

## PRESS RELEASE

**30 April 2025**

### **New National Nature Reserve Launched in Kent as part of the King's Series**

- A week of celebrations to mark new North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve
- **Events take place 24–31 May**, with official **unveiling under embargo until 30 May**
- National Nature Reserve will be first of its kind to include organic vineyard and extensive reach/access
- What is the North Kent Woods and Downs NNR? <https://shorturl.at/OsxNt>

A wide partnership of organisations will launch a new National Nature Reserve (NNR) in Kent as part of the exclusive King's Series of National Nature Reserves on 30th May at a special unveiling\*.

A series of collaborative events from 24 to 31 May will celebrate the new North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve and engage the local community with the remarkable landscapes on their doorstep, ahead of its official unveiling.

This groundbreaking NNR, full of internationally important wildlife, is the first of its kind to be made up of such a wide partnership of private landowners and public land managers, it is also the first to be partnership led.

The North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve has earned national status because it is one of the very best nature conservation sites in England. It unites a mosaic of ancient woodlands, vineyards and chalk grasslands in a rich historic environment and cultural landscape, where people have lived and farmed for millennia. Declared as one of the King's Series of NNRs is recognition the area is nationally important and will be managed in perpetuity as one of the best places for nature to thrive.

The key areas of the NNR lie within the Kent Downs National Landscape within the Gravesham and Medway Council areas. The NNR programme unites core and affiliate partners across the landscape including Shorne Woods Country Park, Ashenbank Wood, Cobham Woods, Cobham and Cuxton Woodland, Ranscombe Farm and Silverhand Estate, the largest single organic and carbon-negative vineyard in the UK. These areas incorporate the partnership between private enterprises and local authorities such as Natural England, The National Trust, Woodland Trust, Kent County Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Plantlife and the West Kent Downs Countryside Trust.

An important objective of the North Kent Woods and Downs NNR is to offer easier access to the area for visitors. The reserve is within five miles of 400,000 people — including communities with a diverse representation of ethnicity — and within an hour's drive for over eight million, offering access to nature on an unprecedented scale.

Nick Johannsen FLI, Director of The Kent Downs National Landscape said: “We’re so proud this reserve has been given national status and chosen as part of the King’s Series as it encompasses nationally and internationally important habitats. This is a new model National Nature Reserve, much larger than previous NNRs and with many more partners, this means we can recover nature at a ‘landscape scale’. The NNR is crucial for the conservation of numerous plant and animal species. These include up to 2,000 ancient and veteran trees, some older than 500 years, which are internationally significant for countless species. The woodlands are home to a mosaic of habitats from rare beetles and bats to delicate lichens and fungi and the more familiar spring woodland flowers including our much-loved bluebells. These wooded areas are surrounded by wildflower meadows and chalk grasslands providing homes for flagship species including, orchids, the Maidstone mining bee, Hazel dormouse and skylarks.

“The North Kent Downs and Woods NNR programme is unique as it isn’t enlarging an existing NNR, instead the managers of some of the best sites for wildlife in England have committed to work together for nature recovery and connect their land to become a new NNR. Our partnership is made up of public, charity and community land managers and private landowner partners who have a shared vision for the NNR and will collaborate in areas such as grazing projects, expanding wild flower management, controlling pests and diseases, engaging people and promoting access along with a joint approach on planning the next generation of veteran trees.

“We are excited that the project has continued to unite partners by offering a series of events during National Nature Reserve Week. These events will showcase this amazing landscape and share with visitors the beauty of the reserve to be preserved for future generations.

“The partnership will ensure this landscape is a living legacy and a vital network for wildlife to survive and flourish. Spanning more than 20km<sup>2</sup> of diverse and ecologically significant land, the NNR is a sanctuary for nature, ensuring a balanced and thriving ecosystem. It safeguards the future of the land for all its habitats and for the communities who enjoy and care for them.”

Ben Sweeney, Ranscombe Farm Reserve Manager, Plantlife: “It is truly exciting that Ranscombe Farm, Plantlife’s flagship nature reserve, is now part of such a concerted effort to bring together conservation, community and sustainable land use at the landscape scale. Ranscombe Farm, a wonderful patchwork of arable fields, ancient woodland and chalk grasslands, is a globally significant place for wild plants and other wildlife. Not only is Ranscombe the last wild UK site for Corncockle, it also harbours the largest population of the endangered Broad-leaved cudweed and a wide variety of rare wild orchids. But it is much more than just a treasure trove of rare and threatened plants; visitors are welcome to enjoy 10 miles of footpaths through the mosaic of habitats covering over 600 acres and marvel at the stunning displays of poppies in June and July.”

The ambition for the NNR partnership is to make a positive change at landscape scale and enhance the vitality of these communities, giving them greater access and awareness of first-class green spaces on their doorstep. Some of Kent’s more deprived areas fall within five miles of the NNR. The social ambitions of the partners include linking the landscape and its urban residents and inviting them to discover what is on their doorstep.

**ENDS**

### **Notes to editors:**

The Kent Downs National Landscape is the co-ordinating body for the North Kent Woods and Downs NNR, working closely with partners to lead its delivery, promotion, and long-term care. This project unites numerous core and affiliate partners across the landscape, including Natural England, the National Trust, Woodland Trust, Kent County Council, Medway Council and Plantlife, Silverhand Estate, Gravesham Borough Council, and the West Kent Downs Countryside Trust, Birling Estate, Forestry England, Kent Downs National Landscape, Shorne Parish Council, Vineyard Farms Ltd, Tarmac and Forestry England.

The King's Series of National Nature Reserves will see five declarations every year for the next five years – 25 in total. A collection of sites designated for their exceptional ecological value during the reign of King Charles III, these reserves celebrate the very best of England's landscapes. North Kent Woods and Downs has been declared as one of the 'King's Series' of National Nature Reserves. The King's Series of NNRs, the first of which was declared in honour of His Majesty The King's Coronation, is a commitment made by the Government to declare 25 significant new National Nature Reserves over a 5-year period in recognition of His Majesty's longstanding passion for the natural environment.

The partnership was assisted by National Highways who, through their Designated Funds scheme, provided significant funding to allow a detailed research and evidence base programme to develop the National Nature Reserve submission and management documents. The Designated Funds also funded a series of projects which enhanced nature on the ground as the NNR submission was being prepared.

### **Additional partner quotes available for media use:**

- **Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport for Kent County Council**, said: "At the heart of the National Nature Reserve is a partnership working together as one area, sharing work, knowledge and planning for the whole ecosystem to be connected as opposed to working in individual areas. Shorne Woods and Trosley Country Parks are part of the NNR and are home to flagship species such as orchids, arable plants, dormice, great crested newts and spectacular veteran trees, each playing a vital role in the ecosystem."
- **Gary Smith, CEO, Silverhand Estate**: *"We are delighted to be a part of and working alongside the NNR. Sustainability, regenerative farming and protection of the landscape is at the heart of everything we do on our Estate. The work our conservation team does has had an enormously positive impact on the local landscape and we are excited to be able to share this with the community going forward."*
- **Cllr Emma Morley, Gravesham Borough Council's cabinet member for operational services**: *"We are blessed to have such beautiful and historically significant landscapes within our borough, which are rightly being recognised through the creation of this NNR. Nature does not recognise human boundaries, and so we look forward to working with the various partners and colleagues to protect and nurture this extensive, beautiful and fascinatingly varied reserve, allowing generations to come to enjoy its beauty."*

- **Jenny Scholfield, Regional Director at the Woodland Trust:**

*"We are delighted that Ashenbank Wood, a SSSI site with ancient woodland, veteran trees and home to rare and declining species including the hazel dormouse, is part of the new National Nature Reserve in North Kent. For over 40 years Woodland Trust has been caring for and managing this site for trees, wildlife and people and we are pleased that Ashenbank is recognised and protected as an important part of the Kent landscape as part of this initiative. We are looking forward to further collaboration with the NNR partners to strengthen our efforts for nature recovery across this unique landscape."*

- **Jonathan Ireland, Lead Ranger at National Trust, Cobham Woods:** *"Cobham Wood's inclusion in the North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve is a significant step in safeguarding one of Kent's most precious landscapes. This ancient woodland, home to centuries-old veteran trees and a rich diversity of wildlife, provides a vital habitat for rare species, from saproxylic invertebrates to nesting birds. Through this pioneering partnership and shared learnings, we can ensure the continued restoration of its historic wood pasture, allowing nature to flourish while welcoming visitors to experience its beauty firsthand. By working together across a landscape scale, we are creating a connected and resilient environment where biodiversity can thrive, ensuring Cobham Wood is protected for future generations to explore and enjoy."*

### **Interview opportunities and media links**

- [Photo library link](#)
- [Video link](#)
- [Map of the NNR and partners](#)
- [Events Kent Downs link](#)
- Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England (at the launch event only). Jim Seymour, Deputy Director, Natural England.
- Jonathan Ireland, National Trust – On site at Cobham woodland and Cobham Mausoleum with veteran trees and access with 4x4 ranger
- Silverhand Estate – Gary Smith CEO/Will Moreno, Conservation Manager
- Plantlife – Ben Sweeney, Ranscombe Farm Reserve Manager
- Shorne Woods Country Park, Tim Bell, Kent Country Parks Manager. Good shots of visitors, events, pond-dipping, accessibility and more.

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### **EVENTS**

There will be a series of events held across the NNR areas to celebrate its new status and invite visitors outside to enjoy. Here is a list of events confirmed.

**Link:** [Events and Activities - Kent Downs](#)

- Saturday 24 May
  - Moth Trapping with Kent Wildlife Trust
- Sunday 25 May
  - Cobham highlights walk with the National Trust (tbc)
- Monday 26 May:
  - Lost Village of Dode Walk and Talk
  - Exploratory Walk-through Leisure Plots
  - Refuge in Movement - Guided 10 Mile Trail Run
- Tuesday 27 May
  - Falconry with Joe's Bows at Shorne Woods Country Park
- Wednesday 28 May
  - Cuxton to Luddesdown Weekday Walk
  - Pond Dipping at Shorne Woods Country Park
  - Cobham Woods and Darnley Mausoleum guided walks with National Trust Ranger.
- Thursday 29 May
  - Orchid Odyssey: A wildflower walk at Ranscombe
- Friday 30 May
  - Shorne Woods Country Park Open Day
  - Silverhand Estate Friday Night Lates
- Saturday 31 May
  - Silverhand Estate Butterfly ID for Beginners

**North Kent Woods and Downs**  
Proud to be one of **THE KING'S SERIES**

**Partners:**

- Birling Estate
- Forestry England
- Gravesham Borough Council
- Kent County Council
- Kent Downs National Landscape
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Medway Council and Plantlife
- Shorne Parish Council
- Tarmac
- The Woodland Trust
- Vineyard Farms Ltd
- West Kent Downs Countryside Trust

**Supported by:** National Highways

**Brought to you by: Nature Cared for by: All**

**[nkwdnnr.org.uk](http://nkwdnnr.org.uk)**

- For information, further events currently being finalised:
  - Bromley and Kent Ramblers are looking to host several walks around the NNR locations on the week leading up to the launch date i.e. Vigo, Camer to Luddesdown, Camer Park to Jeskyns, Shorne to Cobham to Jeskyns
  - Birdwise – Looking to put a bird walking tour(s)
  - Localised short mindful walks (invitation to various community groups)

- CycloPark cycling tour(s)
- Urban cycling tour(s)
- Park Run
- Meopham Leisure Centre and Cascades Leisure Centre running club
- Guided walk at Ashenbank Woods with Woodland Trust
- Drawing / photographic workshop with Cross-Channel Geopark Ambassador Jessica Potter