

---

# Boxley Warren Local Nature Reserve Summary Plan (2012-2017)

---

Prepared for Maidstone  
Borough Council  
by Will Hirstle BA, MSc  
Clarity Interpretation  
November 2007

---

Revised August 2012  
Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership

---



## SITE DETAILS

Area: approx. 89 ha (220 acres) with possible extension of Westfield Wood (5.3ha) and 'The Veitch Land' (3.1ha)

Centre grid reference: TQ 763 602

Parish: Boxley

Local authority area: Maidstone Borough

### Designations:

- The majority of the site is within the Wouldham to Detling Escarpment Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the North Downs Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- The entire site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Most of the woodland is designated as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland.
- The White Horse Stone, located in the far south-western corner of the site, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- The site was declared as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in December 2007.

### Ownership and management:

Boxley Warren is privately owned by David and Norman Attwood. It is subject to a nature reserve agreement with Maidstone Borough Council. The site's management is delivered by the Boxley Warren Local Nature Reserve Advisory Committee which consists of interested parties. The possible extension areas are owned by Cobtree Manor Trust (Westfield Wood) and Maidstone Borough Council (The Veitch Land).

## SITE DESCRIPTION

*Note: the site has been divided into numbered 'compartments', as shown on map 1.*

### Landscape

The site lies mainly on the main slope of the North Downs, which is a ridge of chalk. The landscape is characterised by wooded slopes, with many areas dominated by yew trees, but there is also open chalk grassland, grazed by sheep, typical of the North Downs. There are spectacular viewpoints from the higher ground. The north-western part of the site is on the plateau on top of the downs, with flinty clay soils; the ancient woodland here has spectacular shows of spring wild flowers. As part of the Kent Downs AONB, the landscape of the reserve is of national importance. It is also a key feature of Boxley's local landscape.

### Habitats

One of the most important habitats in the reserve is the yew woodland. This is semi-natural woodland, that has been little altered by man, and has a dark, wild, primeval look to it. In many areas yew is virtually the only tree growing, and because it is evergreen, and casts heavy shade, the ground underneath is often bare of plant life. In more open areas other trees such as whitebeam and ash are found, and where the closed canopy of yew has been storm damaged are splashes of greenery with plants like dog's mercury and stinking iris growing in the light.

Other wooded areas on the reserve are more familiar broadleaved woodland, with much, oak, ash and hazel coppice. Bluebells, wood anemone and other woodland wild flowers thrive here. There is a small area of beech woodland in the south-west corner. One recent addition to the site's tree population was the return of the rare box tree from which the site (and the parish) gets its name; cuttings taken from surviving trees in nearby Boxley Wood were grown on and planted in the reserve by volunteers.

Another important habitat is chalk grassland. Old, established grassland exists in compartment 3, while that in compartments 2a and 7 was cleared of scrub in 2000 and is being 'restored' by grazing and cutting. Chalk grassland is very rich in plants, and many typical species, such as wild thyme, eyebright, common rock rose and a number of orchids, thrive on the established areas and are also returning to the restoration areas. Grassland has also been created by sowing former arable land with a wild grassland seed mix.



'The Veitch Land' is also previous arable land with the southern section now being returned to grassland and the northern section now landscaped with a plantation of native broad leaved trees.

Most of the reserve is protected by UK law as part of a SSSI. The presence of rare yew woodland led to these areas, becoming further protected by European law as an SAC. The reserve's habitats are therefore nationally and internationally important. Compartments 4a, 2b, 7 and 9 are excluded from these designations.

The table below summarises the habitats and their importance.

Habitat	Importance
Yew woodland	Internationally important - the main reason why the site is as an SAC.
Chalk grassland	Included in the SAC as a 'qualifying' feature.
Broadleaved woodland	Included in the SAC, forming habitat 'mosaics' with yew woodland
Arable reversion grassland	Not protected
Landscape planting	Not protected

### Flora and fauna

The table below lists some of the important species at the reserve.

Species	Description
<b>Plants</b>	
Ground pine	A plant that needs disturbed ground on chalk. It is nationally rare and protected by law.
Man orchid	A nationally scarce orchid of rough chalk grassland, with flowers that look like tiny people.
White helleborine	A nationally vulnerable plant found in shady or partially shaded areas.
Stinking hellebore	An unusual looking plant of chalky places, with strongly scented leaves and green petalled flowers that come out in January. It is nationally scarce.
Box	A nationally rare shrub-sized tree, which has been planted on the reserve.
Pyramidal, bee and common spotted orchids	All these orchids thrive on chalk grassland. The bee orchid fools insects into mating with its flowers for pollination.
Cowslip	A once familiar wild flower, now 'of conservation concern'.
<b>Invertebrates</b>	
Holly blue	A butterfly of woodland that has declined in recent years.
Chalkhill blue	This milky blue butterfly is characteristic of chalk downs, but is now 'of conservation concern'.
Heath snail	Despite its name this mollusc thrives on chalk downland. It is classed as 'vulnerable' in Kent and was last recorded on the reserve in 2002.
Bees, wasps and ants	A number of important species have been recorded over the years, and some may still be present - a survey will hopefully tell us more.
Other insects	Chalk downland is often rich in insects such as grasshoppers, beetles, moths and flies - a survey is planned for the reserve to find out what is here.
<b>Reptiles</b>	
Adder	The conservation of Britain's only venomous snake is a priority in Kent, where it is in decline.
<b>Birds</b>	
Skylark	This much loved, once common bird is in real trouble nationally but still sings over the reserve.
Song thrush	Another once common bird now on the RSPB's 'red list' of declining species.

Peregrine Falcon	Bred at Boxley Warren in 2011 and are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act as well as being endangered according to the Kent Red Data Book.
Common buzzard	Buzzards are regularly seen over the reserve.
Chiffchaff, blackcap, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat	Migratory warblers that visit in summer. The chiffchaff gets its name from its distinctive 'chiff-chaff' song - listen out for it in spring in the woods.
<b>Mammals</b>	
Badger	Doing well on the reserve with many setts.
Hazel dormouse	Probably present in the broad-leaved woodland, this mammal is protected by European law; a survey will hopefully confirm its presence.
Bats	A survey will tell us which bats are using the reserve; all bat species are protected by law.

## Heritage

The most important heritage feature of the site is the White Horse Stone. This Neolithic monument, which is at least 4300 years old, is thought to be the remains of a chambered tomb - the large upright stone probably being a wall of the chamber. It is one of a number of important Neolithic sites in this area, known as the 'Medway megaliths'. These monuments, which include Kit's Coty, form one of the most important groups of megalithic structures in south-east England. They were used in funerary rituals and, together with other structures, may have formed a 'sacred landscape' of which the Warren may have been part.

Much later, in the Medieval period, part of the land here must have been used for rearing rabbits, hence the name 'warren'. A warren was an area of artificial burrows for rabbits, which, having been brought into Britain by the Normans, were poorly adapted to our climate and needed careful husbandry. It is likely that the warren was owned by Boxley Abbey, and the landscape here may have other connections with the ecclesiastical estate.

The ancient woodlands in the reserve are at least 400 years old. Not so long ago they were part of a much larger woodland to the south of Chatham, lost to housing and agricultural clearance.

The reserve contains a number of other heritage features, about which little is known. They include a mysterious underground store or water tank, discovered when scrub was cleared in 2000, a number of old sunken tracks known as 'hollow ways', old chalk quarries, and a WWI target range. Archaeological finds on the site include Iron Age coins, a Bronze Age axe, and a Medieval lead vessel known as a 'pilgrim's flask'.

## Access and visitor use

### *Public rights of way (PROW):*

- The Pilgrims Way passes through the southern periphery of the site, following a restricted byway ('restricted' means there is no access for motor vehicles).
- The North Downs Way national trail passes through the western part of the site and along its northern boundary, following a public footpath.
- A public footpath passes through the central part of the site in compartment 1d.

### *Other access:*

- Permissive footpaths and open access to grassland will be considered to enhance the PROW network.

### *Restrictions:*

- Access anywhere in the reserve by motor vehicles or pedal cycles (except on the Pilgrims' Way) is strictly prohibited.
- No dogs allowed on the reserve except on public rights of way.

#### *Getting to the site:*

- Footpath links to surrounding areas are good.
- There is a bus stop at Lower Bell, a short walk from the reserve.
- Local Cycle Route 17 passes close to the western end of the reserve.
- There is no visitor parking.

#### *Site abuse:*

Unfortunately, the site is being mis-used by some people. It has a long history of abuse and once had severe problems with fly tipping and illegal access by motorbikes and 4x4s. Measures taken to protect the site have radically reduced these problems, but abuse does continue, mainly in the form of off-road cycling and motorcycling. The activities of these cyclists are damaging internationally important habitats, and having an impact on the landscape of the reserve. Fly tipping and dumping of cars still occurs from time to time, on and around the reserve, particularly in the vicinity of Lower Warren Road.

#### **Interpretation and education**

The production of a leaflet and interpretive panel about the site has been planned. A regular programme of events is now run through the Celebrating Boxley Warren project and a Friends of Boxley Warren community group has been formed.

Schools, colleges and other organised groups are welcome to visit the site for educational purposes. Parking for coaches can be arranged.

#### **MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

- Conserve, enhance and restore the landscape of the reserve.
- Leave yew woodland to develop naturally (known as 'minimal intervention'), but protect it from damage and invasive sycamore.
- Manage existing chalk grassland, and restore areas cleared of scrub and seeded from arable, by grazing and other methods.
- Coppice broad-leaved woodland areas where feasible; widen tracks to create important open habitats; control sycamore.
- Encourage wildlife connectivity both within the site and to other nearby wildlife sites and semi-natural areas.
- Look after box plantations.
- Carry out surveys to find out more about the reserve's wildlife.
- Carry out an assessment of the reserve's heritage features and landscapes.
- Install new fences to protect the reserve boundary at important points.
- Repair and maintain fences, gates etc.; clear site of signs of illegal access, site abuse, litter and fly tipping.

- Improve access within the site to enable better access for visitors by installing kissing gates and other infrastructure.
- Provide a small programme of community events.
- Involve the local community in a variety of aspects of managing the site.
- Interpret the site and raise awareness of issues surrounding it via a site leaflet and panel.
- Promote the use of the site by schools, groups of students and other organised groups.

Map 2 shows planned management in more detail.









Yew woodland



Downland landscape with wooded slopes



Spectacular views from the downs



Broad-leaved woodland, with a mature oak tree



Valuable plants returning to restored chalk grassland



Arable land that has been seeded to create new grassland





The pylon line that passes through the site



Beech woodland



Field trees enhance the landscape in open downland





Ground pine



Man orchid



Stinking hellebore



Chalkhill blue - on the wing from late July to early September



Adder - these beautiful reptiles bask in the sun in rough vegetation



Hazel dormouse - this internationally protected mammal is probably living in the broadleaved woodland

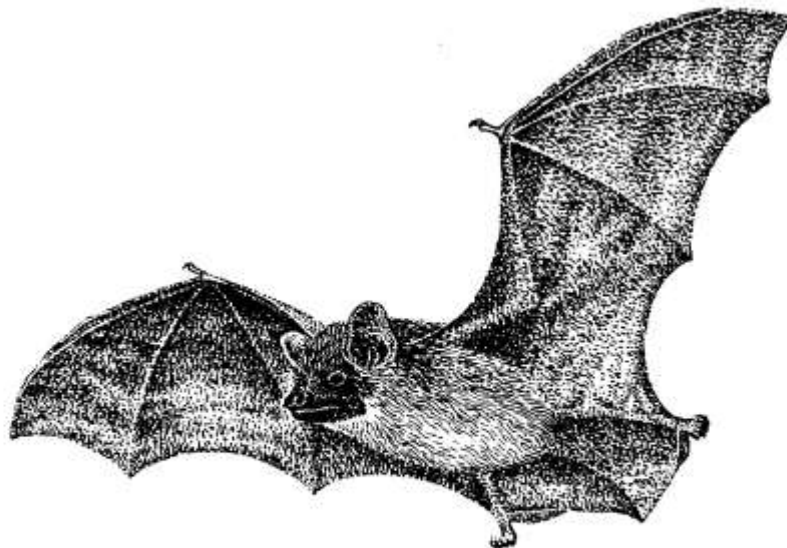




Buzzard - frequently seen over the Warren



Badger - there are many signs of this mammal's presence



Pipistrelle bat - probably using the reserve



The White Horse Stone - at least 4300 years old



Sarsen stones



An undated trackway





Ramp built by off-road cyclists in internationally important yew woodland



Scarring of chalk downland



Burnt out car on Lower Warren Road