

Greensand Farm Cluster Member Newsletter

Issue: #1 Summer 2026

For farmers, landowners and rural partners along the Greensand Ridge south of Maidstone

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of the Greensand Farm Cluster newsletter. Our cluster brings together farmers, landowners and local partners along the Greensand Ridge south of Maidstone to share knowledge, explore practical opportunities and deliver greater benefits for soil, water, wildlife and resilient farm businesses at a landscape scale.

Cluster update

The Greensand Farm Cluster is a farmer-led initiative facilitated by Kent Wildlife Trust with support from Maidstone Borough Council. Current priorities include improving water quality, supporting turtle dove habitat, strengthening hedgerow networks, improving soil health, assisting mink eradication and reducing pesticide and herbicide reliance where practical. The cluster is also building a shared evidence base through baseline ecological surveys, helping members identify priority habitats, species and future project opportunities.

The cluster has welcomed several new members in the last few weeks, significantly expanding the area of land included in the cluster.

We now have a dedicated page on [KWT's website](#) and will be developing our own standalone website in the coming weeks.

We have also published the cluster prospectus and aims and objectives for the coming year, these can be found on the website above.

Welcome to our new facilitator

Hi, my name's Dave Shenton and I started as facilitator in June.

I have already had the chance to meet many of you but not everyone yet. An important part of my role is getting to know you all and your land so please get in touch if you'd like to arrange a visit.

I have been Kent Wildlife Trust's Local Wildlife Sites officer since early 2025, prior to this I worked for Natural England for over 23 years, initially as farm adviser on the original Countryside Stewardship scheme across various counties in the SE from Berkshire and London, eventually to Kent and Sussex which also included time as the North Kent

Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Areas adviser and then moved to national teams and led on various iterations of agri-environment scheme targeting and most recently was seconded to Defra working on the design and development of the ELM schemes

Between that and becoming Local wildlife sites officer at KWT I worked on the North Kent Woods and Downs NNR designation project where amongst other things I produced the initial management and implementation plan (as well as conducting all the lepidoptera surveys).

I am also Kent County Moth Recorder and love nothing more than getting on to farms to survey for moths...



Funding and opportunities

Collaborating as a cluster can make it easier to develop projects that attract funding for habitat enhancement and creation, water management, access, landscape recovery and wider natural capital opportunities. Members are encouraged to share project ideas, priority sites, and areas where joint working with neighbours could unlock greater environmental and business benefits.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Nature Recovery funding

One of the key avenues for funding within the Maidstone District is for projects via MBC's Nature Recovery Fund. I have a growing list of projects that cluster members have already suggested but I'm keen for more. Even if you just have the germ of an idea for a project, I'd like to hear from you.

Tree Planting projects

Kent County Council are looking to apply for funding from The Tree Council again this year to deliver a range of tree planting projects across the county and are looking for landowners who would like to be involved. Projects could be hedgerows and hedgerow trees, elm restoration, orchards, agroforestry, parkland trees, [Miyawaki forests](#) or riparian planting.



Miyawaki tree planting, Maidstone. Miyawaki is on the right, control planting on the left.

There are a few requirements:

- Trees cannot be planted within existing woodland
- There needs to be a social value such as community tree planting, near public rights of ways – even if it's just within public view
- A minimum of five disease-resistant elms will need to be included in the planting scheme
- A minimum of 250 whips

If you are interested, please let me know and we can look to get a project worked up with KCC or via other routes, as needed.

Nightingales in Kent

Nightingales remain one of Kent's priority farmland and woodland-edge species. Recent research shows they are now concentrated in fewer low-lying, damp landscapes with dense scrub, young woodland growth and good habitat connectivity. Many Greensand Farm Cluster members are already helping by allowing hedgerows, field corners, wet margins and woodland edges to develop thicker, more varied structure, particularly where this links existing habitat across the wider landscape.

But there remains a real opportunity to build on this to:

- target effort where it will have the greatest ecological impact
- demonstrate the value of joined-up action across farms
- strengthen the case for future agri-environment and funding support
- and contribute to wider landscape-scale recovery alongside other programmes

If you'd like to hear more about this, particularly to explore how this could apply to or cluster, please get in touch and we can look to get further input from Natural England.



Nightingale in full song

Seasonal focus: practical actions for summer

- **Hedgerows:** Note gaps, poor structure or declining hedge trees now so that planting, laying or gapping-up can be planned for winter.
- **Water:** Check ditches, gateways and high-runoff areas after heavy rain to identify where soil or nutrients may be moving off fields.
- **Field margins:** Record flowering margins, tussocky areas and rough grassland that are supporting pollinators, beneficial insects or farmland birds.
- **Turtle doves and farmland birds:** Look for opportunities to provide seed-rich margins, clean water sources and scrubby nesting cover.
- **Soils:** Consider simple soil health checks, including infiltration, worm counts and compaction observations, to support future decision-making.

Upcoming dates

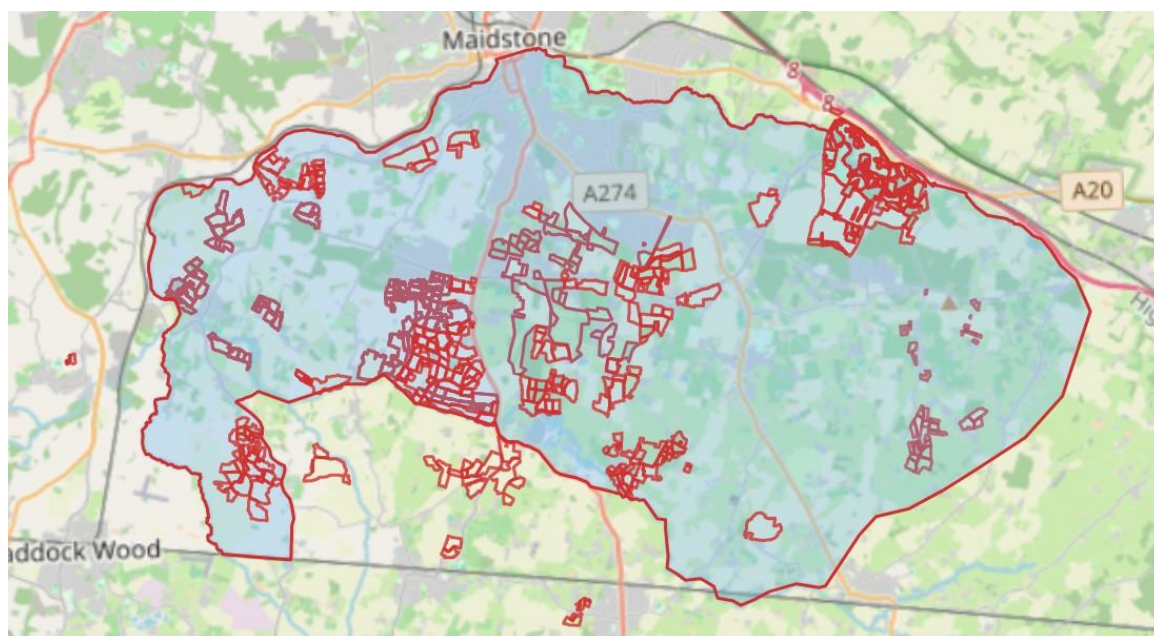
- **Early Autumn farm walk:** Toke Farm, Linton followed by Loddington Tap, 30th September, time tbc (late afternoon/early evening)

Member spotlight: tell us what is working on your farm

We would like to feature short examples from members in future newsletters. This could be a restored pond, a productive field margin, a hedgerow project, a change in cultivation practice, a new stewardship option, or a lesson learned from trying something different. Please send a short paragraph and, if available, a photograph.

Get involved

If you farm or manage land in the Greensand Farm Cluster area, or if you are interested in supporting the work of the cluster, please get in touch. New members are welcome, and you do not need to attend every meeting to benefit from the group. The most important thing is a willingness to collaborate with neighbours and explore practical opportunities for profitable, resilient farming and a healthier local landscape.



Greensand Farm Cluster area (July 2026)

Contact: Dave Shenton, Greensand Farm Cluster Facilitator
dave.shenton@kentwildlife.org.uk