teaching staff included:

- Countryside Code training in schools especially popular/successful. Innovative and fun ways for children to learn – ‘dog poo’ sessions reported as highly successful and engaged. One interviewee praised the delivery team for their ingenuity in making a boring subject interesting and engaging.
- Workshops - couple of artists came in and worked directly with the children, taking them out to the wild areas directly outside their school – *“we felt that was really valuable”*, engaging both children and teachers, encouraging them to see things from a different perspective.
- Teacher training was *“fantastic!”* Teachers really valued the support to help teachers learn how to incorporate outdoor learning into the curriculum. There was great enthusiasm and gratitude for the capital work in the school – *“an entire outdoor classroom – it’s a glorified shed! But having a base for groups to gather outside, a shelter for all their stuff – all means we can use our woods more”*.
- Interviewees specifically mentioned the Forest Schools project delivered by Medway Country Partnership - getting a great uptake in a short space of time
- The education pack was seen as a really fabulous resource (this is on the OCND website)

STUDENT BURSARY SCHEME > PAID TRAINEESHIP > EMPLOYMENT

The reworking and evolution of the student bursary scheme into a paid trainee placement was ultimately positive and resulted in that person securing a full-time post in the sector. The OCND project team appreciated the flexibility to adapt plans after a lack of uptake – and everyone interviewed who was connected to this work described a challenging, and at times frustrating journey, but one which had an overwhelmingly positive outcome.

LANDOWNER AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

This was reported as a real success across multiple interviewees. One observed:

“There was exceptional good will from landowners and commitment from them to see it through”.

“Partners were very much engaged.”

WIDER ENGAGEMENT – SOCIAL MEDIA, RESILIENCE AND RESPONSE TO COVID

Both the project delivery team and partners described the impact of Covid on engagement – despite the challenges, Covid had been a catalyst of innovation as the team sought new opportunities to engage. Interviewees described the positive results:

“The project did digital engagement well despite the challenges - we hit social media hard through multiple different campaigns (Species of the Week, the Wildlife Trust’s “30 days wild in June” – picking up and adding an Old Chalk ‘spin’ to other social media initiatives to make it relevant to Chalk Grassland – exploring new ideas such as digital mapping and videos – just finding those different ways of interacting with people.”

A real success of the project was improved networking and connections amongst people and organisations

This was consistently described by almost all of the beneficiaries of the OCND – but in particular the connections between landowners, contractors and partner organisations.

The benefit for landowners being introduced to a network of private contractors – who can help them manage the site in a way which has positive outcomes for nature – and the fact that the OCND project has supported landowners in working with those contractors – e.g., the project team acting as the intermediary/critical friend between contractor and landowner – was consistently raised as a positive result of the project.

Landowners being introduced to nearby landowners in the project area – either directly or through events – was highly valued. One landowner mused:

“Why wasn’t this done earlier?” (i.e., pre OCND)”

Another landowner commented:

“The networking has been really positive. We’ve gone from knowing no one, to knowing almost everyone, that was a real positive.”

Almost all landowners described the positive experience of developing relationships with other organisations and networks who they can learn from – i.e., those who work on a larger scale with volunteers. They described a real desire and willingness of others to both provide and receive support.

A number of landowners (of public sites) observed that their involvement with the project gave them an opportunity and reason to connect with the community which they wouldn’t have done otherwise – which has been a really positive result and enabled them to increase the visibility of their core work.

What went well: reflections of strategic partners (not the OCND team)

Strategic partners commented on the added benefit of the project leveraging/contributing/complementing wider work – e.g., learning from tree guard work can be used elsewhere.

Another strategic partner reflected:

“The theme of connection - connecting landscape from a habitat point of view - really helped us identify the areas which needed to be looked at and improved, how best to connect them to the right people, and working with the OCND project team to bring them together. Landowners and farmers were the focus for that connectivity – and the net result was benefits to the habitat.”

What did not go so well and why?

Impact of Covid and other external events

Covid significantly impacted the engagement plans – in particular the delivery of schools’ workshops. Even as Covid eased, schools were hyper-cautious about delivering events in-school or leaving school grounds for external activities. However, the project team were able to flex and respond innovatively, delivering more engagement digitally, online. A project team member observed:

“I felt really supported in regrouping and working out how to deliver our objectives differently. There was no pause in the work. We just got on with it.”

Brexit and environmental places not being in place has really impacted on landowners e.g., the uncertainty around ELMS.

Steering group, partners and personnel issues

- The Steering Group could have been stronger and more effective (partners)
- Interruptions to staffing – both within the OCND project team and wider partners (expressed by partners and the project team)
- The time and capacity needed to deliver the project commitments were higher than anticipated (particularly expressed by partners)

Steering Group members observed that the Steering Group could have been more effective. It was not always well attended and should have provided more support to the project team but did not. This was due to staff changes within partners plus impact of Covid.

There were multiple interruptions to the staffing of the OCND team, with resignations of several project staff, including the project manager, who had led the project from inception, with resultant delays of recruitment and struggling to recruit. This was also reported more widely across delivery and strategic partners, with several interviewees concluding that contingencies need to be made to ensure continuity in the event of staff changes: avoid reliance on one person, share learning across the team, ensure proper handovers, and the need to ensure strategic buy-in with partners.

The delay between development and delivery stages, which, combined with Covid, meant a number of schools and other partners were lost and had to be replaced.

Steering Group member observed that the resource and capacity needed to deliver landowner engagement well was far more time consuming than expected – but because it was a key pillar of the work, it was important to get it right. Perhaps next time, we should be less ambitious, focus on quality, and not over-promise simply to secure the funding.

In a similar vein, delivery partners expressed the commitment was more than they had expected, and in some cases, this had been a source of stress – almost to the point of withdrawing from the project.

Promotion and visibility of the project across all stakeholders - lack of awareness of the project until late on.

Multiple partners (grant funding recipients, some landowners) - didn't find out about the project until quite late on, with the result that the capital works and finding volunteers to deliver the work was rushed. One partner reflected:

"I wish we'd known about it sooner".

Securing and maintaining partnership buy-in through the duration of development and delivery stages

Getting, and keeping partners on board. One interviewee explained the challenges faced in getting his organisation to agree to being involved in the project. The main concerns were around:

- Staff capacity to be involved in a time-consuming project
- That the work was a distraction from their core business
- Challenges convincing their organisation that the project interventions were appropriate for their particular landholding
- Concern about, and reluctance to sign up to the cost and resource implications of a 10-year post-project maintenance plan for the site.

Some project elements didn't work as well as expected, and had to be adapted, some quite radically.

For example, the engagement work with schools, and the plans to work with travelling communities. However, the team was able to adapt quickly to rework plans and ensure the outcomes of the project were still achieved.

STUDENT BURSARY SCHEME

This was time consuming and impacted the project, including the Student Bursary Scheme where there was a lack of traction. This was redeveloped as a paid traineeship.

Uptake of the Bursary Scheme was extremely poor due to a range of reasons, the majority out of the OCNDs control. However, more detailed workup at development stage may have anticipated and mitigated some of the challenges which were faced.

One interviewee described challenges in obtaining data, including baseline monitoring data for the sites. There was an observation that the project would have benefited from a system to collect the baseline data, which is easily accessible by all relevant parties (ensuring an easy handover of login

information in the event of staff changes, for example), would have made the process more efficient.

CHALLENGES WITH THE SCHOOLS EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Some of the activities weren't ideal for large groups out of school grounds, needing resources and preparation. It would have been better to focus on sessions requiring fewer resources and working outside the grounds. The feedback led to things being changed, but some of the activities in there - e.g., hammering nails into wood – just didn't really work.

A lot based on forest schools don't work well with larger groups.

One-off, whole-school workshops run by external providers were less successful – these needed a pre-workshop and follow-up to provide context and embed the learning.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMS WERE NOT ALWAYS EFFECTIVE

Comms between partners and externally didn't always work well, and would have benefited from some additional resource, shared branding and someone central disseminating the information across partners. Some partners described a lack of comms resource within their own organisation, meaning their partner organisation missed opportunities to promote and celebrate the work of the OCND project.

The impact of this was probably reflected in one of the comments regularly made during the evaluation interviews: that it wasn't until the close of project conference that people realised just how wide and varied the whole project was.

What would you do differently next time and why?

Summary reflections and points

- **Be more realistic (targeted) in ambition**
 - **Have more of a plan from the start**
 - **Collect the right data from the start**
 - Don't overpromise to secure the funding
 - Less time pontificating, more time delivering, would make it more manageable
- "We needed more focus at the start, to be better at making decisions, being clearer about capacity and realistic deadlines."*
- **Mitigate impact of staff churn project.** Possibly look at making the project roles less tightly defined to allow for flex and shared knowledge.
 - Ensure appropriate contingency planning and sharing of knowledge and project status in the event of staff changes
 - **Think about the legacy sooner in the project**
 - **Build in time/funding to cover back-office functions / admin / finance** – was a big drain on the host organisation

- One partner reflected that commitment to the project should have been embedded in their organisational plans at strategic level. The partnership agreement was too generic.

GRANT RECIPIENTS, LANDOWNERS AND CONTRACTORS:

- Wish they'd found out about the project sooner! This would have made it less stressful to secure contractors and deliver the capital improvements to their sites.
- One interviewee wished he'd used the staff time for advice and support more.
- One interviewee said more in-depth chalk grassland training would have been useful.
- Another landowner said:
"With hindsight, I wish we'd been cheekier and asked for more money to do more things!"
- A strategic partner in the local authority observed:
"We would have got better outcomes if we had involved members from all teams with a potential interest – across protected sites, farming, woodlands section, getting the right input and managing that from the start."

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCHOOLS COMPONENT

Everyone involved in the school's component was keen to praise the school's engagement project whilst also offering positive and helpful comments on how this might have been delivered more successfully. It is clear from interviews that there would be benefit to doing a more thorough analysis of the learning from this component. However, the conclusion of this evaluation process is that there would have been merit in a more thorough design and test stage with co-creation and full buy-in from the schools involved. Putting schools at the forefront of designing the school's component will help ensure all delivery and resources in schools could be implemented as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The message came across strongly that it was critical to develop the schools offer with schools, finalise a plan and communicate it to schools well in advance. Teachers need a clear understanding of what's on offer, teachers are busy, it needs building into the programme well in advance if it's to be effective.

What do you think has been the most significant outcome so far and why?

Chalk grassland restoration and extension

- The visible improvement to the appearance of the Chalk Downs – objectives achieved.
- Strategic partners felt this has been achieved - on quite a big scale – sites are largely well connected, and the sense that we have landowner buy-in for the future.
- Interviewees reflected on the capital work having acted as the catalyst for volunteers and people to come together.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

- Some really important tree work has been undertaken which will help habitats in SSSIs despite challenges from climate change.
- Delivery partners reflected on how some of the capital investment in sites had been realised in a short space of time, although it was acknowledged a longer project time was necessary to properly evaluate the benefits:

“By 2020 we had a pond dug, the outcomes are phenomenal! It’s scoring 6/10 for biodiversity – bearing in mind it was only 1.5 years old when it was assessed!”

Tools and resources developed through the project which can be used in future

- **Connectivity grants** – have been critical in helping to study the area and understand how to manage it in the face of climate change. EG discussions about impact of extreme weather conditions and how best to manage - which they didn't know before. Developing that real understanding of the habitat.
- **Schools equipped and motivated to deliver more outdoor activities.**
- **Student bursary scheme developed into a trainee scheme which ultimately acted as a pathway into employment.**
- **Development of the chalk grassland condition assessment** – a simple tool with an information pack to make it accessible and useable for landowners.
- There's a 10-year **Management Plan in place for the site**, giving them a clear steer for the priorities for the future.

Built networks and contacts

These have enabled participants to secure expertise and input into how to manage their land/site.

- **Farmer clusters** - enabled by the project - really important to continue
- **Collaborative working, sharing knowledge, expertise and contacts** are crucial for the future and the environment. Landowners are supported, empowered, shared experience, grazing animals, equipment, expertise, all contributing to the wellbeing of an isolated farming community - really important:
“We really have to do it together”.
- Sustainability of landowner businesses as a result - – sustainable business growth with network and knowledge to build on that business model

Community and Social Outcomes

“Developing and supporting our community would be number one, because that impacts on everything else”

- Reduction in rural crime
- Increased Countryside Code awareness in children/increasing their knowledge of the chalk and the specialist biodiversity of chalk habitats

“Telling them that chalk is made of millions of tiny sea creatures caught their imagination - this was the sort of knowledge the children retained”

What are your thoughts on the legacy of the OCND project?

Four main themes came through the interviews:

- Networks and contacts will endure
- The new Farmer Cluster
- Knowledge and skills development
- Youth and schools’ engagement

“The legacy is the connection between people”

- For landowners and land managers, the most significant outcomes were resoundingly around building networks, as well as the capital work on their sites:
- Networking and connectivity between partners/other landowners/contractors – having a network of people and organisations they now know they can work with in the future, and where to turn for help
- Greater skills
- Pride and a sense of achievement in knowing that their efforts and interventions have actively increased and improved the size, extent and condition of chalk habitats
- Partners have been supported and encouraged to source and secure external funding to continue the legacy of the project.
- **Youth and schools’ legacy** – engaged children, teachers equipped with knowledge and resources and confidence to deliver more learning outside using nature
- **Raised profile for organisations involved**, both with local community and new/potential partners. For example, Natural England is working with one site to explore the possibility of it becoming a NNR after years of neglect.
- The type of support and intervention which is most valued requires ongoing external funding and staff capacity.
- The OCND has set up partnerships and contacts with the schools which will hopefully endure - e.g., some schools are commissioning them to do follow-up work.
- The **teacher workshops were the real legacy** - equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge to give them confidence to deliver outdoors was the main goal and is where sustainability lies.
- The school’s pack/education resources will remain available and hopefully will be used. The company who created the schools pack has used the pack in other schools outside the project area.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

- There was a real sense of sadness that there was **no continuity, or progression, for students and volunteers** – and that all the positive work the project had achieved is now at risk of being wasted.
- There was concern expressed that sites which had been invested in should have **ongoing monitoring and management in future** if there was to be lasting and significant change to habitats, and those charged with management and maintenance are monitored to ensure this is done.
- One interviewee reflected that **the greatest impact occurred with smaller, private landowners** who had been personally inspired and supported to work differently. It was sometimes harder to effect change with the larger landowners, who may have less scope to significantly alter their land management practices.
- Give careful thought to volunteer motivations, removing access and building a rewarding, inclusive volunteering practice. Equipping volunteers and students with the practical skills they need to thrive in the sector and support their career progression was a particularly positive element of this project.
- **Remove barriers to access volunteering:** e.g., paying volunteers expenses is unusual, but definitely increases uptake.
- The importance of **offering a supportive, inclusive and accessible** way for people to increase their technical knowledge in a supportive environment.



Delegates at the OCND End of Project Conference.

APPENDIX

The detailed approved activities, outputs and outcomes for the OCND project were as follows.

	SECTION ONE: MANAGING THE OCND		
1.1	Land Restoration Volunteer Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
LR: CG	Practical Habitat Management Chalk Grassland Management	Amount of work achieved: 6. Area cleared or restored 7. Number of trees coppiced or pollarded 8. Number of ponds restored 9. Length of hedge planted 10. Number of volunteers attending, skills learnt/improved, knowledge gained, better understanding.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved habitat connectivity through the project area, ensuring species can move more freely from one area to another. 2. Restore and protect the natural heritage and historic character of the area 3. Connect people to their natural environment 4. People learn new skills and better understanding of their natural heritage using the different types of habitats as a medium to do so.
LR: CGW	Practical Habitat Management Chalk Grassland Wildflower Management		
LR: HP	Practical Habitat Management Hedge Planting / Laying		
LR: WG	Practical Habitat Management Woodland Glade Clearance		
LR: WT	Practical Habitat Woodland & Tree Management		
HR: PC	Practical Habitat Management Pond Creation & Management		
	Practical Habitat Management Ragwort Management		
	Habitat Corridor Restoration - Ongoing survey and habitat improvement plan for restoration of important corridors for Biodiversity.		

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

CK: LMVC1	Volunteer Coordination Programme - Coordination of Volunteer Groups on practical management tasks	Amount of work achieved: 6. Area cleared or restored 7. Number of trees coppiced or pollarded 8. Number of ponds restored 9. Length of hedge planted 10. Number of volunteers attending, skills learnt/improved, knowledge gained, better understanding.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordination of practical work on target areas identified during the development phase of the project 2. Liaison with Conservation Groups to support habitat management 3. KWT & Plantlife staff will supervise volunteer groups to carry out habitat management on own sites. 4. Provide students, landowners and volunteers with an opportunity to learn new skills, connect with their natural heritage and help secure new career opportunities. 5. Opportunity to meet new people and socialise.
1.2	Land Management Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
PF: LM1	Land Management Package will be available to all landowners whose land falls within Priority One target areas or provides important links to them. The funding will help towards capital works that will improve management in line with the project's aim.	2. Complete at least 10 packages a year and carry out monitoring of these sites annually.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide landowners with an opportunity to receive advice and guidance in managing their land for habitat connectivity and conservation benefits to protect the area's natural heritage. 2. Provide opportunities for condition assessment to be made to monitor progress and create new engagement opportunities on site.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

CW: LMGF1	OCND Connectivity Grant Fund - This grant will be available to landowners, schools and community groups to apply for funding for works that will enhance or create habitat or improve access in the project area.	2. 22 Connectivity Grants awarded / approve four applications per year.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide an opportunity to apply for funding specific projects 2. Support projects that will create or restore habitat, improve access or help people engage with the OCND heritage
1.2	Land Surveying and Monitoring Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
PF: LSM1	Survey and Monitoring Element of Land Management Packages - Packages offered to all landowners in the project area especially those that link OCND target areas to offer help in the form of advice or assistance to produce suitable management plan or to apply for funding. The pack will include details and best practice in line with the B-Lines initiative.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Complete at least 10 packages a year C 4. Carry out monitoring of these sites annually. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Provide help and assistance in managing land to help improve the habitat connectivity across the project area 6. Provide help with the B-Lines initiative 7. Give landowners insight into how their land forms an integral part of the natural heritage of the area and importance of protecting for future generations
PF: LSM2	Habitat Evaluation and Monitoring Programme - Indicator Species Survey Programme	Production of an effective, simple to use survey technique and programme. Data integrated into the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a mechanism to evaluate progress towards achieving habitat connectivity and measure habitat quality
PF: LSM3	Historic Hedgerow Survey Programme - Set up and manage coordinated survey programme using online interactive map to upload survey data (already created) provide initial training and on-going support to participants including students and local conservation volunteer groups	Ground truth of at least 50% of target hedgerows surveyed and 20 volunteers trained.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide quality information about the status of hedgerows in the area which will direct management and protection

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

PF: LSM4	Re-run of the Habitat Connectivity Assessment Tool	Completion of assessments. Data integrated into the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	1. Provide a way to evaluate the project's progress on habitat connectivity, to ensure best results
	SECTION TWO: LEARNING ABOUT OCND		
2.1	Knowledge: Education and Training Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
PF: LASW4	School Seasonal Workshops - Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter Workshops run with five schools identified in the project area to connect children to their natural heritage through outdoor learning	150 workshops delivered to 35000 students across 13 school, exceeding project goals by 87%.	1. Provide children with an opportunity to become involved in outdoor learning to connect with their natural heritage and develop new interests and skills
PF: LASB6	Student Bursary Scheme and Traineeship At least 20 students to apply for funding and carry out project work in the project area OR at least 1 nine-month traineeship. Where applicable Data integrated into the KMBRC	7. Total 51 students engaged 8. One nine-month traineeship completed leading to full time employment within KCC 9. Three, three-month traineeships supported across partner sites 10. Two Student bursaries granted 11. Four short course student bursaries awarded 12. 41 students in attendance across 5 OCND short courses.	It will provide students with an opportunity to apply for funding to help with expenses when carrying out project work and course work in the project area in line with the project's aims and objectives. [favourable outcomes for the students and for the project]
PF: LAPW7	SPECIFIC AUDIENCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING The Importance of Pollinators Workshop - Workshop tailored to individual audiences	At least 8 people to attend courses	It will provide all participants with the knowledge they will need to change the way they manage their land for the benefits of pollinators and to apply for funding to enter into a ten-year agreement to secure the management practice.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

PF: LAES8	SPECIFIC AUDIENCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING Ecosystem Services Training Day - How to use these services to plan for the future	At least 8 people to attend courses	It will provide participants with the knowledge and skill they need to make informed planning decisions in the future.
PF: LATT9	SPECIFIC AUDIENCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING Teacher Training Outdoor Learning	At least 8 teachers to attend courses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide teachers with an opportunity to learn techniques and develop skills specifically in outdoor learning 2. Ensure that teachers will be able to provide this learning technique beyond the end of the project, sustaining project's aims
PF: LAGF10	INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION AND TRAINING Chalk Grassland Fun, Trosley Country Park	At least 8 people to attend each event	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A more informal fun day event to attract audiences that are not aware of the OCND or do not understand or have little knowledge of it
PF: LAES11	INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION AND TRAINING Eye Spy ID Days Leybourne Lakes, Trosley Country Park, Ranscombe Farm, Birling Estate, Boxley Warren	At least 8 people to attend each event	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aimed at children and younger audiences and families 2. Help people with little or no knowledge to engage with their natural heritage through ID days including wildflowers, pollinators and insects
PF: LAED12	INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION AND TRAINING Summer/Winter Education Days	At least 8 people to attend each event	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aimed at children and younger audiences and families 2. Help people with little or no knowledge to engage with their

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

			natural heritage through ID days including wildflowers, pollinators and insects
PF: LAIS13	HIGHER LEVEL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Invertebrate Study Day Ranscombe Farm	At least 8 people to attend each event	For audiences with an understanding and knowledge of their natural heritage, will help towards increased levels of knowledge to help with studies or towards career progression
PF: LAWS14	HIGHER LEVEL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Wildflower Study Day Ranscombe Farm	At least 8 people to attend each event	For audiences with an understanding and knowledge of their natural heritage, will help towards increased levels of knowledge to help with studies or towards career progression
PF: LABT15	HIGHER LEVEL EDUCATION AND TRAINING Brushcutter Training Course	At least 8 people to attend each event	For audiences with an understanding and knowledge of their natural heritage, will help towards increased levels of knowledge to help with studies or towards career progression
2.2	Volunteer Surveys	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
LA: VSSC	Volunteer Survey Scheme Coordination - Set up and manage coordinated surveys using Indicator Survey Programme Guidance using students and local conservation volunteer groups.	At least 40 surveys to be carried out through the delivery phase. Data integrated into the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre	It will provide students and volunteers with an opportunity to learn new skills connect with their natural heritage and help secure new career opportunities. Repeated surveys will give the participant valuable experience. Opportunity to meet new people and socialise.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

PF: LAVS16	Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Run species monitoring training events.	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	Provide students and volunteers with new skills, connection to natural heritage and secure new career opportunities
PF: LAPS	Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Pollinator Survey Techniques.	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide students and volunteers with new skills, connection to natural heritage and secure new career opportunities 2. Opportunities to socialise
CK: LAHC	Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Hedge Laying Course	At least 8 people are trained during the project's delivery.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities to develop an interest or learn new skills to help secure new career opportunities 2. Provides opportunities to socialise, stay active and improve well-being
PF: LAHS17	Techniques: Practical, Survey and Monitoring Activities Volunteer Survey Scheme Training - Hedgerow surveying	At least 12 people trained during the project's delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide students and volunteers with new skills, connection to natural heritage and secure new career opportunities
2.3	Promotion and Media Activities	Desired outputs / measurement	Desired outcomes
PF: LAMW18	Create and Manage OCND Website	Creation of the website Website visits	The public can be kept informed of the project's progress and upcoming courses, events and open days.
PF: LAIM19	OCND Interactive Map - 'Your Place in the Past' Develop interactive map as part of the main website containing all data from Map Regression Analysis completed in Development Phase.	At least 200 visited site, at least 20 people contributed to site	Map will include photos, stories and history of specific areas which will be displayed when clicked on. New data can be added to the map to create a historic database, will enable new information to be added to the

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

			webpage throughout the project. Historical data will be available to planning authorities and Parish Councils.
PF: LAEB20	Facebook, Twitter & Email Updates & E Bulletin: OCND Project Updates Provide KCC's Promotion Team with regular news articles for the website	At least 6 articles released	The public can be kept informed of the project's progress and upcoming courses, events and open days
PF: LASF	Facebook, Twitter and email, review on-line discussions weekly; respond to individuals if required to do so	Note positive and negative comments	The public can be kept informed of the project's progress and upcoming courses, events and open days
PMPL1	PROJECT LAUNCH - LEYBOUNRE LAKES COUNTRY PARK Welcome event to promote project and attract interest from potential landowners and volunteers.	4 Number of attendees 5 Number of contacts added to list 6 Feedback from people at the event	The launch event will increase awareness of the project, It will provide potential volunteers with an opportunity to express an interest, It will provide local businesses with an opportunity to help with the project to promote positive PR, It will provide farmers and landowners with information about the project and how they can get involved and apply for funding. Provide students with information about the project and how they can become involved and apply for funding through student bursary, Opportunity to meet new people and socialise.

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

PMVC2	Volunteer Celebration Summer BBQ Thank you event for existing volunteer groups to meet and opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Morning of practical management followed by BBQ.	4 Number of attendees 5 Number of contacts added to list 6 Feedback from people at the event	It will give existing groups the chance to catch up and discuss what they have achieved and share good practise, it will provide volunteers with an opportunity to learn new skills and meet new people and get active
PMVC3	Volunteer Celebration Winter Warmer Thank you event for existing volunteer groups to meet and opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Morning of practical management followed by Bonfire & Food	4 Number of attendees 5 Number of contacts added to list 6 Feedback from people at the event	It will give existing groups the chance to catch up and discuss what they have achieved and share good practise, it will provide volunteers with an opportunity to learn new skills and meet new people and get active
PMPC4	Project Completion Celebration Event Thank you event to everyone involved in the project from start to finish	4 Number of attendees 5 Number of contacts added to list 6 Feedback from people at the event	The event will provide the opportunity to thank everyone involved in the project and to promote the good work we have achieved
	SECTION THREE: ACCESSING THE OCND		
PF: DPP31	Downland Protection Initiative	Number of incidents responded to and solved.	Need identified during Parish Council workshops (rural crime, nuisance and dumping / fly tipping)
CW: AIP	Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)	Completion of plan, number of routes improved.	Improved and more accessible Public Rights of Way Network providing access to the OCND project area and key sites
CW: TCP	On Site Self-Guided Trails	Completion of plan, number of routes improved.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Improve existing and create new walking routes to highlight the natural heritage of the area 2 Specific works to create heritage trails E.G., at Trosley Country Park

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

CK4	Trosley Guided Spring Walk	At least 8 people on the walk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Topics centred on the park's history and the North Downs. 2 Provide opportunity to learn about natural heritage, meet new people and socialise.
CK5	Trosley Guided Autumn Walk	At least 8 people on the walk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Topics centred on the park's history and the North Downs. 2 Learn about natural heritage, meet new people and socialise.
PF:AOBW26	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Bee Walk	Not specified	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Attract more people, cover a chalk theme. 2 Learn about natural heritage, meet new people and socialise.
PF: AOCW27	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Chalk Walk	Not specified	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Attract more people, cover a chalk theme. 2 Learn about natural heritage, meet new people and socialise.
PF: AOBW28	Ranscombe Farm Led Walks - Butterfly Walk	Not specified	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Attract more people, cover a chalk theme. 2 Learn about natural heritage, meet new people and socialise.
PF: AOPWS29	Parish Walks	At least 2 Parishes to promote routes in their area and include on website	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Work with Parish Councils to update and promote existing Parish walking routes. 2 Encourage walking to re-connect with the areas natural heritage and promote the Parish and OCND.
Project Meetings and Partnership Working			

EVALUATION REPORT FOR OLD CHALK, NEW DOWNS

	Project Steering Group Meetings	Number of meetings held	Ensure effective management of the OCND project
Generic Activities			
EM1	Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Sustainability Programme	Programme set up, reviewed and report written.	1 Provide details of who are audience is and how successful the project has been in helping them engage in the project and connecting to their natural heritage.
PMPD	Create and update OCND Project contact database as a result of workshops, roadshow events and online surveys.	At least 200 people on database	1 Keep public informed of the project's progress and upcoming courses, events and open days.