

Jeskyns Community Greenspace

Creating quality green places for local people



The remarkable transformation of a 147-hectare farm near Gravesend into a community greenspace has enabled local people to enjoy a wealth of natural features set in a diverse landscape. Located in the Thames Gateway, one of four Growth Areas in the South East earmarked for development over the next decade, Jeskyns is an invaluable natural resource that is being sensitively enhanced for the benefit of communities and the protection of wildlife. With five distinct areas offering mixed woodland, fields of wildflowers, grassland, hay meadows and a traditional Kentish orchard, Jeskyns has something for everyone.

objectives

- To transform a 147 hectare high-intensity arable farm, with a history of chemical usage and landscape degradation, into a community greenspace and woodland for the benefit of people and wildlife.
- To improve public access for local communities, provide links to neighbouring sites and offer a wide range of informal recreational opportunities.
- To involve the community by developing an education programme, providing interpretation and liaising closely with local groups and individuals.
- To increase biodiversity and provide conditions for important species to flourish.
- To protect the area's natural heritage by managing the site's original Kentish features and preserving archaeological interest.

actions

- The purchase of Jeskyns Farm was secured with ODPM (now CLG) funds.
- Extensive community consultation involved public and stakeholder meetings, site walks, drop-in sessions, questionnaires and individual correspondence.
- Surveys were undertaken to determine site flora and fauna, to map habitats, to identify key conditions and assess the site's archaeology.
- The concept and detailed design plan for the site were developed.
- Technical support and expertise from Forest Research enabled soil analysis and surveying, archaeological and heritage preservation, and advice on how best to assess and remediate areas of potentially contaminated land.
- One permanent community ranger and one operations ranger were appointed.

achievements

- The clearing of 145 tonnes of agricultural and domestic rubbish from two large refuse pits removed a health hazard and threat to the underlying chalk aquifer.
- The development of an original concept that retains the site's original name maximised its potential by defining five areas for different uses: Jeskyns Wood, Jeskyns Glades, Jeskyns Meadows, Jeskyns Orchards, Jeskyns Grove.
- The planned installation of infrastructure including 18.4 km of paths, a car park, new site gates, seating, waymarking, and interpretation.
- The creation of 'natural play features' including a tree house, cone pool and sandpit, and a number of environmental art sculptures.
- The creation of two ponds (5,500m²), the planting of over 140,000 plants and 120,000 trees (including 1,000 fruit varieties), and 5 km of new hedgerow.
- Local communities, schools and youth groups have been involved in tree planting events in partnership with the Woodland Trust.

background

The Thames Gateway stretches for 40 miles along the Thames Estuary from the London Docklands to Southend in Essex and Sheerness in Kent. It is one of four 'growth areas' highlighted in 'Sustainable Communities in the South East' (ODPM, 2003) selected to provide 200,000 new homes by 2016. The former industrial area, home to 1.45m residents (600,000 households), once served London and the South East. However its decline has left a legacy of large-scale derelict sites and relatively depressed local towns and communities.

The Sustainable Communities plan identifies greenspace as one of the key mechanisms by which to increase the sustainability and quality of life for many of the proposed new and existing communities within the Thames Gateway. 'Greening the Gateway' (2004) sets out the Government's vision to provide a network of varied and well managed greenspace that provides health and recreation benefits for these communities, and protects the natural environment.

In the spring of 2005 ODPM funding enabled the Forestry Commission to purchase Jeskyns farm. The key objective was to 'benefit the local population of Gravesend by providing high quality accessible greenspace on their doorstep'. Additionally Jeskyns aimed to add value to existing conservation projects and link to neighbouring sites. Adjacent to Jeskyns is Ashenwood, an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Woodland Trust (WT) site. Following an Environmental Impact Assessment, public consultation and Design Plan, work is now being carried out to transform the site, and put Jeskyns on the map. The Forestry Commission, along with local stakeholder bodies, is creating a management plan to look at future opportunities and management of the site.

quotes

"This project has provided a great opportunity to examine a sizeable piece of land, understand its evolution and secure the long term conservation of important features."
Crispin Jarmin, the Canterbury Archaeological Trust

"A brilliant opportunity to buffer ancient woodland and wood pasture. It is great timing and fits in with WT objectives to enhance woodlands, linking up WT and FC sites for greater access. If the FC hadn't done we would have. We are positively behind it."
Clive Steward, Woodland Officer, the Woodland Trust

partners

Forestry Commission delivered

funding

£5m project total capital
ODPM (DCLG) Sustainable
Communities Fund

lessons learnt

Jeskyns will officially open summer 2007, so there is still ongoing work and evaluation. However current recommendations include appropriate training for staff at the right time, and the importance of effective project management and leadership in delivering a successful project.