

Vandals ruin woodland group's latest project

■ Theft blow knocks back preservation work

by Jenni Horn
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IT WAS one step forward and two steps back for a group of villagers fighting to preserve their local countryside.

Just hours after the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group unveiled its latest conservation project, the area fell victim to vandals once again.

FACTFILE

The Bredhurst Woodland Action Group's other achievements:

■ The county council has imposed an experimental traffic regulation order which restricts vehicular access.

■ Additional work, including 350 metres of fencing by members under the guidance of Kent Wildlife Trust.

■ Fly-tipping has been cleared thanks to volunteers and local farmers who provided machinery to remove many of the large items. More than 100 tons of rubbish was cleared during the first fly-tipping clearance day.

■ Since BWAG was formed in 2005 it has raised nearly £65,000 and has more than 200 members.

More than 100 people gathered at Bredhurst Hurst on Sunday, April 30, for the opening of a network of renovated pathways.

The Royal Engineers spent two months working in the ancient woodland to restore several hundred metres of paths.

The paths had been destroyed by off-road vehicles illegally gaining access to the area.

The woods were also blighted by continuous fly-tipping and burnt-out cars.

The renovated paths were officially opened by Nigel Wheeler, the High Sheriff of Kent; Paul Carter, leader of KCC and Cllr Denise Joy, deputy mayor of Maidstone.

Villagers then embarked on a walk through the woods to check out the restored footpaths.

Pleasant

Vanessa Jones, chairman of Bredhurst Parish Council and the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group, said: "We had an excellent turnout - more than 100 people took part on the walk through the woodland.

"Now the woodland is a much more pleasant area to visit and can be widely enjoyed by all."

But just hours after the event, the conservation project was dealt a severe blow.

Cllr Jones said: "Sadly, after such an excellent event, the following day we discovered that overnight a 12ft metal field gate had been stolen from an area within the woodland that volunteers had recently cleared of scrub and fenced."

It is not the first time BWAG has

suffered a setback after a success. In December last year, when the Army first began restoring the footpaths, the tyres of a dumper truck were slashed.

In April, 2007, just three days after volunteers cleared 100 tons of fly-tipping from the woodland, vandals smashed fences and

a kissing gate which had been installed three weeks earlier.

Cllr Jones added: "We won't let the vandals beat us.

"We hope to graze sheep on the land where the gate was stolen from, so we will get a replacement gate installed as soon as possible."



■ Members of the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group gather to walk the network of pathways restored by their efforts and those of the Royal Engineers

Bid to protect commuter route

RAIL bosses are to attempt to save an under-threat service used by hundreds of commuters.

Trains from Chatham to London Cannon Street could run less frequently when new routes are opened in 2009 to service the high-speed rail link to the Channel Tunnel.

But Southeastern trains managing director Charles Horton

has said it was not his plan to reduce the service. He said: "A reduction is not inevitable.

"We're carrying out a market research initiative with the results available shortly.

"Our aim is not to reduce the service but to retain the service.

"We are currently in discussion with the Department for Transport regarding this."

The pledge came after Mr Horton was quizzed by Chatham and Aylesford MP Jonathan Shaw.

Mr Shaw said: "The Cannon Street service is an important commuter link for local people and I am determined to work with the company to improve and keep the service.

"I want to see rail commuters get value for money."



■ Soon after the top picture was taken, the gate was stolen

Fears over future of shop parking

THE Co-op is planning to fine shoppers if they stay more than two hours in its car park at Walderslade, according to a councillor.

Cllr Ian Burt (Ind) said he was particularly concerned because Medway Council was planning to sell off its car park in Robin Hood Lane.

Several car parks across the Towns were up for sale, he has warned.

He said it could have a serious effect on the 80 shops in Wain-scott, and in particular the people who worked in them.

Council leader Cllr Rodney Chambers (Con), said he had heard different reports about the availability of parking in Walderslade.

He promised: "Working with other partners we will achieve a satisfactory solution."

Memorial day to remember lost workers

MEDWAY council staff are to pay tribute to lost colleagues.

A service is being held on Monday, April 28, at Rochester Castle Gardens to remember colleagues who have died. The service starts at midday and is part of this year's Workers' Memorial Day.

Council Ranger Bob Wade will tell the story of the Memorial Tree, planted 10 years ago.

There will also be a display of 240 empty boots representing the number of deaths each year from work-related accidents in the UK. Purple ribbons will also be made available to anyone who wants to remember a colleague by tying one on the tree.

Lynette Rispoli, health, safety and wellbeing manager at the council, said: "This is a chance for people to dedicate a special day to lost loved ones.

"It shows they're not forgotten and also the importance of remembering the dead while fighting for the living."



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Students' fashion goes on show

ROCHESTER students will be hoping their talent will be discovered at a prestigious London fashion show this week.

A group of second-year students from the University College for the Creative Arts, Rochester, will be exhibiting their work at Alternative Fashion Week in London.

Twenty-three students, studying for the National Diploma in Art and Design, will present their Sixties Fashion Project at the event, which is renowned for discovering new talent.

Each student designed and made a 1960s-style dress.

Lecturer Jennifer Hughes said: "This kind of exposure is fantastic. Alternative Fashion Week provides

an opportunity for truly innovative designers to present their work directly to the press, the public and the fashion industry."

Hot on the heels of London's mainstream Fashion Week, this event is for those who enjoy fashion and want to stay ahead of the pack.

Rochester's young designers will show off their innovative work alongside fashion's stars of the future.

The show is famed for its aspiring young fashion models and trendsetting fresh talent.

■ **Alternative Fashion Week is at Spitalfields Market, Crispin Place, Brushfield Street, London, from Monday, April 21, until Friday, April 25. Admission free.**



■ Some of the work from Rochester students which will be on show at Alternative Fashion Week