

Terms of Reference – Version 5

1. Name

The Blean Initiative

2. Geographical Area

The Blean is the area of wooded landscape and villages between the cathedral city of Canterbury and the towns of Faversham, Whitstable and Herne Bay. The importance of this landscape is already acknowledged through many conservation designations.

The area includes the largest woodland complex in the South East, covering over 3000 hectares (11 square miles), almost all of which is classified as ancient woodland. More than half of these woodlands are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest under UK statute. There are two National Nature Reserves and three areas are internationally important Special Areas of Conservation. The majority of the remaining woodlands are Local Wildlife Sites, also recognised for their importance to conservation. Much of the non-wooded area is further recognised as Special Landscape Area or Conservation Area. The area can be accessed by a number of transport links and is within thirty minutes' drive time of 342,000 homes.

3. Background

The Blean Initiative was established in 2002 to develop an integrated approach to landscape management with the aim of promoting the area's biodiversity, heritage and potential for recreation, while having a regard to its sustainable economic development. Stakeholder conferences held in 2002 and 2005 identified the interests of major landholders and the wider community. The outcome was a vision for the area of this multi-purpose wooded landscape making a major contribution to the quality of life in East Kent.

In 2011, the Blean Initiative Coordinator role was discontinued. This required a re-appraisal of the group's objectives to ensure that the initiative was fit-for-purpose in a new era.

4. Composition

The Blean Initiative includes a combination of land owners, local authorities, statutory agencies, community organisations and other environmental groups.

Blean Heritage & Community Group
Canterbury City Council
Forestry Commission
Kent Association of Local Councils
Kent County Council
Kent Wildlife Trust
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership
Natural England
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Swale Borough Council
Tilhill Forestry
Woodland Trust

4. Purpose & Vision

The purpose of The Blean Initiative is to maintain, enhance and promote The Blean as a coherent landscape for biodiversity and people.

All partners in The Blean Initiative recognise the importance of the natural environment, the cultural heritage and the role of the community in creating and maintaining The Blean's unique character.

The shared vision for the area is the sympathetic integration of wildlife, culture and community to benefit The Blean, those who live and work there and the wider public without harming the area's distinctive landscape.

5. Specific Objectives

Through continued consultation and working with stakeholders, The Blean Initiative aims to:

- Provide a forum for land managers, statutory agencies and other interested parties in The Blean to share best practice and coordinate activities.
- Ensure that The Blean acts as a robust, landscape-scale habitat mosaic, incorporating woodland and scrub, heathland, grassland and farmland, against a back-drop of decline in woodland and farmland species and probable climate change.
- Apply a coordinated, intelligent approach to public access to The Blean, seeking to create managed visitor “hot-spots” and wildlife refuges, balancing access and conservation.
- Conserve, restore and enhance the natural, landscape and historic features of The Blean.
- Promote an enhanced “sense of place” of The Blean by raising its profile through marketing and branding
- Increase public awareness of the natural and historical heritage of The Blean through interpretation and education.
- Encourage community groups, specialist interest groups and individuals to become involved in working towards the shared vision.
- Promote local Blean products and services, contributing to a sustainable local economy.
- Encourage sustainable and appropriate rural tourism to benefit the local economy.
- Support healthier lifestyles by providing opportunities for all to engage in activities that enhance emotional and physical wellbeing.

6. Agreed procedures

- Meetings will take place at least three times a year.
- Meetings will seek to balance formal business with site visits and shared learning (e.g. visitor management, woodland management).
- Brief notes and action points will be circulated shortly after each meeting.
- The chair will be appointed by mutual agreement and will normally serve for two years.
- Should funding be dependent on a constitution, the group will appoint a lead partner for the project and seek to formalise a constitution only if deemed appropriate by all members.
- Specific sub-groups may be formed with appropriate individuals to deliver key projects.
- The group is committed to formal and informal consultation with the local community and stakeholders .
- Decisions will be made by consensus, or, if necessary, by a vote, with each partner having only one vote
- Additional partner organisations may be admitted to the group in the future subject to group consensus.
- Individuals or other organisations may be invited to attend specific meetings as appropriate and agreed by the chair.
- The group recognises the importance of external communication including the website and press releases.
- The group may endorse or promote a collective view but will not seek to replicate reports, statements or comments from partner organisations without acknowledgement and clear permission.

Alan Johnson

26th September 2011