

Newsletter

Haysden Country Park

OCTOBER 2024

ISSUE 10

Welcome to the newsletter for Haysden Country Park.

Top stories in this newsletter



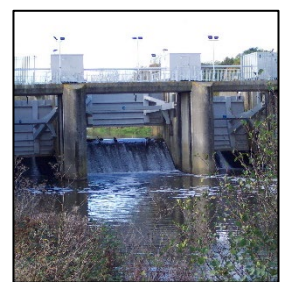
Planting



Management plan



Calendar



Leigh barrier



Planting – At Barden Lake in Haysden Country Park, this July we have continued our conservation efforts this year with the support of students from Tonbridge School, collaborating with Haysden Country Park Students volunteered at the park during the school's annual 'Giving Day.' This is a volunteer initiative focusing on local community projects. The students worked hard to move more soil and, this time, planted wildflowers along the revetment constructed in previous years. Their efforts were bolstered by a generous donation of £1,000 from the school for materials. To protect these newly planted areas from waterfowl, we have installed temporary fencing. This planting is a crucial step in regenerating this section of the lakeshore, enhancing the lake's resilience and making it more attractive for both visitors and biodiversity.



Management plan – The current management plan comes to an end in December this year. As you will be aware among other things this is a key document to identify projects for improvements, to achieve the Green Flag Award and securing funding. We have now carried out the Market Survey and Access Audit of the park using specialist advice, both will be incorporated into the new plan. Once the draft documents have been prepared, next year a Council committee will have the opportunity to comment on the draft plan before we ask for your comments during the public consultation.



Calendar – The 2025 wildlife calendar is now on sale from the Café in the park. The calendar has photographs taken in the park by Bill accompanied by his dog Mouse. This raises funds to run the Haysden Country Park Volunteer group and carry out projects in the park. The calendars cost just £7 each, this is a limited print run, and they usually sell out fast so grab your copy and support the group now.



Leigh Barrier – The Environment Agency contractors have been working on the grass barrier again this summer and this work will continue next year. Work on the new lock gates has been started. [More...](#) Mitigation schemes within the park started with planting of trees, clearing undergrowth around Botany Pond, and more work paid for under this scheme, is currently being considered for elsewhere in the park.

Other news

Natural history

Wildflowers – Dr Alan Heyes, is continuing his ‘absent or presence’ surveys of the park this time mainly looking for fungi and ferns. He also continues to find new plants in the park. In recent months the plant total has reached 536 species. One of the recent plants identified, we believe is a declining species - Sneezewort - *Achillea ptarmica*. This plant will be promoted in our ‘Plant of the Month’ poster for November, which will be displayed on the noticeboards at the entrances to the park. The first Boletes, a type of fungi that has spongy pores rather than gills under the cap, have been identified in the wood just east of Barden Lake. One was the Rooting bolete - *Caloboletus radicans*, and the other Ruby bolete - *Hortiboletus rubellus*. The species diversity of the park is evidently exceptional.

We are using established survey methods to record animal species in the park, that are repeatable and consistent in their approach. All the national survey methods would normally select locations at random across the country, (and may cross different landownerships), as we are only interested in information about the park our surveys use the same methods, but the survey area is restricted to within the park boundary.

Bat Surveys – our volunteer, Becky, with our Ranger, Jane, have now completed the series of transect surveys around the park for this year, using an adapted Bat Conservation Trust survey method. The presence of bats has been detected around the survey routes but identifying the different species of bat using their echo location frequency, is proving a challenge. Each different species of bat has its own echo location frequency, but some frequencies can be very close together.

Breeding birds survey – Two surveys have been carried out by Martin, our volunteer using an adapted survey method from the British Trust for Ornithology. There was a slight downturn in the number of breeding birds this spring compared to previous years, but the weather, disturbance and migration patterns, and chance will have played a part in the survey results. We still have 53 breeding birds recorded in the park. More species are likely to be present and breeding outside of the survey sampling area.

Pond surveys – The survey technique for our ponds has been established and agreed, with our volunteer Sue, and equipment purchased. We are using the Freshwater Habitats Trust sampling method adapted for the park. The first surveys of two ponds have been carried out this year at the pond in Friendship Wood and the other at Haysden Water called Botany Pond. Sue has already identified several species in the ponds and the likelihood of other animals like newts being present or absent. We will continue the surveys in more ponds next year.

Reptile surveys – These have been completed this year by our volunteer, Helen, and the results are now being collated. We already know there are a variety of reptiles living in the park, from slowworms to lizards and grass snakes. The surveys will build a consistent approach which is repeatable over the years to establish trends in numbers.

Green Flag Award

The park has won the international Green Flag Award again in 2024 for the 19th year running. There are only 2349 parks in the whole of the United Kingdom (with another 133 across the world) that have won this coveted award in 2024. The judge liked the presentation of the plan and made very few recommendations. They said the park was well managed, supporting a wide range of biodiversity, and suggested we needed to consider more



water safety signage along Barden Lake riverside, do more for climate adaptation in the plan, and to widen The Shallows bridge when replacing it to improve maintenance access. They noted the park was supported by an enthusiastic volunteer group and mentioned the café sourcing local products and said they did fantastic food. We are considering the recommendations, and some will be covered by projects in the next management plan.

(The adjacent Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground has also won the award for 4 years running now.) **More...**

Work completed

- Invasive species control of Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed
- Planting along the new revetment at Barden Lake
- Field surveys, completed see above
- Replacing the fence along the Mud Lane boundary (materials purchased by the Council and our volunteers installed this)
- Removed the old rotten dipping platform.
- Replaced the boot wiper brushes.
- Two new items of play equipment purchased and installed, purposed made musical instruments for the play area, a xylophone and a percussion instrument.
- Replacement of litter bins.
- Repairs under warranty to the junior multi play unit and Areil runway.
- The Shallows Bridge is coming towards the end of its life, a report is being made to the Finance Committee with the options.
- Various projects from the management plan put forward to the Planning department to form a list for developer contributions.
- Repairs of play equipment and surfacing
- A talk was given by our volunteer Dr Alan Heyes about the botany of Haysden Country Park at the AGM of the Kent Botanical Recording Group
- Car park signage replaced

Licensed activities

At Haysden Water because we let licenses for the sailing club watersports and triswim, as a safety measure we take in season monthly Bathing Water quality samples. The results have again this year met the national guidelines.

Blue Green Algae

This natural algae occurs in many water bodies and has bloomed at Barden Lake again this year. There a several similar algae species occurring in the lakes and not all of them are dangerous. The Environment Agency is currently undertaking a

national project to improve our understanding of this algae, and we have allowed them to take samples from our lakes. Due to the lakes being large water bodies there is little we can do to prevent this and the algae cannot be identified with the naked eye and so specialist advice is employed. The Council have a procedure in place to check and sample the lakes for blue green algae. If we suspect algae is blooming, we sample the water and orange warning notices are displayed for the public and information shared with the licensees. We do also display year-round posters recommending that dogs do not swim in the lakes (for this reason and others).

No swimming

We do not allow swimming in the lakes unless you are taking part in a licensed activity. The lakes in the park were all gravel pits, the water is deep and can be cold (leading to cold water shock) and are likely to contain hazards which could entangle you. No swimming signage is on display around the park. The lakes are now being patrolled by a team in response to an increased number of unauthorised people swimming in the lakes, and fines will be issued under the Public Space Protection Orders.

Volunteering update

We are fortunate to have a large group of regular volunteers working at the park. We are grateful to all of them for freely giving their time.

For work completed by the Haysden Country Park Volunteers (HCPV) see above.

Number of volunteer hours (beginning of March 2024 to end of September 2024)

Haysden Country Park Volunteers 2712 hours

Tonbridge School 120 hours

Work coming up

- Consider public events at the park for 2025
- Replacing three old picnic tables which have come to the end of their life by The Shallows bridge.
- Install replacement new main gate in the play area (as worn out)
- Technical Services to consider the options for automated number plate recognition for car parking
- Consultation on the new site management plan
- Green Flag Application for 2025
- Decision expected from the committee about The Shallows Bridge

- Contractor to undertake expert tree inspections
- Coppicing of Barden Shaw by the HCPV
- Cutting back undergrowth in selective areas HCPV
- Cutting back the wildflowers near the jetty (cutting back in the spring allows seed for winter birds and cover for overwintering insects) HCPV
- Improve some sections of path surfaces around Barden Lake
- Dipping platform replacement options to be considered.

Finance

Car parking income continues to be one of our largest sources of income to financially support the park. New car parking charges were agreed by the Council's committee and have been implemented.

Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)

You may have seen in the press an article about this. Councillors have requested that officers explore automated number plate recognition for the car parks, and Haysden Country Park is being considered as one trial site for this project. This project is still at the inception stage and nothing beyond that has yet been decided. Any proposal will need to consider the pros and cons and more engagement will take place in due course.

Grounds maintenance contract

The Council's borough wide grounds maintenance contract has now been retendered and a contractor appointed. Landscape Services will continue to provide these services on all the borough Council owned sites.

Folly Wildlife Rescue

The Trust have supported us for many years by treating injured wildlife casualties from the park. Unfortunately, injuries are a common occurrence in the park often caused by discarded litter. The Trust are facing closure and have launched an **urgent appeal** for public donations to continue running their services, there are various simple ways you can support them, some at no cost.

Events

A number of events have been arranged by us. We have also approved and supported others to host events in the park:

Past events

- Easter trail 2024 self-led trail (free) 66 leaflets used
- 13 June Kent Botanical Recording Group visit for members 7 attendees

- Butterfly Conservations Big Butterfly hunt national event self-led (free) 142 leaflets used
- Love Parks (national event) self-led event (free) 60 leaflets used

No charged events were run during this period.

What's on

- October Halloween self-led trail (free) 26 October- 3 November
- November Saxons Orienteering Club nighttime event for members
- December Christmas trail self-led trail (free)

2025

- January New year national plant hunt self-led event (free)
- 24-26 January RSPB national Big Garden Bird Watch self-led (free)
- April Easter event (school holidays)
- July Butterfly Conservation National Big Butterfly hunt self-led (free)
- July Love Parks national event

Unfortunately, we are no longer able to subsidise events, such as bat walks and led activities that we have run in the past. We will try to arrange more events for next summer, but if we engage external organisations, they will need to recover the full cost.

Anyone wishing to host an event at the park can apply to the Events Team by completing this [form](#)

For details on all the latest events see our website – [Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council \(tmbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.tonbridgeandmalling.gov.uk)

Field surveys

We are always looking for volunteers to run field surveys and to help when others are away.

Keep in touch - If you have any ideas for the new management plan, comments, or questions for our team, we would be happy to answer you.

If you know other people who would like to receive this newsletter, please ask them to contact us at leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk

The next newsletter is due to be published in the Spring of 2025.

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