

Dear

Welcome to our February Newsletter

The New Year is now well underway and signs of Spring are upon us. Poetry is a great way to lift the spirits and help us to focus upon a much happier year ahead.

The great nature poet John Clare wrote...

*Come, gentle Spring, and show thy varied greens
In woods, and fields, and meadows, by clear brooks;
Come, gentle Spring, and bring thy sweetest scenes,
Where peace, with solitude, the loveliest looks;
Where the blue unclouded sky
Spreads the sweetest canopy,
And Study wiser grows without her books.*

Parks Fit for the Future

The [Local Government Association](#) is the organisation which represents all our local councillors on a national level. They have just completed a detailed study of our parks and greenspaces and the results are very clear.

- 30% more people were active in our parks during the first lockdown
- 62% of the adult population of England visited a greenspace in October last year
- 42% of adults say that their greenspace has been important to them during lockdown

Despite this the future of many of our greenspaces is uncertain because funding is a problem.

The LGA is calling on the Government to introduce a local, flexible **£500 million Green Parks Fund** to help councils to invest in small scale initiatives to help the nation's parks and green spaces recover, flourish and to ensure a healthier more active nation.

"Parks have been lifelines for residents during the the pandemic, but many face uncertain futures." Cllr. Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board.

To read more about this important issue follow the link to the [LGA report](#).

Small Grants Available

Some great news about possible funds for our Friends Groups.

The **Involving Medway** small grants pot is now open for applications.

Community organisations and volunteers have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to connect communities and keep people safe and well. Grants of up to £2,500 are available to community groups and individuals for initiatives which help beat social isolation and encourage people in community activities. This year we are particularly interested in ideas which manage to connect isolated people virtually.

Download an application form [here](#). For more information please contact Kent Community Foundation bruce@kentcf.org.uk or phone 01303 815151.

Applications will be open until Friday 5th March 2021.

Greenspaces update - news from around our Friends Groups

Throughout the lockdown our Friends Groups have done their best to stay in touch and we have all learned the wonders of Zoom!

In Rochester, **the Friends of the Vines** had their first ever Zoom meeting at the end of January and are hoping that it will be possible to hold their famous Cherry Picnic in July. The **Friends of Watts Meadow** have also met regularly to plan the coming year, including ways to help their bat population!

New signs are going up at **Borstal Recreation Ground** which will explain some of its history, and similar signs are being designed by the **Friends of Millennium Green** in Luton, The **Friends of Rainham Recreation Ground** have planted a willow den next to the children's play area and have a fairy trail for children to follow over half term.



At **Broomhill** there has been some clearing of fallen trees across paths by a very good local contractor. Bark chipping are available for path surfacing and shrub beds so contact the Forum for [more information](#).

In **Wainscott**, where a new Friends group is about to be launched, there is planting of a new community orchard, with cob nuts and fruit trees, Something we could all do on our greenspaces to encourage some local foraging!

If your group has plans for the coming year or any special news then please let us know and we will share this with the MUGs Forum members.

Special News for Friends Groups

For those groups wanting help and support over the coming months or who have found the lockdown has been a real struggle help is at hand.

We can now provide some one-to-one support for those Groups who need help with recruitment or organising how things are run.

The MUGs Forum has also set up **Social Media Training Course for the evening of the 23rd February from 6.30-7.30 pm** The course offers the chance to learn more about social media and other online tools to boost your membership. There are spaces left so just [email](#) us for further information.

Link to I-Spy February

Our I-Spy page for February is proving very popular. If you want to find out what to look out for this month then just follow the [link](#).

Let us know if you have any recommendations for places in Medway to see some special wildlife, or what to look out for in March.

Walking for Health

The Council's team responsible for promoting healthy walking have doing an amazing job keeping us active despite the lockdowns. They are also working on new initiatives that will encourage people to get out and about safely.

In particular, Medway Trails, which is a way of orienteering using pictures. Our greenspaces will be involved in this so if you want to help set up a route contact David through walking@medway.gov.uk

For more information on walking in Medway go to:
https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200221/a_better_medway/449/health_walks

Latest on Climate Change

COP 26

COP 26 is the next annual UN Climate Change Conference. This year the UK holds the presidency of the conference which will be held in Glasgow from the 1-12th November.

COP stands for Conference of Parties and it brings together all the heads of state, climate experts and campaign groups to continue their work to address the problems and causes of climate change.

This year the conference is particularly important as the new US President will be attending and many believe that this will fundamentally change the whole approach on climate change for the better.

For more information go to the [MUGs web site](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/cop26) climate change pages or follow this link <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/cop26>

Government delay on Environment Bill

The Government is to delay the long awaited Environment Bill which is set to redefine our own environmental rules now that we have left the EU. Campaigners are angry about this and it will delay action on issues from air pollution, to plastics, to biodiversity and would have been the biggest shake up in the legislation for decades.

For more information go to:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/26/fury-as-long-awaited-uk-environment-bill-is-delayed-for-the-third-time>

<https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/environment/environment-bill-delay-adds-to-uncertainty-for-farm-businesses>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-55799191>

Biodiversity update

As the Spring arrives we will gradually see more and more of our wonderful Medway Forest come to life. For example, we have had report of Kestrels over the Great Lines and Tree Pipits in Rochester.

Some Friends Groups have already started to send in records of their wildlife so if you want to join them you can use the special recording forms or simply email your sightings to the our MUGs Forum [web site](#).

.... and finally some more lines we have come across.....

We long for Spring.

The hint of purple, the splash of pink,

The sharp, scratch of Hazel red.

The canvas is bare, the colours prepared,

The brush is charged,

We long for Spring.

(Anon.)



Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum | c/o Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, ME4 4TR, Chatham

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