

Heritage Strategy

North Kent Woods and Downs - National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Kent County Council

March 2025



Cobham Landscape Detectives – youth group - hands on archaeology

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Heritage Strategy has been coordinated by Kent County Council Heritage Conservation Team and includes the research of a number of local historians and archaeologists. The North Kent Woods & Downs National Nature Reserve (abbreviated in this report to NNR) has a rich historic environment, as reflected in the Kent Historic Environment Record (HER) to complement the rich natural environment. The NNR partner areas include or are adjacent to:

- 6 Scheduled Monuments
- 6 Conservation Areas
- c.78 Listed Buildings (within c.500m of NNR)
- 4 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens
- 2 Designated Military sites
- c.200 HER records for non-designated heritage assets and finds, and;
- c.120 HER records for archaeological and cultural heritage 'events', including desk-based assessments, evaluation surveys and excavations.

1.2 This Heritage Strategy report is supported by more detailed appendices looking at 10 characteristic cultural heritage themes and a spreadsheet (NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan) with HER information for each NNR 'site' with recommendations for future work. The 10 key themes of the strategy are:

1. Landscape and Environment
2. Communication
3. Settlement
4. Agriculture
5. Woodland and Forestry
6. Industry
7. Culture, Education and Religion
8. Leisure, Recreation and Sport
9. Military and Defence
10. Events and Information

1.3 The existing data illustrates the significant time depth to the NNR landscape with evidence for human activity in every chronological period from the present day back to early prehistory over twelve thousand years ago. The evidence shows that over millennia the landscape has changed, with the fundamental 'template' being created during the Pleistocene, with, in the last approximately five thousand years, since the Bronze Age, periodic woodland clearance and cultivation leading to the erosion of soils from higher ground and the deposition of material on lower slopes and in valleys. These processes have led to differing types of archaeological potential across the NNR area and this is reflected, to some extent, in the uneven distribution of recorded historic environment records and archaeological sites. The other reason for the distribution being the areas of interest for archaeologists and historians.

1.4 The study illustrates the importance of historic farmsteads and their associated fields as well as the villages and hamlets, as important elements of the rural settlement of the NNR with agriculture having a long history stretching back

over more than four thousand years. Woodland is seen as a significant aspect of the present-day landscape and its development and complex patterns of changes can be traced back over time. The geology of the NNR has provided a source of raw materials for industry locally and for the key industrial urban areas to the west and east – in particular for the cement industry. The NNR contains important archaeological evidence for past practices related to religion and death from the Neolithic to the present day from Bronze Age barrows to medieval chapels and a post-medieval temple-like mausoleum. The extensive parks and woods of the NNR have historically, and still today, provided important spaces for leisure, recreation and sport. During periods of conflict, the strategic location of the NNR has meant that its sites have been used for numerous military activities including defensive structures, camps and training areas. NNR site owners and managers have been proactive in providing information to visitors about the cultural heritage of the area, and this important aspect of the Heritage Strategy (theme 10) is an aspect where the creation of the NNR could lead to significant public benefits thorough greater coordination of information and activities.

1.5 The area has been subject to a wide range of historical, archaeological research and community archaeology projects (these are listed in the annex NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan) but there is still much to learn and discover. A priority for the NNR should be the reporting and synthesis of existing unpublished records of archaeological and historical research to help define research questions and inform decisions about where future surveys and investigation would be most useful. Consideration of key research questions should be taken forward. A summary Implementation Plan table is included at the end of this report.

2.0 Background

2.1 It is understood that Natural England's strategic vision is that *'NNRs will be at the core of nature recovery and their abundant wildlife will brim over to enrich surrounding areas. Extensive and joined up NNRs will help restore ecological function and resilience. NNRs will provide for high quality research and monitoring contributing to land-based and social environmental science, demonstrating innovation and best practice, and inspiring learning. NNR managing organisations will collaborate to optimise the effectiveness and the outcomes of scientific effort. NNRs provide places for people to connect with nature through access, responsible recreation, discovery and participation. Our partnership work will increase the range and variety of engagement opportunities and will welcome new audiences across the NNR series'*.

2.2 The NNR has a remarkably rich and diverse heritage to support Natural England's strategic vision. While some of its heritage assets are instantly recognisable like Cobham Hall and Park there are many more that are less well known but that play a major role in the area's historic sense of place. At a wider scale, the area contains different historic landscapes moulded by natural and human processes that provide the distinct character that is valued by those who live, work in and visit the area. The heritage assets, from individual finds and features to the wider landscapes, can all play a role in shaping the NNR development and identity.

2.3 This Heritage Strategy was commissioned to help ensure that the heritage of the area plays a clear and positive role in defining the NNR and its future. It has been written to help explain the substantial benefits and value that conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets, their recognition and use can bring to the NNR area. The Heritage Strategy seeks to:

- Ensure that heritage plays a positive role in helping to define the NNR;
- Enable and inform future natural environment management decisions with a strong understanding of, and sense of place, pride and interest in the heritage;
- Contribute to and enhance tourism and the visitor experience and the economy;
- Increase wider understanding of the NNR's heritage and the ways in which the community and visitors can engage with and experience the heritage to help deliver social and health benefits and provide a valuable educational resource.

2.4 There are a large and enthusiastic group of stakeholders, individuals and groups, involved in many existing heritage activities within the area and many of these have been involved in the production of this Heritage Strategy. It is hoped that this Heritage Strategy will act as an aid to the stakeholders helping them to pursue common goals and to provide an evidence base for their project funding bids and future plans.



Cobham Landscape Detectives booklet front cover - KCC

2.5 The area has been subject to a wide range of historical and archaeological research (c.120 Kent HER 'event' records) including by members of the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group, Gravesend Historical Society, Kent Archaeological

Society, amongst others as well as archaeologists and historians working for the Highways England Lower Thames Crossing project.

2.6 The South-East Research Framework (SERF 2019, <https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/south-east-research-framework>)) exists to set the research agenda for the archaeology of south-east England (defined for SERF as Kent, Surrey and East and West Sussex). The Greater Thames Research Framework (GTRF, 1999 revised 2011 https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/gtrf_na_2011/overview.cfm) carried out a similar function but was focused on the Thames Estuary. Both provide a chronological and thematic overview of the state of current archaeological knowledge for the study area and identifies numerous research questions that need to be answered.

3.0 The NNR's rich heritage

3.1 As can be seen from the list of designated and non-designated heritage assets (above), the NNR contains an exceptional wealth of heritage, and these span thousands of years from early prehistory to the present day. The area has archaeological finds, historic structures and landscapes that are of outstanding significance having national importance and international relevance.

3.2 Alongside these and other nationally important sites there are numerous sites of regional or local importance, less well known perhaps but treasured and valued by the local communities as markers of their own history and that of the villages and rural communities. Furthermore, there are important visitor sites that are open to the public that make a substantial contribution to the public's understanding of the area's heritage and to its tourism potential. These sites, buildings and objects are known as 'heritage assets' and are exactly that – places and artefacts of value to the NNR, and to its unique sense of identity.

3.3 The wealth and importance of this heritage is reflected in the Kent Historic Environment Record (HER) which lists c.200 HER records of heritage assets and finds. Alongside those recorded there will be many more that are not yet included in the HER. The HER contains approximately 120 records for 'events' including a range of research and investigation from desk-based studies to field evaluation and excavations within and close to the NNR area. A list by NNR site of the 'Monument' and 'Event' records, presently within the Kent HER are included in an accompanying document (NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan). To allow readers to learn about the individual sites mentioned in the text, each is accompanied by its reference number in the Kent Historic Environment Record (e.g. TQ 66 NE 23), an accessible version of which can be seen online at <http://www.kent.gov.uk/HER>.

3.4 The geology and geography of the area plays an important role in its heritage and history. The survival of important archaeological remains, above and below ground, is also in part a result of the protection from cultivation that has been afforded by the extensive areas of woodland and parkland, and as noted above, from burial by colluvium in valleys. Consideration of the geological complexity of the area is discussed under the theme 1 - Landscape and Environment. LiDAR is an

important technology for understanding terrain, especially beneath woodland – see the Kent LiDAR portal - [Home - Kent LiDAR Portal](#).

3.5 The NNR contains an exceptionally rich and varied historic landscape which has been clearly characterised and described in the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) which includes a thorough consideration of the more recent historical trends. Therefore, this Heritage Strategy has not developed a separate historic landscape characterisation element. It is considered here that it is more helpful to focus on the physical heritage assets and archaeological potential of the NNR to provide additional time-depth to the LCA work.

3.6 This report summarises the evidence for the history and archaeology (historic environment) of the NNR area using information about known sites (heritage assets). To help illustrate the significance of the historic environment of the study area the designated heritage assets are listed below and this is followed by summaries of the 10 characteristic themes for the area taking account of both the designated and non-designated heritage assets and an assessment of archaeological potential. Gaps in our understanding are identified and the report includes over-arching recommendations for future research and management projects.



Artist' reconstruction of Mesolithic activity within the NNR Area – Alan Marshall

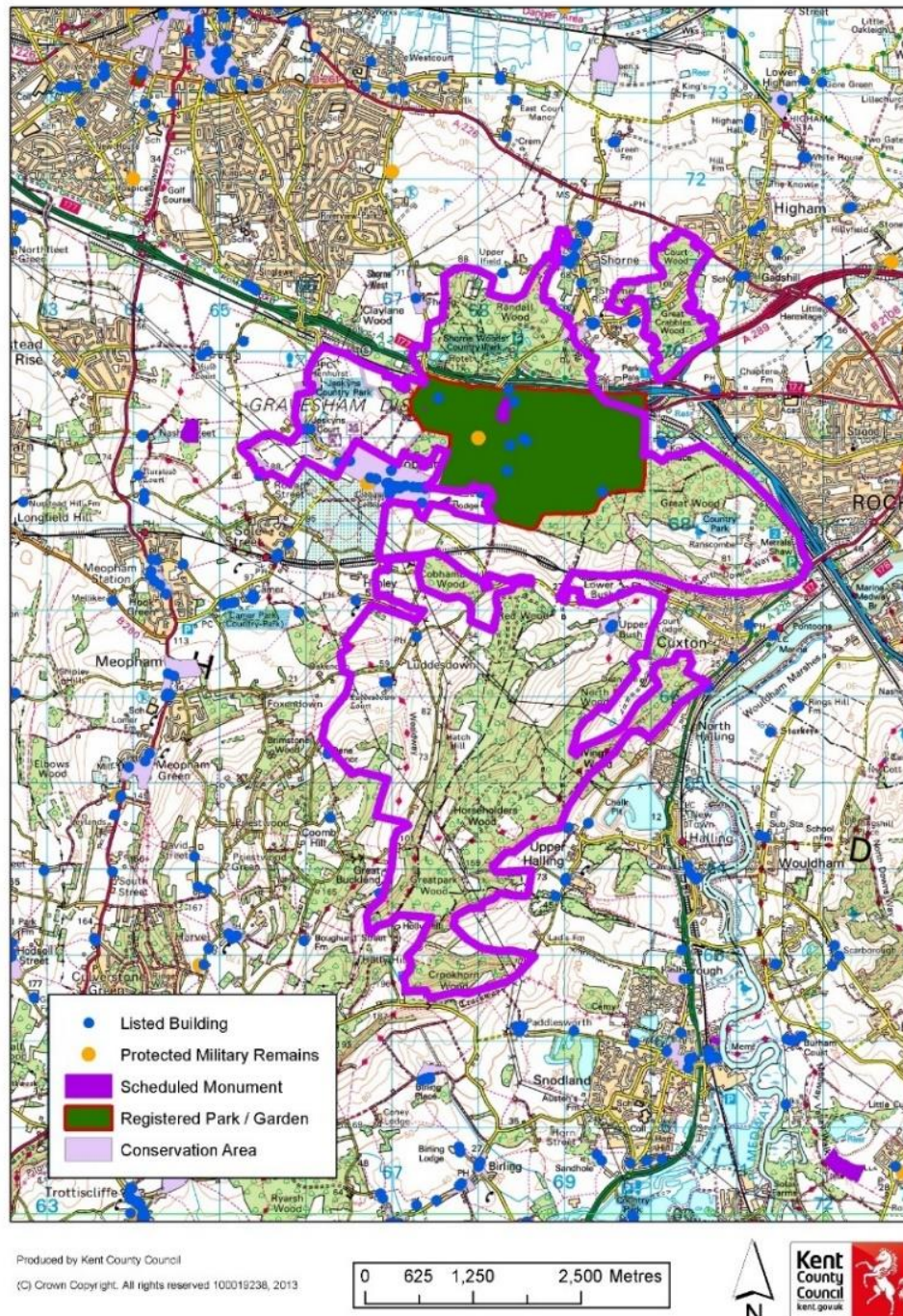
3.7 The accompanying NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan presents more detail for each NNR site/partner area, including existing Kent HER data, the range of past and ongoing research and recommendations for future research and investigation, management and mitigation and for outreach and interpretation.

4.0 Designated heritage assets

4.1 Map 1 (below) illustrates the importance given to the area around the village of Cobham and Cobham Hall and Park for designated heritage assets and the location of these nationally important assets and landscapes between the extensive areas of woodland to the north, east and south.

Map 1 – Map illustrating the location and extent of designated heritage assets within and around the NNR.

Kent Historic Environment Record - Designations



4.2 World Heritage Sites

There are no **World Heritage Sites** within the NNR area with the nearest being Canterbury Cathedral c.28 miles to the east.

4.3 Scheduled Monuments

There are 6 scheduled monuments within or immediately adjacent to the NNR boundary. These comprise the site of a Romano-British villa and later remains at Cobham [DKE19099] and c.800m to the west the site of a possible Bronze Age barrow in Ashenbank Wood [DKE19033]. 1km to the south of these two scheduled sites, but outside the current NNR boundary can be found the scheduled World War II heavy anti-aircraft gun site [DKE19164]. Outside and c.500m to the west of the NNR lies the scheduled deserted medieval manorial settlement site of Cossington [DKE19056] and outside and c.500m to the east of the NNR area lies the Palaeolithic scheduled site at Cuxton [DKE19328]. To the west in Gravesend the Riverside Leisure Area includes the scheduled New Tavern Fort and medieval Milton Chantry [DKE19066]. These six, nationally important scheduled sites, within or close to the NKW&D NNR area, illustrate the time depth with examples from early prehistory, later prehistory and the Romano-British, medieval, post-medieval and modern periods.

4.4 Conservation Areas

There are 6 Conservation Areas, within, partially within, or immediately bordering the NNR area. They comprise Thong village, Shorne village, Chestnut Green, Cobham village, Upper Bush and Riverside Conservation Area, site of Riverside Leisure Area around New Tavern Fort and gardens.

4.5 Listed Buildings

As might be expected the majority of listed buildings in the area can be found within the historic villages where there are Conservation Areas, for example within the Cobham village Conservation Area, including the clusters at Owletts and Rookery Farm. The majority of these listed buildings lie outside the NNR sites, but the landscape of the sites contributes, in part, to their setting (see Landscape Character Assessment report for a useful consideration of this important aspect of the value of the NNR in heritage and landscape terms). Whilst some villages such as Luddesdown do not have Conservation areas, the dispersed rural settlement is reflected by important historic farmhouses, country houses and churches. There are c.78 listed buildings within NNR sites or within 500m of the boundary of the NNR including concentrations of 28 in Cobham village, 19 in Shorne and Shorne Ridgeway and 7 at Camer.

In the west of the area there is a cluster of Grade II listed buildings at Jeskyns Court, including the main house and granary [DKE 1168, 1169 & 1324]. There are no listed buildings within the NNR sites north of Watling Street but numerous examples in the villages of Thong, Ifield, Shorne, Shorne Ridgeway and Gadshill. In the southern part of the NNR there are listed buildings at Lower Bush, the Grade II Forge Cottage, and Upper Bush, including the Grade II* High Birch [DKE1791] and the Grade II Barrow Hill House [DKE1356]. In Lower Luddesdown there is the Grade II Bookers Farm [DKE1193] and in Luddesdown the Grade I Luddesdown Court [DKE1196] and the Grade II* church of St Peter and St Paul [DKE19884]. The Grade II* Dode Church (Church of Our Lady of the Meadow) [DKE6526] lies just outside the south-west boundary. To the south-east of the area at Upper Halling there is a cluster of listed

buildings, including those associated with historic farmsteads, for example at Court Farm [DKE1621].

Within the designated Cobham Hall Park and Garden there are 8 listed buildings or structures. These include the Grade II Mount [DKE1183], a Grade II Parish Boundary Stone [DKE1259], the Grade II Cobham Hall Engine House [DKE1251], the Grade I Cobham Hall, including kitchen and garden [DKE1161], the Grade II* dairy [DKE1292], the Grade II Cobham Hall aviary [DKE1290], the grade II temple [DKE1162] and to the south-east the Grade I Cobham Hall mausoleum [DKE1163].

Adjacent to Camer Park are 7 Grade II listed buildings including Camer House [DKE1069] and building to the west [DKE1277], Bailiffs Cottage [DKE1067], 5&6 Camer Street [DKE1197], 9&10 Camer Street [DKE1198], Camer Green Cottage [DKE1344] and Somers [DKE1278]. The Grade II Little Buckland [DKE1275] lies c.250m east of Camer Park.

Within the Riverside Leisure Area can be found the listed Grade II* Milton Chantry [DKE1145], the Grade II* New Tavern Fort [DKE1249] and the Grade II statue of General Gordon [DKE1330].

There are presently no Locally Listed Buildings within the NNR study area.

4.6 Registered and Historic Parks and Gardens

A significant part of the central area of the NNR is covered by the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden of Cobham Hall [DKE19443]. The park and gardens form the essential setting for the 8 listed buildings and structures. A slightly smaller area, defined as Cobham Park, is designated as an Historic Park and Garden [DKE19804]. Camer Park is designated Historic Park and Garden [DKE19749] and to the west Riverside Leisure Area is part of the Riverside Historic Park and Garden [DKE19623].

4.7 Military sites

There is 1 registered site of a Supermarine Spitfire crash site within the NNR area at Cobham [DKE21785] and the crash site of a Vickers Wellington [DKE21798] just outside the area near Cobham village.

5.0 Non-designated heritage assets

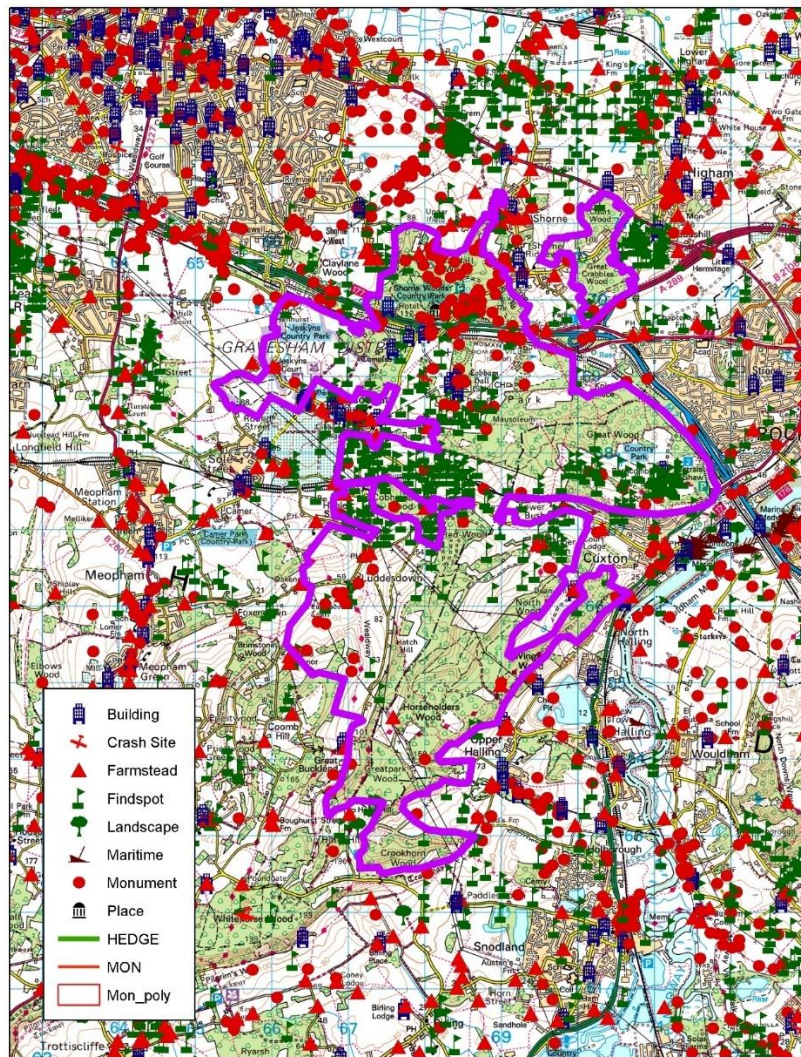
5.1 The recorded non-designated heritage assets within the Kent HER represent the majority of the defined heritage assets and they provide the framework for understanding the history of the area.

5.2 The NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan lists the recorded data but in the next sections the characteristics of the NNR areas are summarised by theme. These help us understand how the NNR area came to take on its current form and to identify those heritage assets – archaeological sites, historic buildings and landscape features – that are of most significance. We can use this understanding to help shape the future of the NNR and to develop social, community, research and educational programmes to further explore the past and help people connect it with their modern lives.

5.3 The distribution of sites shown on Map 2, which has a similar pattern to the designated assets illustrated on Map 1, is in part a reflection of local historical and archaeological research, and there is still much to discover and learn about the history of the NNR area.

Map 2 – Non-designated heritage site (assets and finds)

**Kent Historic Environment Record -
Non-designated heritage sites**



Produced by Kent County Council
(C) Crown Copyright. All rights reserved 100019238, 2013

0 625 1,250 2,500 Metres



6.0 Thematic summaries

6.1 Landscape and Environment

6.1.1 The 'template' for the NNR was formed over a period of nearly two million years during the Pleistocene with the earliest period of human history being the Palaeolithic coinciding with the second half of this period. In Britain the Palaeolithic

covers the earliest hominin occupation some 800,000 years ago to the end of the last ice age, c.10,000 years ago (Wenban-Smith, 2007). The British Palaeolithic coincides with the second half of the Pleistocene, a period of glacials and interglacials often referred to as 'The Ice Ages'. The NNR is located to the south of the maximum extent of former glaciers, during which periods Britain was uninhabitable. During the warmest periods of the interglacials the climate would have been warmer than today with mollusc species that now inhabit the Nile abundant in British rivers and tropical fauna including hippopotamus and forest elephant, common in the landscape. The present landscape of Britain is in large part the result of almost two million years of these processes of erosion and deposition. The best evidence for the Palaeolithic, therefore, tends to be buried under five, ten or even twenty metres of ancient river gravels, cliff collapse or mass slope-movement deposits. Geoarchaeological studies are required to understand these contexts.

6.1.2 Understanding the geology and geomorphology of the area helps us understand the context in which heritage assets and archaeological remains may be found and thus how people in the past lived in and used the area. It also helps us appreciate the complexity of the area and what 'underpins' the present-day character.

6.1.3 At its simplest the bedrock geology of the NNR area, which is entirely comprised of sedimentary geologies, can be divided into two parts. The northern half is characterised by Late Cretaceous Lewes Nodular Chalk, overlain by more recent sand, silts and clays of the Thanet Formation, Harwich and Lenham Formations and London Clay. The northern half is characterised by higher ground with watersheds to the west, north, east and south. The southern half of the NNR is also characterised by Cretaceous Chalks (Lewes Nodular Chalk, Seaford and Newhaven Formation etc..) but is incised by a series of dry valleys that run, initially northward and then east into the Medway valley. Overlying the older 'bedrock' geology are superficial Head deposits, gravel deposits, Pleistocene solifluction and colluvial 'hill wash' deposits in the dry valleys of the chalk downland. The younger hill wash deposits are a result in large part, of periodic woodland clearance and cultivation, starting approximately five thousand years ago during the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. Recent geoarchaeological field evaluation for the Lower Thames Crossing has demonstrated the complexity of the palaeo-topography and range of superficial deposits across the northern part of the project area.

NNR Palaeolithic potential – Low to Moderate and Uncertain

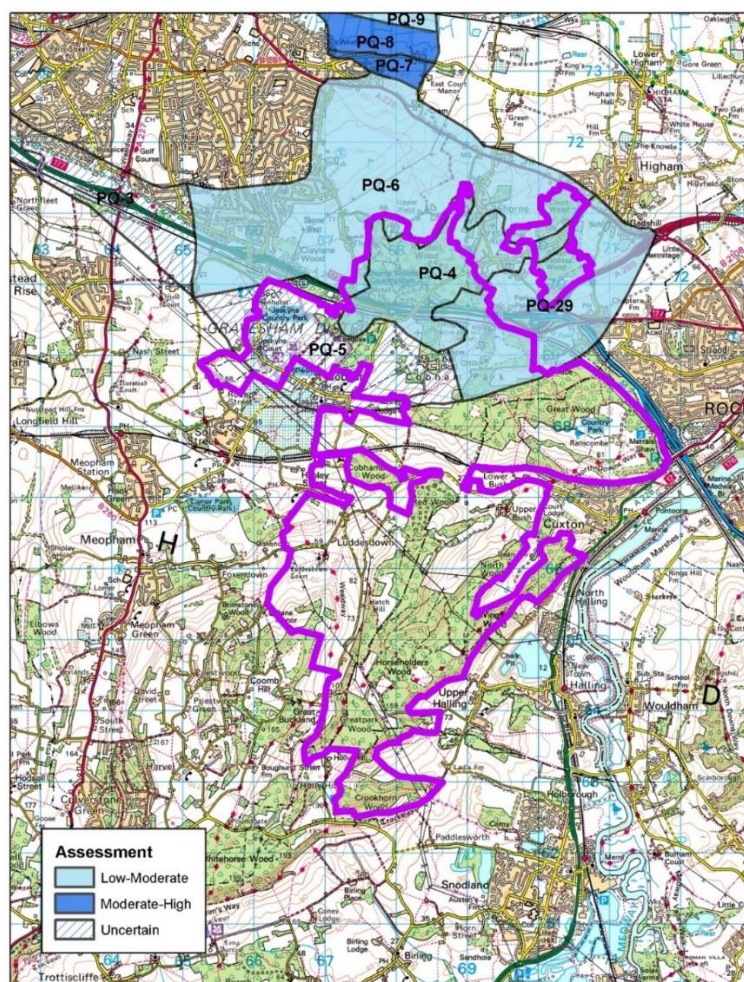
6.1.4 Archaeological research and investigation for projects such as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and more recently for Lower Thames Crossing demonstrate that the NNR lies within an area of high Palaeolithic archaeological and Quaternary geological importance spanning the last half a million years (c.500,000 to c.12,000 years ago) as well as for the subsequent Holocene. Sites can include areas of in situ flint working with handaxes and waste debitage but more commonly, given the age of much material, finds are not in their primary contexts but redeposited. For these reasons geoarchaeological research to understand the detailed local context is particularly important when considering any significant groundworks.

6.1.5 Recent relevant research into the Palaeolithic and early Holocene geoarchaeological and archaeological interest of the NNR has been undertaken by

Drs Francis Wenban-Smith and Martin Bates for Highways England's Lower Thames Crossing project. The recent work adds to the significant Mesolithic evidence already identified in the northern half of the NNR. As can be seen on Map 3 part of the northern area of the NNR is covered by their study area. The research provides a useful context for understanding the early prehistoric interest of the NNR by defining PQ zones of varying Palaeolithic/Quaternary deposit character and importance. Each zone has been attributed a category of low, medium or high Palaeolithic and geo-archaeological potential. The authors note that relatively little detailed work has yet been undertaken on Pleistocene or Holocene deposits in the area and, as-yet-undiscovered sites of similar high importance to those already known are likely to be present in the areas identified as of high importance. These include land within the NNR area around the Ebbsfleet valley (PQ3), Shorne Woods plateau (PQ4), Jeskyns shelf (PQ5), Thong Lane (PQ6) and the Thameside areas (PQs7-9) and Park Pale to Medway (PQ29). Details of the Palaeolithic and early Holocene potential of these areas can be found in Appendix 1 (Landscape and Environment).

Map 3 - Palaeolithic and Quaternary Zones (after Wenban-Smith for LTC)

Kent Historic Environment Record - Palaeolithic and Quaternary zones



Produced by Kent County Council
(C) Crown Copyright. All rights reserved 100019238, 2013

0 625 1,250 2,500 Metres



6.1.6 Further work should focus on extending the Palaeolithic and Quaternary characterisation across the NNR and ensuring the results of past investigations are brought into the public domain. See appendix 1.

6.2 Communication and transport

6.2.1 There are no heritage assets specifically related to the theme of Communication which are designated. The line of Watling Street is recognised as a heritage asset in the Kent HER.

6.2.2 There is a range of transport links through the NNR from local footpaths to regional roads and railways. The NNR is recognized as an important location as it is historically through the NNR that the main route from London (and therefore the rest of the country) runs to the channel coast, and the shortest sea crossing to Europe (post c.8,300 BP when rising sea levels cut the land bridge). There is archaeological evidence for prehistoric trackways and the relationship between a prehistoric network and the Roman road system (and the exact nature of the Roman road systems) is an important research topic. Physically the NNR comprises the local watershed between the Thames and Medway rivers. It therefore operates at many levels in both historical and current contexts, which in turn impacts on landscape and ecology, and vice versa. Sea and river navigation are important factors but of course the NNR area is dominated by the presence of Watling Street (*Casingc Stræt* – *Key Street* in Kent, *Wæcelinga Stræt* north of London but adopted as a name for the whole length). Watling Street was established as a Roman road from London to Dover/Richborough (*Londinium* to *Dubris* & *Rutupiae*) via a crossing of the Medway on a bridge built at Rochester (*Durobriavae*) in about AD43 with the A2 broadly following the same alignment. The eastern course of the Roman Watling Street is not certain and research, including the use of geophysical surveys, could investigate this.

6.2.3 In 1845 the railway was built from Gravesend to Strood with the London & Chatham Railway taking the more southerly route cutting through the area to reach Strood from Swanley in 1860. Much more recently High Speed 1 (originally called Channel Tunnel Rail Link) opened in 2003 (Stage 1, Stage 2 to St Pancras came in 2007), carrying international trains to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, as well as domestic trains to Ashford and then on to destinations in East Kent. These also run along the North Kent line via Gravesend.

6.2.4 At a more local there has always been a network of routes (some are very impressive hollow ways) for walking and riding, some of which have become tarmac roads, to get between local towns, villages and farms. The Public Rights of Way map extends the network, as do some of the permissive routes in the area. Near Shorne there is evidence of a possible ancient trackway that has not made it into modern times. A route from Cobham to Strood was suppressed by the Darnley's as it crossed the park. Connecting trails such as the Darnley Trail for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians links Shorne Woods Country Park with wider landscape.

6.2.5 Gravesend Airport was seen as a possible London East airport in 1930's but became an RAF station with the outbreak of 2nd World War, with grass runways. Being under the direct approach path to London for enemy bombers it was not well located. Electricity pylons are another sort of transport network, and with the

development of renewable resources may need to be expanded or modified to meet new patterns of supply. Telegraph Hill at Higham was part of a signal system across Kent to warn of invasion. The modern mobile phone masts (e.g. rear of Inn on the Lake Hotel) are a descendant of this. Fibre optic cables (and other utilities) run in the A2 corridor, again serving local, regional and international communications functions.

6.2.6 The NNR could help deliver a more coordinated communications network, particularly for walkers, cyclists and riders, and this should be developed using GIS to model the historic network supported where necessary by additional LiDAR and geophysical surveys.

6.3 Settlement

6.3.1 There is archaeological evidence for settlement within the NNR area since at least the Mesolithic, for example with evidence within Shorne Woods and on Ranscombe Farm. If by settlement we mean places where people live, then the Mesolithic flint scatters, and most probably the evidence of Palaeolithic flint working, represent periods of 'settlement' if only as short-stay locations (possibly seasonal) as part of essentially mobile lifestyles.

6.3.2 The evidence for a more fixed sense of place to which ideas of settlement can be located starts in the Neolithic but it is arguably not until the Bronze Age that we start to see evidence for more permanent settlement in the form of dispersed farmsteads.

6.3.3 The Bronze Age landscape of the NNR became further formalised during the Iron Age, with examples of possible settlement near Luddesdown [TQ 66 NE 21] and was then reorganised during the Roman period, with for example, the establishment of a Roman villa near Cobham [TQ 66 NE 23], settlement evidence at Henhurst Road [TQ 67 SE 327] and along the Medway at Strood, Cuxton and Halling. There is also evidence for Iron Age activity, including metalworking, at Jeskyns and Owletts.

6.3.4 There is evidence for early medieval settlement at Ifield and it is likely that the villages of the NNR area have early medieval origins, although the archaeological evidence for this is lacking at present. There is, for example, Saxon charter evidence (for the bounds of Meopham) which reference *Cobba Hammes*. Certainly, the villages, manorial centres and many of the historic farmsteads were in existence during the medieval period and this pattern of rural settlement, overlaid by the creation and expansion of the Darnley estate, characterises the NNR today. Settlement names have changed over time, and sometimes relatively recently. For example, Upper and Lower Bush are recorded on the 1st Ed. OS of the late 19th century as Upper and Lower Birch and on the Tithe Map as High and Lower Birch.

6.3.5 References should be made to the LCA for consideration of the setting of the settlement of the NNR. There is scope for more detailed consideration, using archaeological investigations such as LiDAR and geophysical surveys, to more comprehensively look for evidence of former settlement locations and to understand the origins of the present-day settlements. There is extensive LiDAR evidence for field systems in the Cobham landscape, focused around 'Cobham Manor' and in Shorne Woods around Randall Manor and there is still work to do to understand the

pattern of medieval manorial landscapes of the NNR, including those of Cobham, from Randall to Henhurst.



Randall Manor dig in 2013 (Andrew Mayfield and KCC, HLF)

6.4 Agriculture

6.4.1 Within the NNR area there is evidence for continuous agricultural activity from at least the Bronze Age, with recent evidence Neolithic evidence from Lower Thames Crossing investigations. The HER includes records for a number of crop marks, indicative of ditched enclosures of uncertain date (pending field investigation). Examples subject to trial trenching for the Lower Thames Crossing, suggest that those on the higher chalk slopes of the Downs are likely to be stock enclosures of later prehistoric date. Examples within the NNR include [TQ 67 SE 101] and at [TQ 66 NE 38] the remains of a field system of uncertain date (this system could be medieval or later in date). There is important evidence for Iron Age agricultural settlement at Cuxton [TQ 76 NW 911].

6.4.2 Whilst the NNR includes archaeological evidence for activity, including possible elements of field systems and enclosures, there is presently a limited understanding of settlement distribution and agricultural field systems. This should be an important research topic for the NNR and will require more consideration of the LTC data from areas around Thong and Ifield and could be addressed through field investigation combining LiDAR analysis, geophysical surveys, surface artefact collection and test-pitting surveys within NNR areas. However, as is outlined below from the LTC Oxford Cotswold Archaeology field evaluation reports (e.g. Archaeological Evaluation Report for Trial Trenching of Land Parcels 71, 72 and 75,

2021), the record is very complex. A key factor in the creation of this complexity has been the agricultural activity itself since later prehistory. The archaeological evidence demonstrated clearance of vegetation and agricultural practices at various times from later prehistory through to the Roman period, which have led to soil erosion and the deposition of colluvium.

6.4.3 The NNR landscape was being systematically farmed during the Roman period. This is illustrated by the survival of remains of the Roman villa at Cobham [TQ 66 NE 23]. The villa is a corridor type discovered in 1959 and excavated in 1959-60. Possibly developed since circa 100 AD from a farmhouse, although earlier Iron Age pottery sherds have been found, and occupied until the mid-4th century. The remains were partly destroyed during the 17th to 18th century by the construction of a ha ha. The remains of an outbuilding and a well were found to the northeast and appear to be associated with the villa site. This villa would have been at the centre of an estate and is evidence for the continuity of food production within the NNR area.

6.4.4 Whilst the NNR includes archaeological evidence for Early Medieval cemeteries and burials there is little good evidence for settlement and agricultural systems. This should be an important research topic for the NNR and could be addressed through field investigation combining LiDAR analysis, geophysical survey, surface artefact collection and test-pitting surveys.

6.4.5 The present-day landscape of the NNR contains many elements which are essentially of medieval origins. Research around Randall Manor illustrates this with surviving earthworks, ponds, tracks and field boundary banks and lynchets.

6.4.6 GB to provide post-med summary and summary of Darnley estate impact.

Note to add about the estate maps in the Medway Archives.

6.4.7 The HER records illustrate the key themes for the NNR which comprise a rich resource of historic farmsteads with important surviving historic buildings, most of later medieval and post-medieval date, a surviving character of dispersed farmsteads between villages, the presence, especially within areas of woodland and parkland of cropmarks and earthworks of former field boundaries, lynchets and trackway and below-ground remains of ditches of prehistoric and later field systems. The evidence from the LTC evaluation stage has seen an increased understanding of how field systems were formalised during the Bronze Age and those systems have influenced subsequent land use. Understanding the detail for each NNR area would require further specific work involving combinations of geophysical surveys, detailed LiDAR, surface artefact collection and test-pitting or trial trenching.

6.5 Woodland and Forestry

6.5.1 Woodland is one of the most important characteristics of the NNR today with extensive tracts from Randall Wood, Court Wood and Great Crabbles Wood in the north to Great Wood and Cobhambury Wood, Red Wood, Horseholders Wood, Wingate Wood, Greatpark Wood and Crookhorn Wood in the south. There are of course many more areas of woodland within the NNR and the form, extent, ownership and names of the woods have changed over time.

6.5.2 Under the search term 'woodland' the HER appears to contain a relatively small number of records for the NNR project area (c.17 records) and these records appear mainly as evidence of historic landscape boundary features (e.g. banks). The majority are in the areas that have been subject to survey in Shorne Woods (e.g. Randall Wood) and around Cobham Park. Nicola Bannister's work on the Paddlesworth Farm area has led to the creation of two records in the south of the project area.

6.5.3 Looking at the attached HER map in Appendix 5, it is clear that the existing data is not comprehensive and there are few HER records of features associated with woodland industries.

6.5.4 Looking to the future, the extent of former woodland, fields and tracks should be traced from historic mapping, LiDAR and aerial photography, to create a GIS model which can then be subject to field investigation. The survival of historic features such as lynchet banks, tracks and features related to woodland industries, such as saw pits, mine pits, tracks and ancient coppices and standards, should be investigated and recorded on the ground using guidance such as that produced by East Sussex County Council for the Historic Environment Awareness Project which was part of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. There is great scope for woodland archaeological research combining high quality LiDAR and documentary records and maps with ground truth survey, identification, recording and interpretation. There is still work to be done to understand in more detail medieval woodland clearance and management and coppicing, through into the post-medieval period. This is research that can combine studies of veteran trees with the study of earthworks and historic maps and documents. Such work can continue the legacy of projects at Shorne Woods and make the most of the expertise of the volunteers there.

6.6 Industry

6.6.1 To inform this study Dr Chris Down was commissioned to undertake a research assessment of the industrial heritage of the NNR area. The full report can be found at Appendix 6. Below are some extracted key points but the reader is directed to the full, illustrated report for details.

6.6.2 The review is presented in two main eras: pre- and post-1800 and provides a very useful appraisal of existing HER data and its limitations, which will be helpful in planning future research during future project implementation phases. For example, there is a lack of data at present about smaller scale cottage industries. An important point is that whilst extractive quarrying has been a common theme, the total area of extraction impacts is relatively small in relation to the total NNR area.

6.6.3 The pre-1800 industrial activity includes evidence for quarrying of clays, flint, sands and chalk, clay and flints. There is evidence for wells and smaller scale industrial activity, including windmills, such as the site in Shorne Woods. Local brickmaking was a significant local industry, for example related to developments at Cobham Hall.

6.6.4 Post-1800 the cement industry dominates the industrial landscape. Once the secrets of manufacturing a reliable Portland variety (the exact blend of chalk and clay and how to achieve it, optimum kiln temperatures, correct grinding of the kiln product [clinker] and so on) had become better understood in the mid-19th century, the attractions of north Kent, both Thames, Medway and Swale, for cement manufacture became obvious, not least because of the extensive chalk quarries and shipping facilities already available, but also because of the wide availability and proximity of the other main raw material, clay, and the pre-existing record of manufacturing precursors to Portland cement. The main impact into the NNR was the quarrying for chalk, particularly in the east of the NNR and proximity to cement works on the Medway.

6.6.5 The clay, brick and tile industries expanded, and in the case of bricks, in larger part to serve the cement industry where structures including kilns and store buildings required huge numbers of bricks. There is scope to understand local geological changes better to help map the distribution of small-scale brick and tiles manufacturing.

6.6.6 Arguably the biggest impact of quarrying within the NNR came in 1936-37 with the new Shorne Wood or Cobham claypit (now Shorne Wood Country Park). The Thames-side cement industry had undergone the same early evolutions in its clay resources as did the Medway industry but as those became exhausted (excepting those at Cliffe Marshes, exploited up to 1970) there was no accessible Gault Clay to fall back on. Therefore, attention concentrated on the few London Clay deposits and Shorne Wood was one of those. Producing clay which was slurried on site and piped (mostly alongside the A2) to Bevan's Works at Northfleet, the pit worked until about 1964. After lying derelict for some years, it reverted to the landowner and the Country Park project was initiated. The clayworks site has been extensively investigated by the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group.

6.6.7 Often mis-described as a coal mine, lignite was discovered during civil engineering work to upgrade the A2 Watling Street (1922-24) (TQ66 NE113), near today's 'Inn on the Lake' hotel. It comprised a very thin deposit, just 6in near surface and thickening to 2ft 6in at shallow depth. At first it may have been dug from surface on a small scale for local use on the Cobham Estates of the Earls of Darnley, the landowners, but no substantial development occurred until after 1947 when underground mining began to be considered. Development began in 1948 by a private company, despite the newly formed National Coal Board considering the claims for the deposit extremely optimistic and the project was very short-lived.

6.6.8 The heritage value of assets and the potential for future research is noted and one particular aspect of industrial history which is demonstrated in the study area, but which is now rare, is evidence for the transition from manual to machine excavation of chalk quarries. The only surviving examples in the area may well be Hilton Quarry and probably Lee's Houlder quarry; just possibly also White Pit or the older portions of Burham on the east bank.



Shorne Woods Archaeology Group excavating part of an industrial rail track in 2020.

6.6.9 Amongst potential future NNR studies, research into old OS, Tithe, and similar maps, combined with studies of LiDAR data and aerial photography, is likely to increase the number of small-scale records in the NNR. There is scope for further oral historical research to add to the work of the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group who have interviewed pit workers. Various indirect effects of industry upon the NNR can be canvassed, but one in particular – the potential impact of depositing high-alkali cement kiln dust upon local ecology – may have considerable potential for study.

6.7 Culture, Education and Religion

6.7.1 It has perhaps always been the case that people's perceptions of their physical environment have been endowed with spiritual significance. The NNR area has no lack of character in this respect. Evidence of what we have termed 'Religion and Culture' is varied with numerous records under the Religion search term in the Kent HER for the NNR study area. Types of sites include places of ritual significance and worship and places for burial and examples in and around the NNR project area are representative of every period of human occupation from the Neolithic to the present day.

6.7.2 Evidence for Neolithic activity includes the suggested, but unlikely, location for a megalith at Cobham [TQ 66 NE 4] and the site of undated, but possible Neolithic burials, found during the 1930s when constructing pylon bases, at Luddesdown [TQ 66 NE 16]. Evidence for later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age burials include the barrow in Ashenbank Wood [TQ 66 NE 17] and inhumation burials at Halling [TQ66 SE 29] and [TQ 76 NW 46].

6.7.3 More recent sites include Romano-British and early medieval cremation and inhumation cemeteries e.g. at Upper Halling [TQ 66 NE 25] and [TQ66 SE 16] with other examples along the Medway at Strood and Cuxton, at Shorne [TQ 67 SE 21], the possible, though contentious site, of an early medieval burial ground in Claylane

Wood [TQ 67 SE 7] as well as churches, chapels, temple-like mausoleum and war memorials.

6.7.4 This collection of heritage assets represents a significant aspect of the historic environment of the NNR and further work should be undertaken across the NNR to understand more fully the distribution, evaluation and setting of these monuments. Future land-management decisions should aim to conserve and protect the assets and their settings.

6.8 Leisure, Recreation and Sport

6.8.1 The NNR includes important examples of historic and contemporary spaces for leisure, recreation and sport. Historically there are important surviving elements of parkland associated with Birling Park, Comford Park and Cobham Park. Cobham Park and Gardens and Camer Park are designated. Many of the NNR sites provide public access for leisure, recreation and sport. These include Cobham Golf Club, established in the East Deer Park after the property was sold in 1925.

6.8.2 The traditional rural leisure pursuits were often perceived as the domain of the upper classes, though in reality they involved a wide range of people and specialisms related to rural life. The development of foxhunting in the early 18th century created changes in the landscape as new woodland, coverts and spinneys were established. More obvious is the provision of extra stabling and, particularly, kennels for the hounds on estates such as at Cobham Hall.

6.8.3 Cricket has been a sport that enjoys a wide cross-section of people within rural communities and at Cobham Hall a cricket ground was created to the south of the main house at 568467/168357 (not on the HER). The location of the ground is recorded on historic mapping (OS 1st Ed. – 4th Ed.). It is visible on the RAF 1946 aerial photos but the field was then cultivated since the post-war years. Cobham Hall was home of the ashes..!

6.8.4 The Inn on the Lake is an example of a leisure project connected to changing aspirations and opportunities to travel by car in the early 20th century. There is mention of there having been a diving school at the Inn on the Lake. Today, the area has a good network of public houses, many of which are in themselves historic buildings of significance. More research could be done to research in greater depth the development of leisure activities across the NNR area, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, to help understand the basis for a coordinated approach to future offers.

6.9 Military and Defence

6.9.1 To inform this study Victor Smith was commissioned to undertake a research assessment of the military and defence heritage of the NNR area. The full report can be found at Appendix 9.

6.9.2 Although the area of the NNR is not of itself a defensive entity it was the setting for a diversity of military and defence sites established across the landscape during the 20th century. Whether still existing or no longer extant, they were important elements of wider local, regional and national systems of defence. As

such, they were designed and positioned variously against the threat of land attack and bombing from the air and were essential for the Defence of the Realm and to preserve our freedom. Knowledge of these heritage assets enriches the history and heritage of the area and presents opportunities for further research and investigation, to advance our understanding of their purpose and place in the wider defensive and national context.

6.9.3 Through its military and defensive diversity in the 20th century, the area represents very much broader national strategic purposes, planning and implementation. Use of the landscape and terrain was a crucial feature of defensive development. The Great War trenches along the crest of the Downs are an example of this. These were historically significant as a length of a massive nationally important system which has left comparable archaeological traces elsewhere along the line.

6.9.4 From the Second World War were the dispersed accommodation camps for nearby RAF Gravesend, which utilised semi-concealing woodland. These may be compared with such airfield-related sites elsewhere, whether still existing or disappeared. Similarly, the Furzy Leas pre-D-Day troop camp and which has a relationship interest with other known sites in Southern England. There were also the vast training spaces radiating from the nationally important Wrotham Camp, a unique facility, taking advantage of both of woodland and cleared ground, of which parts are in the study area. The training area contained many opportunities for the use of landform for tactical training purposes.

6.9.5 The terrain of the area more generally influenced the siting of the many home defence positions which have yet to be fully identified and investigated. Landscape also determined the siting of the dummy airfield at Luddesdown. There were vast numbers of these across Britain, allowing contrast and comparison. As has been noted, the river Medway guided the placement of important anti-invasion defensive positions as elements of the National GHQ Line of defence, with linked counterparts upstream and across the Hoo Peninsula.

6.9.6 The Cobham heavy anti-aircraft battery [TQ 66 NE 59], complete in its core essentials, is worthy of special mention as a survival of a steadily declining number of such sites, having both common elements and some variations. Consideration should be given to affording public access to this site. Despite some intrusion of housing and other development, and the covering of soil and vegetation, settings and spaces utilised for defence and military purposes across the terrain, including in woodland and along the bank of the Medway, remain as a reminder of a once existing large, militarised landscape. The area has a number of important crash sites/

6.9.4 There are many opportunities for future research and outreach at the broader NNR area scale – see Appendix 9 for details and NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan. There is the opportunity, for example, to develop an NNR-wide defence heritage trail.

6.10 Events and Information

6.10.1 The NNR has many sites which have outreach as a core objective and many provide opportunities for heritage-related events and information. The existing structure for access and information is set out in the Visitor Access and Engagement Scoping Report by Polly Mathewson of Yellow Dog Green Planet. This strategy could provide the basis for a more detailed audit of all the existing publicly accessible cultural heritage information, both physical and digital, with the aim of developing a more coordinated NNR offer. It is recommended that a 'heritage information review' could be part of the NNR-wide Implementation Plan.

6.10.2 The NNR offers opportunities to develop more extensive heritage trails and reference should be made to the LCA Landscape Implementation Plan (May 2024) Section 8.4 – recommendations for Heritage Trails.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 The existing historic environment evidence for the NNR illustrates a significant time depth and rich record with evidence for human activity in every period of history from the Palaeolithic to the present day.

7.2 An important factor for the heritage of the NNR is that the woodland and parkland which is so characteristic of the area, can be favourable for the preservation of below-ground archaeological remains and earthworks. Some areas of the NNR such as Shorne Woods and Cobham Park, have been subject to detailed surveys, but many other areas have seen little modern research and investigation. The distribution of records within the Kent HER highlights these discrepancies.

7.3 Research within Shorne Woods Country Park over the last twenty years illustrates the potential for using LiDAR and interpretative ground surveys, combined with documentary research, to learn more about past land use and settlement. Within Shorne Woods Country Park there is evidence for Mesolithic activity, represented by concentrations of worked flints, as well as for a complex multi-period landscape of fields, tracks and ponds associated with medieval Randall Manor. Elements of this dominantly medieval landscape can be understood within the fascinating context of the site's 20th century military use and extensive industrial quarrying for clay and the subsequent woodland regeneration and evolution of the country park. There is the potential to undertake similar studies within other areas of NNR woodland which have not been subject to systematic study in the past and the NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan document includes available information about past research with recommendations for future work by NNR site area. Such research is ideal for involving volunteers.

7.4 A recommendation from this strategy is the need to create detailed GIS models of historic environment site data, which could be added to as more evidence is recorded, and which could act as a basis for future research (e.g. by period and/or theme) and for future NNR land management decisions.

7.5 Summary Implementation Plan priorities

No	Action description	When	Who	Contact	Costs
1	Update Heritage Strategy – ongoing to update documents through discussions with partners	24/25	CJ	KDNL KCC	£2k
2	Public heritage information review – e.g. information boards, trails, online and physical information, leaflets, booklets (Cobham), academic reports etc. with the aim of creating an NNR-wide offer	24/25	External	KDNL KCC	£3k
3	Report existing backlog fieldwork projects with more detailed literature review and control this action through the NNR Site Data spreadsheet	25/26 26/27	Researchers and authors	KDNL KCC	£500
4	Update the Kent HER monument and event records and the NNR Heritage Strategy docs using data from No. 3	25/26 26/17	KCC HER	KDNL KCC	£1k
5	Create NNR GIS heritage projects to define areas of significance and create period and thematic maps linked to evolving set of heritage research questions (6)	25/26 26/27	Kent Downs working with KCC HC	KDNL KCC	£3k
6	Develop a Heritage Management Plan for the NNR with heritage research questions - chronologically and thematically	25/26	External specialist	KDNL KCC	£6k
7	Update Heritage Trails – start with strategy document and maps from No. 2, liaise with partners about any groundworks and information, signage etc., draw up programme of works, commission, deliver	25/26	External supported by NNR team	KDNL KCC	£20k
8	Undertake fieldwork with volunteers to address research questions in No.6	26/27	KCC SWAG GHS	KDNL KCC	TBC
9	Advise on NNR land management decisions through provision of advice and training – update Heritage Strategy	25/26	KCC	KDNL KCC	TBC
10	Support ongoing projects such as Pond Survey and Heritage at Risk review	24/25 25/26	KNNL KCC	KDNL KCC	TBC

Acknowledgements

This document was commissioned and funded by the Kent Down National Landscape team and the author would like to thank Mike Phillips and Katriona Sharp for their support and encouragement during the project. Particular thanks also to Andrew Mayfield, Paul Cuming, Simon Mason, Chris Down, Victor Smith, Geoff Baker, Richard Taylor and Tony Chadwick for their advice and expertise. Thanks go

to the NNR partners for their support and engagement and to Karen Faux of Natural England for strategic advice.

Image copyright holders are identified alongside each image and their help is also appreciated. The text was written by Casper Johnson with specialist sections by Chris Down, Victor Smith, Geoff Baker and Tony Chadwick. Where appropriate we have also drawn on the past work of many local specialists.

All Ordnance Survey mapping presented in this report is reproduced under licence. Crown copyright and database rights [2022] Ordnance Survey (0100019238).

Bibliography

- Allen, T. et al., 2012. *A Road Through the Past, Archaeological Discoveries, on the A2 Pepperhill to Cobham road-scheme in Kent*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology
- Champion, T., 2007. Prehistoric Kent. In: J. H. Williams, ed. *The Archaeology of Kent to AD 800*. s.l.: Boydell Press - Kent County Council, pp. 67-132.
- Davis, S., 2006. *The prehistoric and Post-Medieval landscapes at Cobham Golf Course, Cobham, Kent*, s.l.: Unpublished report Oxford Wessex archaeology.
- East Sussex County Council., 2010 Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. Research & Survey Toolkits and Feature Identification Charts for Wooded Landscape (see High Weald National Landscape - highweald.org - and search for 'toolkits')
- Fyfe, F., Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Implementation Plan (May 2024) Fiona Fyfe Associates Ltd.
- Garwood, P. 2011. Early Prehistory. In P. Booth, T. Champion, S. Foreman, P. Garwood, H. Glass, J. Munby, & A. Reynolds, *On Track, The Archaeology on High Speed 1 Section 1 in Kent* (pp. 37-150). Oxford: Oxford Wessex Archaeology
- Matthewson, P., Visitor Access and Engagement Scoping Report (June 2024) Yellow Dog Green Planet
- Oxford Archaeology. 2008. *A2 Pepperhill to Cobham Widening Scheme, further Archaeological Works Report (Site D)*. Unpublished report.
- Wenban-Smith FF, 2007. The Palaeolithic archaeology of Kent. In (JH Williams, ed) *The Archaeology of Kent to AD 800*: 25-64. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge.
- Williams JH., (Ed.) 2007. *The Archaeology of Kent to AD 800*

List of appendices – thematic papers and HER evidence

1. Landscape and Environment
2. Communication
3. Settlement
4. Agriculture
5. Woodland and Forestry
6. Industry
7. Culture, Education and Religion
8. Leisure, Recreation and Sport
9. Military and Defence
10. Events and Information

Associated document.

NNR Site Data and Implementation Plan (spreadsheet)