

# Newsletter

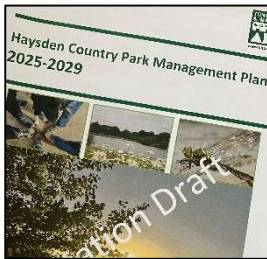
## Haysden Country Park

APRIL 2025

ISSUE 11

**Welcome** to the newsletter for Haysden Country Park.

### Top stories in this newsletter



**Management plan**



**Access Audit**



**Straight Mile**



**Nest Boxes**



**Management plan** – A brand-new management has now been drafted and sent to committee. This incorporates ideas put forward by the public in the last market survey and an access audit see below. The public consultation is now open, and the information can be view [here](#).



**Access Audit** – As part of the new management plan the Council commissioned a new access audit of the park. We have reviewed the previous assessment and there are some new suggestions to improve accessibility. Implementing improvements will form one of the projects in the management plan. The picture here shows one example of equipment that could be purchased for the play area, a dragonfly musical



instrument, but there many other options and priorities. Accessibility is an aspect that needs to consideration in many projects. Some other suggestions are illustrated in the management plan.

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**Straight Mile stream improvements** – The Council have approved a river restoration project designed by the Environment Agency to improve the Straight Mile channel in the park. The work has started by cutting down some trees along the channel to allow daylight onto the stream which will allow more vegetation to grow in the stream. Some of the cut material will then be used to create berms on the sides of the stream to create areas of slow and faster moving water which is good for water plants and wildlife. This is part of a wider project taking place with works also taking place at another watercourse outside our ownership at the Powdermill Stream. The contractor Land and Water will be working on site. See poster below.

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**National Nextbox Week** – As part of the Nestbox Week our volunteers have built a range nestboxes and have been installing them in the park. We provide a variety of nestboxes of different designs for mammals and birds in the park, including those for owls, bats and dormice. Our existing boxes have also been repaired and cleaned out. Nestboxes provide homes to animals where there are not enough trees and natural nesting, or roosting places. This event takes place each year and following the success of this year we are keen to take part again next year.

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## Other news

### Natural history

**Wildflowers** – Dr Alan Hayes continues to find new plant species in the park. This year his focus will be on updating the flora of the park and focusing on Bryophytes and fungi.

**Ash dieback** – Ash trees around the park continue to be affected by this fatal disease. We have had to fell more severely affected trees and will continue to monitor more trees. Trees behind the Stone Lock and along Barden Shaw among other areas have been felled. The volunteers have used some deadwood to make a dead-hedge, dead-wood has also been left on the ground to decay for fungi and animals like beetle larvae.



The survey season for recording species will also start again shortly and over the summer months, for bats, breeding birds, reptiles and ponds.

**Harvest mice survey** – An expert visited the site in January to advise on this mammal, which is Britain's smallest rodent. Following a very wet winter, we were excited to record 3 intact nests located in different areas of the park, which is a very positive sign for their population. We can adapt our habitat management particularly of meadow margins and hedgerows to encourage the population and record more data on this species.

**Amphibian and reptile survey** – a healthy population has been found in the park during 2024, with a large number of slow worms (a legless lizard), grass snakes (not poisonous), and common frogs recorded. Leaving the grass in plies on site from the two meadows when they are cut, should improve the breeding success of slow worms and grass snakes.

### **Green Flag Award**

The park has been entered for the international Green Flag Award again in 2025/26, this will be our 20<sup>th</sup> year taking part in the award.



(The adjacent Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground has also been entered for the award again.) **More...**

### **Work completed.**

- Coppicing of Barden Shaw and dead hedging by the HCPV and Ranger
- Estate maintenance and repairs by the HCPV and Ranger
- Scrub management 1/3 of the scrub area by the River Medway (this is a good habitat for slow worms, ants, nesting birds and small mammals) by the HCPV and Ranger
- The Shallows Bridge has been closed at the far end of the car park. An inspection found issues with rot in the timber structure so until we know more it will stay closed. An alternative route has been signed.
- Dr Alan Heyes our volunteer botanist has given several talks about botany in the park to local groups around the area
- The HCP volunteer calendar sold out this year
- New litter bins have been installed around Barden Lake and catering area
- When some of the meadows were cut this year, we left the cut material in the corner of the meadows to rot down (this creates another habitat and reduces the need to transport this off site.)
- We have created access to an area to leave the water meadow cut material next year this is outside of the Leigh Barrier embankment
- An external audit of volunteering has been completed and found the park



volunteering to be well managed.

- Gaping up and caring for the young trees planted by the Environment Agency.
- Nest box checks and cleaning, this is necessary to avoid pests building up and to check they are in good condition and safely secured by HCPV and Ranger, and a contractor for the barn owl boxes.
- HCPV and Ranger have built and installed additional dormouse nest boxes to create a suitable survey area of at least 50 boxes. Replacement bird and bat boxes have also been built to replace those now damaged or unfit for purpose.

### **Opening times**

As normal during the lighter evenings, beginning on the 5<sup>th</sup> May until 24<sup>th</sup> August, car park opening times at the park will be extended until 9pm.

### **Leigh Barrier**

The Environment Agency still have parts of their grass embankment fenced off to aid the establishment of grass. They have left a few gaps in the fence where you can gain access across the bank. This embankment to the reservoir forms part of the flood defense structure and is land owned by the Environment Agency not the Council. There are only two public rights of way crossing points where the cycle route crosses and near the end of Mud Lane.

### **Licensed activities**

At Haysden Water we let licenses for the sailing club watersports and triswim, as a safety measure we take in-season monthly Bathing Water quality samples. We will begin carrying these out shortly.

### **Flooding**

The park has been affected by flooding again this year with damage to paths around Barden Lake and a closure of the main car park due to flooding. That also affected the play area which in the cold weather then froze, so that was also closed for a few days. The loss of trees along the riverbank has also caused additional work and damage to the banks, we are grateful to the Environment Agency for their assistance in removal of trees from the river. The park is on the flood plain and affected by the reservoir holding back water behind the Leigh Flood barrier and the release of that water downstream from the flood storage gates into the river Medway. There are some projects proposed in the new management plan about flooding but many of these will require external consents and investment.



### **Volunteering update**

Our large team of regular volunteers working at the park have been busy over the last few months. We are grateful to all of them for freely giving their time. There has been an increase in the number of volunteer hours each year.

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

### **Number of volunteer hours (beginning of October 2024 to end of March 2025)**

Haysden Country Park Volunteers 2,180 hours

### **Work coming up**

- Preparing for public events at the park during 2025
- Path repairs Barden Lake we are investigating the prioritising areas to be resurface
- Replacing three old picnic tables by The Shallows bridge. Delays caused by wet conditions.
- Install replacement new main gate in the play area (as worn out)
- Consultation on the new site management plan
- Decide what to do about The Shallows Bridge
- Preparing for judging of the Green Flag Application
- Basic tree inspections
- 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
- Dipping platform replacement options still being considered.
- Changes to the building to address the welfare of staff and volunteers are being assessed for the building
- Bidding for funding to improve vegetation cover around Barden Lake - HCPV.

### **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**

- January New year New Year Plant Hunt self-led event (free)
- 24-26 January RSPB national Big Garden Bird Watch self-led (free)

### **What's on**

- Easter trail 2025 self-led trail (free) 5<sup>th</sup> - 21st April



- July Butterfly Conservation National event the Big Butterfly Count self-led (free) 18<sup>th</sup> July – 10<sup>th</sup> August
- July Love Parks national 25<sup>th</sup> July - 3<sup>rd</sup> August – events will run this week to promote greenspaces
- October Halloween self-led trail (free) 26<sup>th</sup> October - 3<sup>rd</sup> November
- December Christmas trail self-led trail (free) 2025
- The Kent Botanical Recording Group are planning to visit again this year
- January 2026 RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch
- January New Year Plant Hunt self-led (free)
- February National Nestbox Week the volunteers will be working maintaining nestboxes, building new ones, and installing these in the park
- March World Environment Day we will post news about wildlife in the park on that day

We are not planning any subsidise events during the current year, but will consider other events, should the opportunity arise.

We welcome suitably organised events run by the public at the park, you 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.tmbc.gov.uk)

**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](mailto:leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk)

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

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council  
Leisure Services  
Gibson Building, Gibson Drive  
Kings Hill  
West Malling  
Kent ME19 4LZ  
Email: [Leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk](mailto:Leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk)  
Tel 01732 844522





## Restoring our rivers

Spring 2025

As part of the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme, the Environment Agency is carrying out works to improve the biodiversity of the Straight Mile and Powdermill Stream watercourses.

The Powdermill Stream, as its name suggests, formerly fed the mill at the Powdermills. Part of it was once a lake which gradually silted up and turned into a stream. It is slow moving and silted. The Straight Mile in Haysden Country Park is faster flowing but is extremely straight which causes it to have little variation in its flow. Both watercourses suffer from a lack of daylight with heavy tree cover.

We plan to use the same river restoration techniques at both locations to address these problems. We will securely install trees and tree limbs into the channels (see example, right). We will also place some new gravel. Most of this will go into the Powdermill which, as a former lake, will naturally have less.

For the Powdermill, these works will help to flush the silt from the riverbed to reveal any buried gravels which fish can spawn on. The extra gravels will aid this.



Above: Tree hinging and brushwood berm creation on the River Witham along Dysart Park, Grantham.  
Source: Lincolnshire River's Trust

For the Straight Mile, these works will reduce its linear nature, adding to the flow variation. All works will increase the in-channel and bankside vegetation and improve oxygen levels.

These works won't increase the flood risk as the flood risk here is controlled by the Leigh flood storage reservoir outlets. This is therefore an ideal opportunity to carry out more restoration work than is usually possible.

Below are photos of similar river restoration works carried out on the River Wandle at Carshalton, London. Source: South East River's Trust.

