



Valley of Visions

a landscape partnership for the Medway Valley



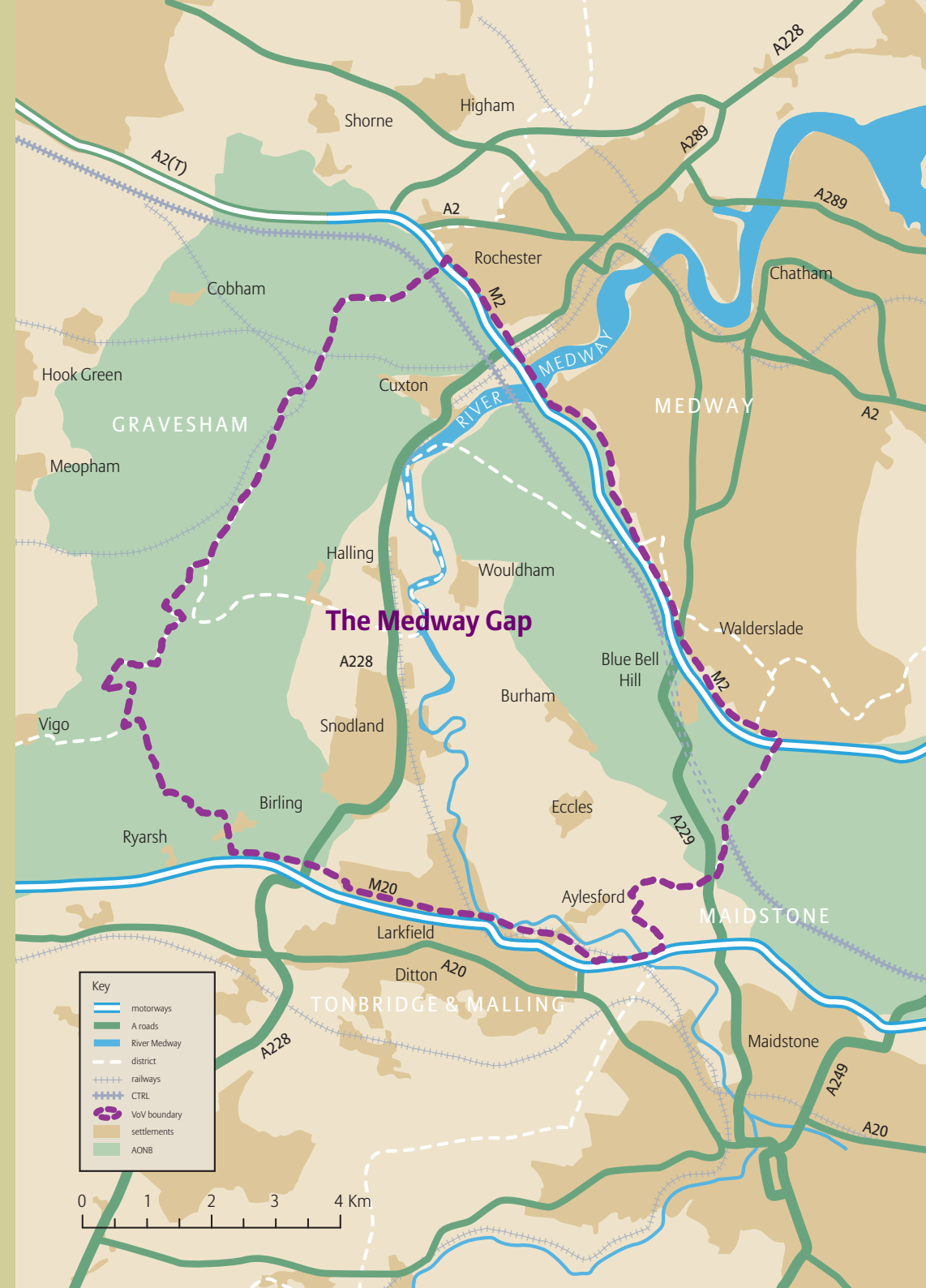
Introduction

Nestled between Maidstone and the Medway Towns is a unique and distinctive landscape. The county's largest river cutting through the North Downs has created the dramatic, broad triangular valley that is today known as the Medway Gap.

The Medway Gap is an area in transition and under pressure as old industries decline, farming practices change and new housing and commercial developments are expanding. Yet these changes have brought fresh opportunities to work with local communities, local authorities, landowners and developers to protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage assets. In addition, huge potential exists to engage local people and visitors in exploring, caring for and celebrating this special place.

Valley of Visions is a three year Landscape Partnership Scheme funded primarily by the Heritage Lottery Fund and delivered through the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The project aims to encourage local people and visitors to conserve, enhance and celebrate the natural beauty and heritage of the Medway Gap, to ensure its survival for future generations.

This leaflet intends to give a brief overview of some of the work Valley of Visions is doing over the next three years in the Medway Gap. As you will see, there are many ways you can get involved. Feel free to contact us to find out more.





Conserving the Valley's Wildlife and Landscape



The wide bottomed valley of the River Medway as it flows through the Medway Gap is bordered to the east and west by the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These wooded chalk hills provide a striking contrast with the vast expanses of the tidal Medway's flood plain. This contrast in turn provides a wide range of habitats for wildlife to thrive in a relatively small geographical area. Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme is working with landowners, tenants and partners to achieve real conservation benefits for the project area.

Managing the Medway Arc

The Medway Arc refers to the horseshoe of downland that borders the Medway Gap to the east and west. The slopes are ecologically rich and include a variety of habitats ranging from chalk grassland through to scrub and woodland which support a range of notable wildlife including juniper, dormouse and the chalkhill blue butterfly.

Working with the Kent Wildlife Trust, landowners and local volunteers, Valley of Visions is supporting ongoing conservation work, such as coppicing and scrub clearance, while reintroducing management to sites that have been neglected.



Medway Marshes

Halling, Holborough, Burham and Wouldham Marshes nestle alongside the River Medway as it winds its way out to sea. The low scrub and reedbeds provide a rich mix of habitats for wildlife. However, the marshes' proximity to the local villages and towns mean they are also important for public access. Valley of Visions is working with partners to improve public access to these sites, whilst maintaining and enhancing these important habitats for wildlife.

Working with Farmers and Landowners

Throughout the scheme's three year life, Valley of Visions will work with stakeholders in the Medway Gap to achieve maximum environmental benefit on land through agri-environment schemes, advice and support.

Securing the Landscape

There has traditionally been a high level of nuisance vehicles, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour within the Valley of Visions scheme area. The areas of abuse have tended to be concentrated in some of the more remote rural areas. This activity has had a detrimental effect on the landscape and makes access to the area threatening and unsafe.

Valley of Visions is leading a new approach to tackling these problems on a landscape scale. Working at a high level with Kent Police and key stakeholders, intelligence gathering is being used to target areas to coordinate and make the best use of resources. This approach is being supported with the installation of robust physical barriers, publicity and community liaison.



The Gap in the Past

The fertile floodplains and the surrounding hills of the Medway Gap have attracted settlers for some 400,000 years. It is home to one of the most important collections of Neolithic monuments in south-east England, the site of the original crossing of the River Medway by the Roman army and has a wide range of medieval heritage as well. More recently, the cement industry has left its mark in the valley. Quarrying has led to numerous 'carvings' of the landscape and most of the towns and villages within the valley have been shaped by the industrial past.

The Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme works with partners, local interest groups and volunteers to interpret and conserve the Medway Gap's rich heritage, particularly its Neolithic, Palaeolithic and industrial heritage.

The Medway Megaliths

Over the years the majority of the valley's megalithic sites have fallen into neglect or been destroyed entirely. Valley of Visions is working to improve public access to the remaining Megaliths, as well as interpreting the sites to better understand their history and relevance.

Revealing Industrial Heritage

The cement industry's impact on the area is clearly visible today. However, ways in which it has shaped the natural and built landscape, as well as people's lives, could be better understood and celebrated. Valley of Visions is involved in a number of projects to celebrate the area's industrial heritage, such as the restoration of 19th century railway carts and the Bishop's Palace in Halling where the industrial past overlays the medieval.



Medway Memories

Building on the fascinating project *People and Work in the Lower Medway 1750 – 1900* undertaken by Victoria County History, Medway Memories will work with schools and volunteers to record people's memories of industrial heritage and landscape to the present day. Information gathered will be used in other projects particularly in interpreting key sites within the Medway Gap.

Archaeology in the Community

Throughout the Valley of Visions project there are opportunities for local people to get involved in the processes of archaeology, whether through archaeological digs, field walking or historic landscape surveys.

Talking History

Valley of Visions is organising a number of talks by local experts on key aspects of the Medway Gap's heritage including industrial, Neolithic and Palaeolithic heritage.

Reconnecting People and Landscape

Just as the landscape has been shaped by the Medway Gap's industrial past, so have its villages and towns, each settlement showing signs of its more distant heritage alongside modern developments. Over the years, the rate of change has led to people and communities in the Medway Gap becoming disconnected from the landscape and each other – the River Medway and major roads dissect and encircle the valley.

The Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme is working with local communities to reconnect them with their landscape and their past to celebrate the Medway Gap.

Get Out in the Gap

There are numerous reasons why people don't explore their local area: a perceived lack of anything of interest; physical barriers such as major roads; poor condition of footpaths and other rights of way to name but a few. To reduce these barriers and to help people learn about their local area, Valley of Visions is running guided walks and cycle rides for local people, while encouraging and enabling them to become leaders themselves. There is also the opportunity for communities to set up and interpret their own circular walks.

Schools Out

The natural and historic resources within the Medway Gap provide a wonderful opportunity for learning. Valley of Visions is working with local schools to set up exciting and interactive projects to engage young people both inside and outside the classroom.

Let's Celebrate

In order to provide a true legacy to the Valley of Visions, one that reveals itself in the enthusiasm of local people for the landscape of the Medway Gap, Valley of Visions is working with local residents, schools and partners alike to celebrate the landscape. This celebration is taking place over the three years of Valley of Visions' life and includes innovative projects to express feelings about the area through drama, dance and the visual arts. There is also the opportunity for young people to record music based on the sounds and emotions generated by the valley.

Your River

Your River is a photography competition which offers people the chance to capture what the River Medway and its valley means to them in pictures. Successful photographs will be publicised and displayed throughout the valley and the wider area.





Get Involved!



There are numerous ways you can get involved with Valley of Visions: why not join a guided walk or cycle ride, attend a free training course on wildflower identification, or volunteer on an archaeological dig?

Events and Talks

Valley of Visions is running a whole host of events and talks to help people enjoy and understand the wildlife, landscape and heritage of the Medway Gap. Events range from guided walks to look at the butterflies of the area to interactive talks on its Neolithic heritage.

For a full list of events and talks, pick up a copy of our events and talks leaflet or visit our website.

Conservation & Heritage Training

In order to provide local people with the necessary skills to get actively involved with the conservation of the Medway Gap's natural and built heritage, Valley of Visions is offering free training courses in a wide range of subjects from marshland ecology and coppicing to woodland archaeology and oral history.

The conservation and heritage training leaflet details the vast range of training opportunities on offer. Why not pick up a copy and book onto a course?



Volunteering

Throughout the Valley of Visions Scheme there are many ways to volunteer. You can get involved with practical habitat management with our partners, such as Kent Wildlife Trust and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership or take part in community archaeology in various places throughout the valley. Contact the Valley of Visions project team to find out more about how you can get involved.

Copies of leaflets outlining our events and talks as well as our conservation and heritage training opportunities are available from local outlets or directly from Valley of Visions. Alternatively, electronic versions are available on our website.

Contact us

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