

**KENT HIGH WEALD PARTNERSHIP**  
**WORKING WITH**  
**TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FOR**

**OUR COMMUNITY**

**Education, volunteering, health and wellbeing**

**OUR NATURE**

**Protecting and improving biodiversity**

**OUR LAND**

**Caring for the landscapes and Nature Conservation sites of the  
Borough**

**A New Service Level Agreement**

**Between**

**Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**

**And**

**Kent High Weald Partnership**

**01 April 2024 – 01 April 2027**

## Overview

Although the KHWP exist as semi-independent organisation under a formal partnership agreement between KCC and TWBC they operate only within Tunbridge Wells Borough and so are effectively what other authorities have as Countryside Management Teams or Rangers.

Only part of their Funding comes from TWBC and with that they do this:

- a) Through the management of sites for nature conservation the KHWP connect our communities with nature in a way that supports health and wellbeing objectives and brings benefits for biodiversity through activities, education, and action.
- b) They ensure that they deliver value for money through:
  - Partnership working
  - Supporting a strong force of volunteers
  - Securing additional funding through other agencies and external grants that far exceeds the Borough Councils contribution.

They are, through a Service Level Agreement, answerable to the Council and able to respond to and support Council projects, policies and events including most recently the Councils declaration of Climate and Biodiversity emergency.

**For every £1 of funding given to the KHWP they will usually attract more than an additional £3. So that £1 of Council money equals £4 spent in the borough on corporate priorities.**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

The Kent High Weald Countryside Partnership (KHWP) was established in 1991 for countryside management and conservation activities across the Borough involving management of Local Nature Reserves, conservation work, community engagement, volunteering and environmental education. It is one of seven such organisations across Kent and currently only works within Tunbridge Wells Borough.

Core funding is currently provided by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Kent Country Council (KCC) and its operation is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between KHWP and TWBC. KCC also host the KHWP and line manage staff.

The majority of funding is raised through project-based activities, commissioned programmes, external grants and work for other landowners.

The Councils funding and the work of the KHWP is covered by a Service Level Agreement (SLA). A review of the Partnerships work and the existing SLA with TWBC was completed in 2019 as part of a wider review of Council funding required as a result of the current period of austerity in Local Government. The requirement for detailed review was in recognition of the special long-standing status of the KHWP and the positive contribution it makes to Council owned sites and the community. The review resulted in the following recommendations to be investigated:

- (1) alternate structures for KHWP (e.g. charity, social enterprise or CIC status)
- (2) new and alternate sources of funding and areas of work
- (3) opportunities associated with housing growth in the Borough and management of Council owned sites to provide further sources of revenue
- (4) a new framework for Council funding based on agreed requirements for site management and specific outcomes.

The first two recommendations are longer term goals and are incorporated in the current KHWP Business Plan. This new SLA addresses recommendations 3 and 4 and sets out to establish the new terms under which TWBC provides funding to KHWP.

This document is the overarching SLA summarising the core service and objectives that KHWP will provide to TWBC.

## **2.0 KHWP'S VISION AND AIMS**

Kent High Weald Partnership aims to connect people and nature through conservation, education, and wellbeing. Through its work KHWP want to support the development of resilient communities and resilient ecosystems that mean people and wildlife can thrive together.

KHWP Strategic Aims are to:

- Enhance, protect and restore wildlife & biodiversity through conservation tasks and other activities that raise awareness and encourage understanding of the local environment, High Weald AONB and wider area and responsibility for the natural world.
- Recognise and promote the value of volunteering, improve accessibility to volunteering opportunities and increase the number of people taking part in volunteering across all communities.

- Develop opportunities for lifelong learning and experiences that inspire and engage all parts of the community.
- Encourage and support people to improve their physical and mental wellbeing through access to the outdoors, nature-based activities and interventions that enhance lives and nature.
- Develop community partnerships and networks that improve our ability to deliver our aims using a collaborative approach.
- Review the way we work to build resilience and create a sustainable model.

The KHWP business plan also takes account of the increasingly urgent local Climate Action agenda and the commitment by the Council to be carbon neutral by 2030 and will have a focus on community growing and the emerging recovery and response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

These aims are delivered through the management of Borough, Town and Parish Council owned sites as well as engagement with other landowners, schools and key stakeholder groups.

An office move to Bedgebury Pinetum in 2007 has enabled KHWP to develop and deliver a highly successful Forest Schools Program in partnership with the Forestry England.

### **3.0 NATURE OF THE SERVICE TO BE PROVIDED**

Kent High Weald Partnership offers a unique service to the Council by supplying a range of skills, experience, value, and professional collaborations that it would be difficult for other organisations to provide. KHWP work solely in Tunbridge Wells Borough, delivering Council policy for places and people on the ground, working in partnership to manage green spaces and engage with local communities. KHWP's work aligns with the Government's 25 Environment Plan pledges to use and manage land sustainably, recover nature and enhance the landscape, and to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.

The service that KHWP provides works across multiple Council departments and addresses many of the council's key priorities and statutory duties whilst maintaining a level of flexibility to ensure dynamic responses to changing environments. KHWP are a key contributor to Tunbridge Wells in Bloom and the outcomes of their work make a significant contribution to the Council fulfilling its duties under the CROW Act with regards the High Weald AONB and the NERC Act in respect of the Biodiversity Duty as well as supporting a wider range of Council policies for the environment.

This partnership between TWBC and KHWP will ensure:

#### ***Effective land stewardship & biodiversity results***

The core part of KHWP's service is to manage nature reserves and greenspaces in the Borough which will be carried out with regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and relevant local, regional and national plans, policies, and strategies. This supports TWBC with its national and regional conservation and landscape objectives.

#### ***Exceptional value for money & a high return on investment***

KHWP operates most of the practical conservation work required with a large network of local volunteers supervised by skilled and qualified staff. This allows for high productivity of work at a low

cost, ecological sensitivity when needed and excellent opportunities for community engagement, life-long learning, and wellbeing.

As a result of this partnership with TWBC, KHWP is able to carry out fundraising and additional service commissioning, obtaining over around £250k additional funding annually from other sources which is spent on projects in the borough. So For every £1 of Council core funding more than £4 will be spent.

A recent Leeds Beckett University research project found that there was a high social return on investment in nature-based projects for health and wellbeing as people benefited from the time in nature and thus used other health services less. According to this study:

- For every £1 spent on nature-based wellbeing programmes, the council could save nearly £7
- For every £1 spend on nature volunteering projects, the council could save £8.50

Source: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/SROI Report FINAL - DIGITAL.pdf>

### ***Meaningful partnerships***

KHWP ensures a joined up and holistic approach to its work through years of developing a wide range of successful partnerships and collaborations. KHWP works closely with housing companies, local businesses, a wide range of community organisations and schools, landowners and developers, other conservation organisations, health services and GPs, the High Weald AONB Partnership, and parish councils.

### ***Proactive response to the climate emergency***

Underpinning all the work of KHWP will be consideration for the climate emergency. This includes nature-based solutions to climate change as part of our sustainable land management, focus on local food growing via our wellbeing projects, and nurturing the land's future guardians through our education programme. The KHWP will support the Councils commitment to be carbon Neutral by 2030.

### ***A path towards community resilience, inclusivity, and wellness***

At the heart of KHWP's service are the communities, and KHWP work with as diverse a range of groups as possible. Due to the high public interest in greenspaces and the social benefits they offer, a key component of sustaining the sites is to involve the local community. It is important that everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to access and enjoy nature in their area. KHWP will work with all groups in the borough, delivering positive outcomes for individual and community.

## **4.0 SERVICE OBJECTIVES**

KHWP agrees to provide the following services to TWBC:

### **4.1 Stewardship of TWBC owned Nature Reserves and Natural Greenspaces**

KHWP have responsibilities for the management, maintenance, and community engagement of TWBC owned Local Nature Reserves, Local wildlife Sites and natural greenspaces. These include Hilbert Woods LNR, Barnetts Wood LNR, Cinderhill Wood LWS, Sherwood Lake and Woods Town Green, Marshley Harbour Woods LWS\*, Snipe and Bassets Wood LWS\*, High Woods and Reynolds

Lane LWS. In total these sites cover around 150 hectares. The duties for stewardship are listed below:

Site management:

- Writing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing site management plans with the overall aims of conserving and enhancing biodiversity and maintaining and promoting public access and enjoyment.
- Identification and administration of relevant land management schemes and designations (such as Environmental Stewardship, Woodland Grant Schemes, Green Flag Awards, etc)
- External fundraising to support the work and its sustainability
- Stay informed and respond proactively to local site changes, climate change issues, new diseases and invasive species, new policies, and strategies
- Regular site/habitat/species surveying
- Contractor management (for works relating to the management plan)
- Explore site potential for climate change mitigation and nature-based solutions to the climate crisis (for example, natural flood management, carbon storage and ecosystem services)

Site maintenance:

- Regular site checks (including identification and reporting of issues relating to health and safety, water quality, etc to the relevant authority)
- Respond to and liaise with local residents regarding site issues (such as dangerous trees, anti-social behaviour, illegal activities, etc) and report accordingly to the relevant authority
- Work with local agencies to respond to and deter anti-social behaviour and illegal land use
- Upkeep and repair of site infrastructure such as signage, fencing, boardwalks, steps, dipping platforms, rustic benches (*large trees, wayleaves, and large infrastructure such as built dams and culverts not included*)

Community Engagement:

- Establishment, support, promotion, or facilitation of site Friends of Groups
- Provision, management, and delivery of regular volunteer programme
- Provision, management, and delivery of community events, citizen science projects, and education programmes
- Stakeholder partnership development and management (local groups, organisations, schools)
- Provision of education and training opportunities
- Regular publicity of site activities and nature-related information to the community using a range of online and offline media
- Provision of corporate volunteering opportunities to local businesses

As well as these TWBC owned sites KHWP has responsibilities and/or is contracted to undertake management, maintenance, and community engagement on sites on behalf of parish and town

councils in the borough (under separate agreements) and is available to provide management activity, support and advice when needed across the borough.

#### **4.2 Provision of year-round volunteering opportunities for TWBC residents**

KHWP will provide weekly volunteer opportunities for TWBC residents all year round, ensuring a wide range of ages and abilities can access these opportunities. KHWP will facilitate and manage volunteer recruitment, training, tool provision, welfare and safety. KHWP volunteers will be covered by comprehensive public liability insurance.

#### **4.3 Offer land management, project advice, and practical assistance to Borough landowners, Parishes, and community organisations in line with the landscape, heritage and biodiversity objectives of the council.**

KHWP will be available to offer professional land management and project advice to Tunbridge Wells borough residents, landowners, developers, and community organisations that support the landscape, heritage and biodiversity objectives of the Council. KHWP will maintain annual assistance and support to local greenspace groups such as Friends of Dunorlan Park, Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, Friends of Calverley Grounds, Birch Wood Association, Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, Rusthall Fremlin Pond, and Southborough Common.

#### **4.4 Support TWBC in the local and national Britain in Bloom competitions and other discretionary council and park projects**

KHWP will work closely with the TWBC Parks Team, providing advice, skills and practical support for park and open space projects and initiatives such as the Britain in Bloom competition and ad hoc projects on sites such as Dunorlan Park, Calverley Park, and local recreation grounds.

#### **4.5 Actively ensure the borough is proactively involved in environmental strategies and schemes**

To ensure that Tunbridge Wells Borough is at the forefront of nature recovery and conservation efforts, KHWP will actively see to represent TWBC where appropriate in local and regional forums, groups and schemes such as the River Catchment schemes, Natural Flood Management, Kent Nature Partnership, and GCN licencing.

#### **4.6 Support with S106 projects and the Biodiversity Net Gain policy required for new housing developments**

KHWP will offer its services readily to TWBC in relation to planning development projects and requirements – such as greenspace enhancements, habitat improvements and creation, community engagement, and biodiversity net gain results. KHWP can ensure that development money can be put towards meaningful projects with long-term, sustainable outcomes.



#### **4.7 Provide nature and outdoor based learning, education, training and work experience opportunities for the residents, communities, and schools of the borough**

KHWP will work towards the betterment of children's and young people's lives in Tunbridge Wells. As a fully qualified and certified training and education provider, KHWP offers the following services to the borough:

- Forest school programmes
- Outdoor enrichment programmes
- Team building
- Forest School leadership training
- Work experience placements
- Apprenticeships

Although open to all, KHWP seeks funding annually to work directly with hard-to-reach groups and areas of deprivation.

KHWP is also able to provide school ground improvement advice and practical assistance to schools in the borough, including support with the outdoor learning requirements of the national curriculum.

#### **4.8 Improve the health and wellbeing of residents and communities in the borough**

KHWP will contribute towards the council's health strategy and objectives and provide advice and support to the Tunbridge Wells Health Action Team. KHWP is a qualified and experienced provider of nature-based health and wellbeing programmes in the borough and has established projects and contracts as well as commissionable services available. These include:

- Community allotment and gardening projects
- Wellbeing walks
- Horticultural therapy programmes
- Kent Sheds
- Forest therapy
- Online nature connection groups
- One-off wellbeing days for local businesses and organisations (including council staff)

Through working in partnership with local and regional health services and organisations, GPs, housing associations, landowners, and community groups, KHWP will work towards the betterment of the health and wellbeing of Tunbridge Wells Borough residents.

#### **4.9 Bring income into the borough**

With a proactive fundraising strategy at the heart of its business plan, KHWP will draw in additional income from external sources that will be spent on projects within the borough, providing a significant return on investment for the council's money.

## **5.0 SERVICE OUTPUTS & PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS**

In addition to the site-specific outcomes and targeted outputs, the key measurable performance indicators that KHWP will record and report on include:

- Numbers of volunteer engaged in activities
- Numbers of volunteer days and volunteer hours delivered (including financial value)
- Numbers of community events and participants attending
- Volunteer and community feedback survey data
- Contributions towards Local Management Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan Targets (including BAP species and habitats encouraged)
- Contributions towards High Weald AONB Management Plan Objectives
- Biodiversity improvements on TWBC land
- Biodiversity Net Gain targets achieved where set
- Number of schools, community groups and other organisations, private landowners worked with
- Number of people trained and qualified
- Numbers of adults and children whose wellbeing has been improved through attending KHWP programmes (case studies will also be collected)
- Social return value of KHWP activities
- Numbers of children accessing Forest School activities and outdoor enrichment
- Numbers of new trees, plants and seeds planted
- Value of return on investment through external funding applications made and secured

### **Minimum targets:**

- External Funding Secured in a financial year: £190,000 (3 x the SLA contribution).
- 100 x Volunteer event days per annum
- Maintain up to date management plans for all 8 Council owned sites.
- An annual report at the end of the financial year, detailing outcome and outputs achieved against the service objectives.

TWBC are welcome to request additional measurable outputs in line with any council strategy requirements or changes.

## **6.0 WIDER SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES**

KHWP is able to respond quickly, innovatively, and flexibly to new demands and opportunities. With extensive project management and fundraising expertise and a wide skill set, KHWP can ensure TWBC is at the forefront in terms of biodiversity and nature related wellbeing projects.

KHWP can upscale and replicate projects readily as well as create new projects in response to latest strategies, objectives, and community needs.

As a key partners of TWBC, KHWP will be available to offer additional services where needed and practicable.

Potential areas for wider service provision: Biodiversity Net Gain; Nature Recovery; green social prescribing; and Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS).

## **7.0 FUNDING AGREEMENT**

TWBC will pay KHWP a core grant of £76,194.50 annually for the period of this agreement.

The funding provided under this SLA shall not be used for any other purpose without TWBC's prior written agreement. These payments will be paid on the submission of the Partnership's invoices.

## **8.0 SERVICE STANDARDS**

### **8.1 Service delivery**

All work shall be delivered through the employees of the Kent High Weald Partnership under the guidance of the Steering Group working in partnership with TWBC to achieve the aims and objectives as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between TWBC and Kent County Council (the administrative host of KHWP).

### **8.2 Financial Monitoring and Reporting**

The Partnership shall keep accurate and up-to-date accounts and records of the receipt and expenditure of the Funding monies received. Financial and managerial record keeping for funding shall be overseen by KCC in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement. An annual financial report based on audited accounts will be submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to allow an assessment of value for money in accordance with performance measurements.

### **8.3 Public Liability Insurance, Health & Safety, and Equal Opportunities**

As an organisation operating under the auspices of Kent County Council KHWP is covered by KCC's £50 million Public Liability Insurance policy. KHWP is also governed by KCC's health and safety policies, and has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures.

All practical work carried out on both public and private sites by KHWP, is risk assessed in line with KCC policies and procedures. Copies of risk assessments, which are produced for every occasion on which KHWP works on public or private sites, with volunteers, or with members of the public, are available on request.

When providing its services, the KHWP shall not discriminate against any service users on any grounds regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Services that are offered to ethnic and minority groups shall take into account the users'

cultural, language, race and religion. All staff shall be sufficiently qualified, competent, experienced and supervised to provide the service in a sensitive manner without discrimination. Training in equalities is compulsory for all staff and is provided by KCC.

#### **9.0 AGREEMENT PERIOD, REVIEW AND TERMINATION**

Financial review will be through the Council's Service Planning process. The Service Level Agreement will cover a 3-year period subject to annual review in line with the Business Plan and MoA. The annual review of the SLA will be carried out by the Landscape and Biodiversity Officer and the Manager for the KHWP in consultation with Officers Consultation Group for the KHWP, Service Managers and Portfolio Holder.

Termination shall be governed by the Memorandum of Agreement between KCC and TWBC.