New Wayfinder partnership project encourages Croydon’s residents to get active in the great outdoors

The Downlands Partnership was very pleased to work in partnership with Striders of Croydon and London Borough of Croydon during 2017/2018. Their work on three new wayfinder running/walking routes in three popular parks/open spaces has helped to encourage increased fitness and wellbeing of the borough’s residents and visitors to the area.

The Downlands Partnership was commissioned to produce and install all of the wayfinder posts - around fifty. The volunteers led by the staff were kept busy in the depot workshop and digging in the posts on site over the autumn/winter 2017/18 season. The project commenced in September 2017 and was completed in March 2018 and the routes have been very well received and well used since. Full details of the project and routes can be found on the Striders of Croydon website.

Chalk grassland restoration given a helping hand thanks to Surrey Hills Trust Fund

During early 2017 extensive countryside management work was completed at Quarry Hangers, a Site of Special Scientific interest (SSSI) in the east of the Surrey Hills at Chaldon, near Caterham. Extensive targeted scrub clearance was carried out to improve the landscape and restore the rare and precious chalk grassland, typical of the North Downs.

Chalk grassland is a very diverse habitat where you can find as many as 50 different kinds of plants and wildflowers within a square metre. Common species that are typical of chalk grassland and can be spotted at Quarry Hangers SSSI include bird's-foot trefoil, common spotted orchid, wild marjoram, salad burnet and wild strawberry. Butterflies such as the common blue, orange tip and dingy skipper can also be seen here. Quarry Hangers SSSI also supports a good number of bird species; listen out for the distinctive song of the skylark.

Active management is essential to maintaining chalk grassland; Quarry Hangers SSSI is managed by the Downlands Partnership on behalf of the landowner, through practical conservation work and grazing with goats. The targeted area cleared through the grant funding is on a very steep gradient, unsuitable for working with volunteers, and desperately needed intensive clearance to give the fragile beautiful landscape a fighting chance. Specialist countryside contractors South East Tree Surgeons were commissioned by the Downlands Partnership to carry out the work and the landscape has been successfully opened so the flora and fauna can thrive.

Debbie Hescott, Surrey Countryside Partnerships Business Development Officer comments "being able to further restore this beautiful chalk grassland gem thanks to this essential funding has been an excellent result. We are looking forward to monitoring how the habitat improves now the invasive scrub has been cleared; for wildlife and for people to enjoy now and in the future".

All this was made possible by a grant from the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. A fund within the Community Foundation for Surrey which helps to conserve and maintain the fragile environment of the Surrey Hills. It does this by awarding grants to support a wide-range of local projects from landscape conservation to community enterprise schemes. A match funding contribution was also made by the Downlands Trust, the registered charity partner of the Downlands Partnership.