

SEVENOAKS GREENSAND
COMMONS PROJECT

WINTER

WALK CHALLENGE



Made possible with

Heritage
Fund



Westerham
Town Council



Sevenoaks
TOWN council



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	01
Top tips for observing wildlife	04
Week 1: Farley Common	05
Week 2: Sevenoaks Common	06
Week 3: Bitchet Common	07
Week 4: Hosey Common	08
Week 5: Crockham Hill Common	09
Week 6: Sevenoaks Weald Common	10
Week 7: Fawke Common	11
Week 8: Seal Chart & Redhill Wood	12
Transport Information	13



THE PROJECT

THE SEVENOAKS GREENSAND COMMONS PROJECT IS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN KENT WILDLIFE TRUST AND SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL, WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH LANDOWNERS, PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS. THE PROJECT AIMS TO RESTORE THE LANDSCAPE, SOCIAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE GREENSAND COMMONS OF SEVENOAKS, WESTERHAM AND SEAL.

LOCATION

- 8 project sites all on, or adjacent to, the Greensand Ridge, covering 300ha.
- Underlying geology means that most of the sites are quite acidic, which influences the ecology of the Commons. Historically they were easy to clear, but hard to farm, many were managed as wood pasture, with heathland present.
- Steeped in natural and landscape history, these jewels are a unique but currently much undervalued resource for local communities.
- Iron Age man, the Romans, Saxons and Normans, and people right through to the 20th Century have benefited from the Commons.

RARE HABITATS

The Commons contain some unusual and rare habitats for Kent and while much of the area is dominated by woodland, there are significant sections of acid grassland and heath habitat which is of high biodiversity value.



Did you know that British heathland is rarer than Amazonian rainforest?

A COMMON VISION

Our key objective: For local people to have worked together to restore the landscape, social and natural heritage of the Sevenoaks Greensand Commons and to have increased our communities' capacity to value, manage and protect this same heritage by building and sustaining skills, knowledge and resources, now and into the future.

Volunteering

Whether you're looking to protect local wild spaces, learn new skills or simply meet new people, it is not too late to join our volunteer task force! Our team meet twice a week on Wednesdays and Fridays at sites across Sevenoaks, Westerham and Seal to carry out crucial work, such as tree felling, holly thinning and more. We work at a pace that suits you and you can volunteer as little or as often as you please.

**Our volunteers
have given over
70,000 hours of
voluntary work to
the project so far!**

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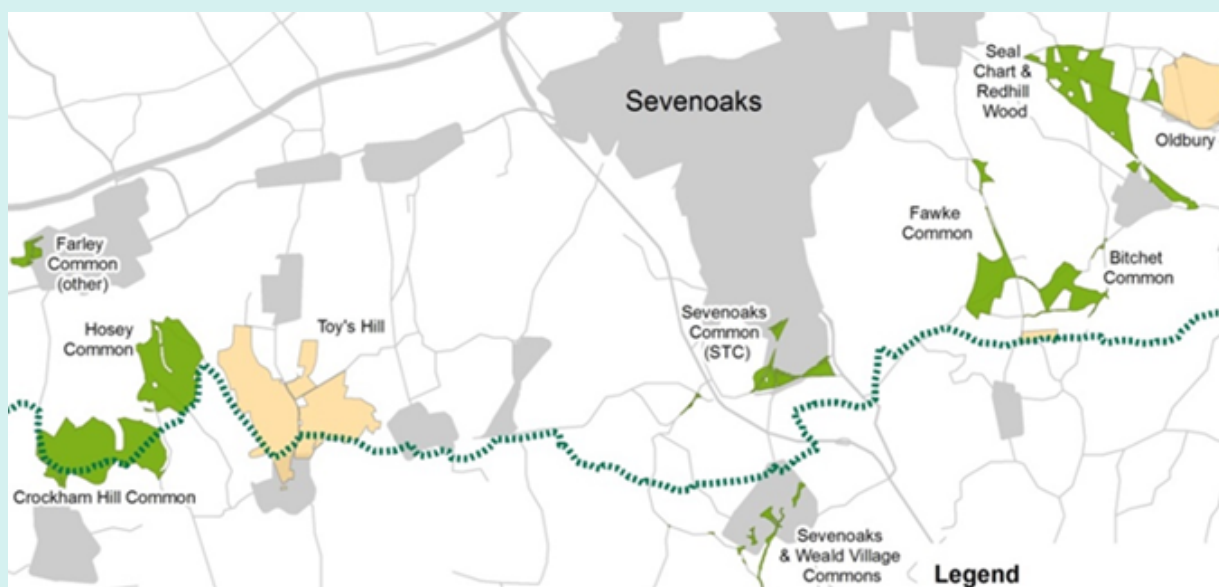


WILD WALKS FOR WELL-BEING: TAKE THE WINTER WALK CHALLENGE

Winter is a challenging time for wildlife and people alike. Having less access to natural light and finding less opportunities to socialise outside can have detrimental effects on our health and well-being. An estimated **2 million people in the UK suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) every year**, which causes low moods, increased sleep, and reduced activity.

Spending time outside in natural light can alleviate the symptoms of SAD, reducing feelings of stress, enhancing your physical health, and improving your confidence and self-esteem. Although it may be tempting to hibernate indoors this winter, we can combat the winter blues by putting on our warmest coat and heading out into nature.

The Winter Walk Challenge will provide you with hints and tips on what to see and when and where to see it. Running from late December to early February, the challenge is designed to give residents of Sevenoaks, Westerham and Seal their daily dose of nature. **Learn to identify animal tracks, bird calls and plant species!** Observe the wild spaces on your doorstep as they transform over winter into early spring! A map of the Commons, parking and public transport details and more will be provided to help you visit an exciting new location every week.



OUR TOP TIPS FOR OBSERVING WILDLIFE

What will you see at our eight extraordinary sites this winter? Read our top tips for observing wildlife below and remember: the more time you spend walking in nature, the more likely you are to observe rarer Kentish species!

● Respect

Explore your surroundings with care. Minimise disturbance by talking quietly; loud noises will frighten birds and mammals. Keep at a safe distance from wild animals and ensure that rocks and logs are returned carefully if you are hunting for minibeasts.



● Research

Before heading out to the Commons, use our guide and other resources to learn more about Kentish wildlife. You can research which species are associated with different habitats, key behavioural information such as feeding, mating and nesting, how the appearance of different plants change throughout the season and much more! This information can help you to make sense of the wild world around you. Consider bringing a pocket guide to British wildlife on your walks.

● Record

Take binoculars, wildlife guides, cameras and more on your walks. If you are interested in identifying the plants and animals of the Commons, these pieces of equipment can help you to accurately record your sightings. Magnifying glasses can be useful in identifying invertebrates and apps can be downloaded on your smartphone to help you identify species using your phone camera!



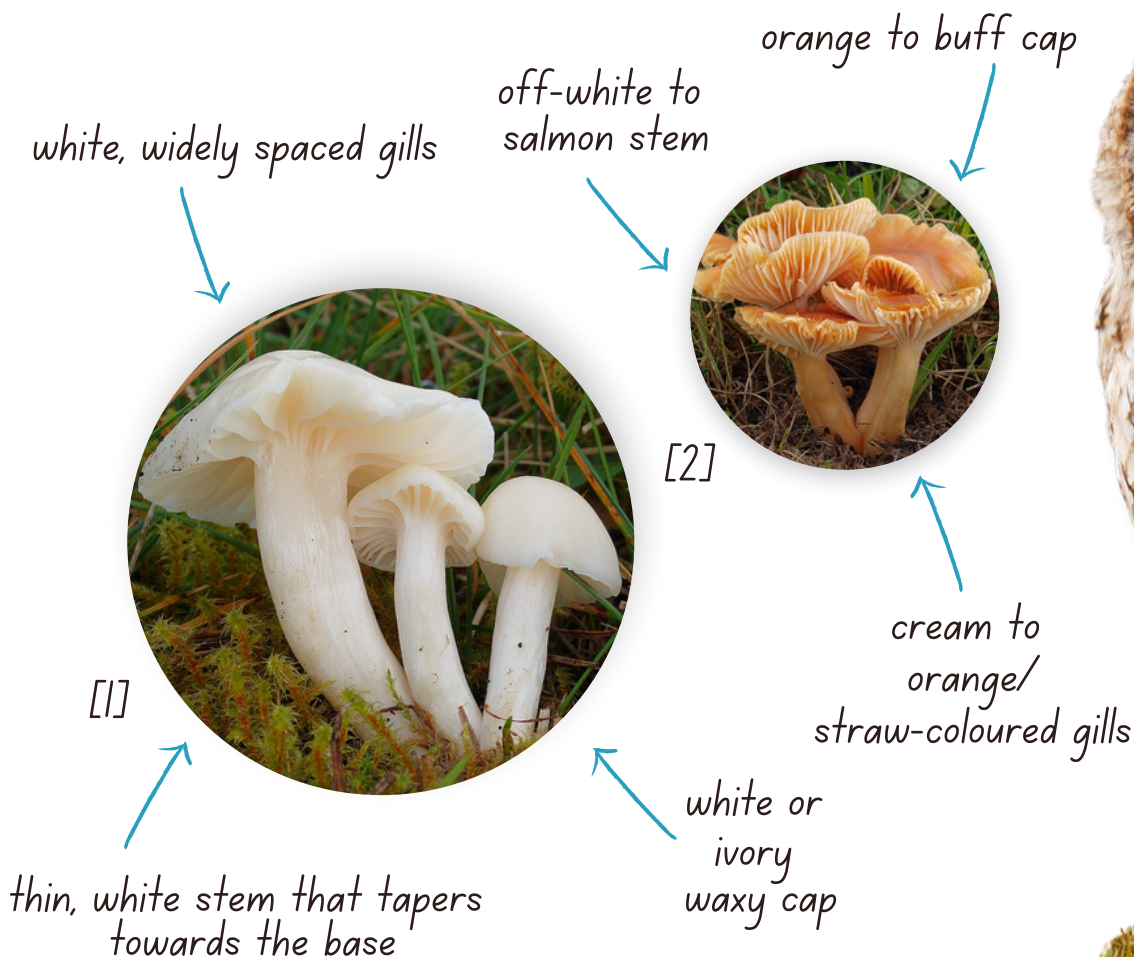
FARLEY COMMON

WEEK 1: 19TH DECEMBER

With well-developed paths throughout this site and near on street parking, Farley Common is easily accessible. This common boasts a rare habitat for West Kent: acid grassland. This is an ideal site for families with young children to explore local wildlife.

This winter, listen out for the distinctive "kee-wick" and "hoot" calls of the **tawny owl**. The hooting or "twoo" sound is a territorial call, typically made by the male. These calls are most likely to be heard at dawn or dusk. They remain common throughout December as young birds disperse from breeding grounds in the autumn, making winter a particularly competitive period. Did you know that you are more likely to hear owls call during a full moon and when there is less cloud cover?

When visiting the common, don't forget to visit its field of unique acid grassland. In December, you may observe **snowy waxcaps** [1]. The most common of wax caps, these mushrooms thrive in locations with acidic soil. **Meadow waxcaps** [2] may be spotted nearby.



SEVENOAKS COMMON

WEEK 2: 26TH DECEMBER

Sevenoaks Common is an easily accessible, quiet site. Badly hit by the Great Storm of 1987, the site has seen a huge effort to re-establish native tree species, which now support a wide range of birds, mammals, and insects.

As this common sits in the heart of Sevenoaks Weald, you are likely to see species that also occur in your garden at home. Can you find any **overwintering snails**? Snails spend the colder months inside their shells, protected by a layer of hardened mucus. These clever creatures can even alter the chemicals in their blood to create a natural anti-freeze, which prevents their body fluids from freezing in conditions as low as 5 degrees Celsius!

The project hosted a **Community Bioblitz** in summer 2022 which identified 75 plant and animal species at this site!

On your festive visit to Sevenoaks Weald Common, you may spot the red-breasted **robin**. Previously voted as the nation's most loved bird species, the robin sings to defend its territory. Listen out for a dry, elastic 'tic' which is repeated frequently in a short series of notes. These enthusiastic singers are usually the first species to start the dawn chorus!



BITCHET COMMON

WEEK 3: 2ND JANUARY

A truly beautiful site, Bitchet Common offers pockets of heathland habitat. Free local parking makes the site easily accessible, however, its hilly terrain presents a more challenging route, perfect for the avid walker.

This site is home to a vast variety of tree species, including hornbeam, beech, rowan, sweet chestnut, yew, silver birch and of course, the mighty oak.

The oak tree can be identified by its scaly bark, which is known for having deep ridges and fissures. Around the base of the tree, you will find decomposing leaves, which have smooth edges, 4-5 lobes and barely visible stems.

If you take a closer look into the crevices of a tree trunk, you may find hoards of the seven-spot ladybird. Ladybirds overwinter in groups, and it is not uncommon to find them huddling for warmth in bark. During the colder months, ladybirds enter a dormant state called 'diapause', whereby development is paused due to cold conditions.



KNOCK ON WOOD

The **green woodpecker** feeds almost exclusively on ants. However, during the winter it may be forced to supplement its diet with other invertebrates as ant colonies become harder to find.

As you explore Bitchet Common, you may hear green woodpeckers drumming on deadwood, in hot pursuit of insect larvae. Did you know that the tongue of a woodpecker is so long that it coils around the back of the skull? As the bird drills into deadwood, this extraordinary muscle tenses inside the head to cushion the brain and spine.



HOSEY COMMON

WEEK 4: 9TH JANUARY

Hosey Common is home to Westerham Mines, which provide a crucial roosting site for rare bat species, including **Whiskered bat**, **Brandt's bat** and **Brown long-eared bat**. Napoleonic allotments also remain at Hosey Common, which were established on the commons in 1815.

Bats hibernate during the winter months, roosting in safe spaces such as the mines. But don't worry - there's still plenty to see, including Hosey's unique ancient beech hedgerow (right)!

Although the trees are bare, ferns brighten up the winter woodland at Hosey with pops of vibrant green. Look out for the **hart's-tongue fern**, which can be identified by its wide and leathery leaves.

Pay attention to the ground beneath your feet - can you spot any mammal tracks? **Red foxes** mate during January and are particularly active during this period.



Fox



Deer



Badger

CROCKHAM HILL COMMON

WEEK 5: 16TH JANUARY



If you are a keen birder, Crockham Hill Common is a hidden gem. With fragments of heathland habitat throughout, this common is a refuge for West Kent's lesser seen plant and animal species.

Corvids such as **crows**, **rooks** and **jackdaws** can be found in large flocks during the colder months. Did you know that a group of crows is called a murder? These charismatic and gregarious birds are rather noisy and can be heard squawking, squabbling, and squeaking from above.

Although autumn is the best time of year for spotting mushrooms, some species of fungi survive into the winter.

Keep an eye out for the **winter chanterelle**, which often clusters around fallen beech, birch or conifer tree branches from November to late January.

Log piles can be found throughout the site, which our volunteers have created to promote invertebrate populations.



Rook



Jackdaw



Crow

SEVENOAKS WEALD COMMON

WEEK 6: 23RD JANUARY

This small yet valuable common provides a home for wildlife in the heart of Sevenoaks Weald. Its quaint village location makes for a peaceful visit, with the offer of a local pub within walking distance.

This open site is a great space for observing feeding birds. The open field habitat provides feeding opportunities for **robins**, **blackbirds** and various **gulls**, who can be seen searching the ground for worms on rainy days.

Gull species are more likely to be observed in urban and semi-urban habitats during the winter too. When high winds set in on the Kentish coast, these savvy birds seek shelter in towns and cities. They may be seen occasionally on Sevenoaks Weald Village Common, drumming on the ground to mimic rain in an effort to summon worms from the earth.

Woodpigeons can be seen in the trees that border the common. They are the UK's largest pigeon species and are known to use urban and semi-urban habitats more frequently during the colder months, likely entering human spaces to take advantage of bird feeders.



FAWKE COMMON

WEEK 7: 30TH JANUARY



Sitting adjacent to Knole Park, the wilder landscape of Fawke Common is truly a haven for Kentish wildlife. The woodland is alive from the ground to the tree canopy, providing a home to a variety of insects, fungi and birds.

As you explore the common by foot, look out for the beautiful bell-shaped flowers of the **snowdrop**. This species usually flowers in January and February, but due to the warming climate, they may appear earlier.

Can you find any **acorns** in the undergrowth? Where there are acorns, there are mighty oak trees! Through forgetting the location of their hidden treasure, **jays** coincidentally plant hundreds of oak trees across the UK every winter. These colourful corvids play a crucial role in maintaining oak woodlands in the UK and are regular users of the Sevenoaks Greensand Commons



This site boasts several **veteran trees**. A veteran tree is defined by its 'veteran features', such as a hollow, rotting limb. These trees deliver an ongoing supply of deadwood in varying stages of decay, which benefits the entirety of the woodland. Veteran tree roots promote complex fungal communities, improving fungi diversity.



SEAL CHART & REDHILL WOOD

WEEK 8: 6TH FEBRUARY

With patches of open woodland throughout, Seal Chart and Redhill Wood are easily accessible. This site is known to support a wide variety of fungi species.

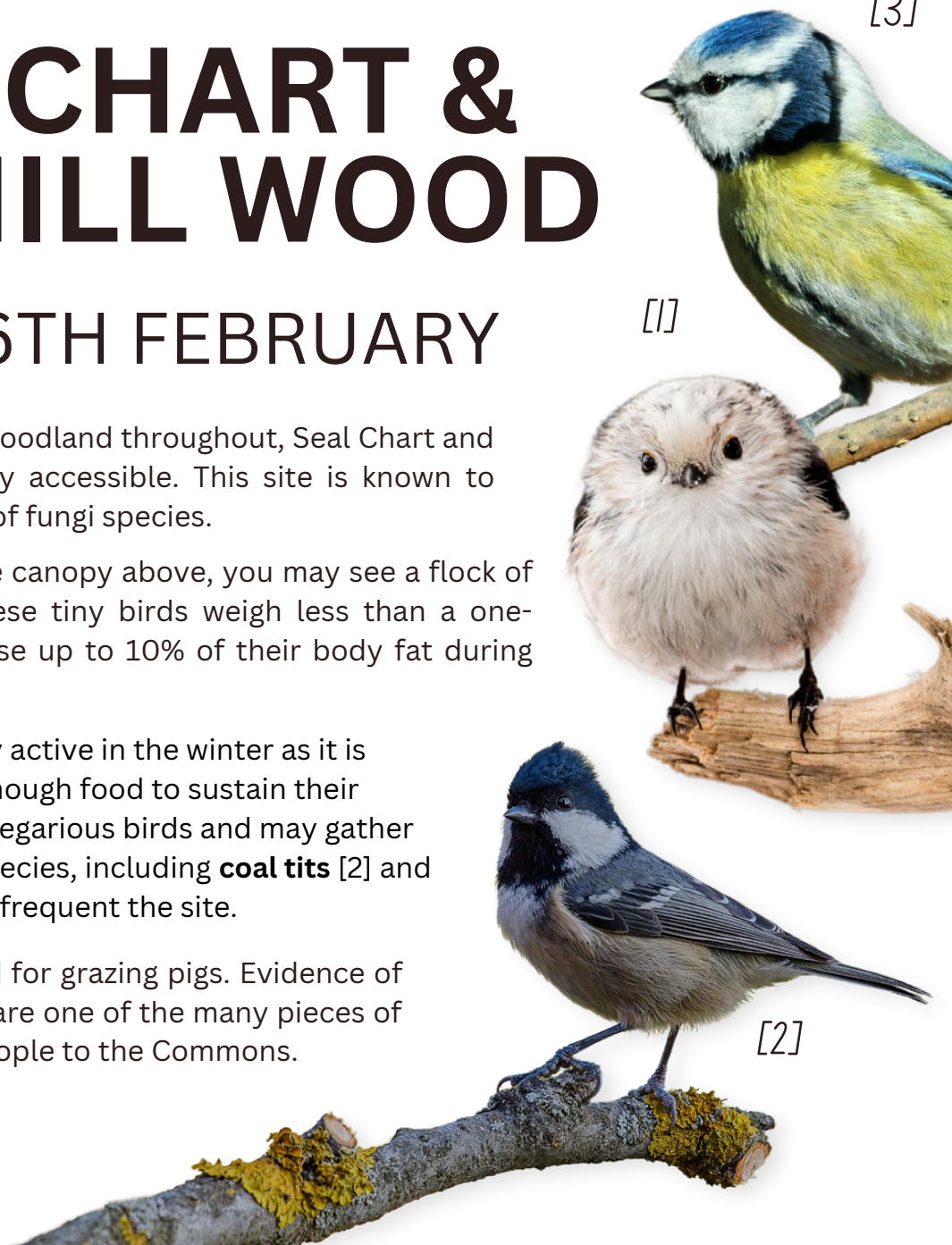
If you look into the tree canopy above, you may see a flock of **long-tailed tits** [1]. These tiny birds weigh less than a one-pound coin and can lose up to 10% of their body fat during cold winter nights.

Long-tailed tits are very active in the winter as it is crucial that they find enough food to sustain their small bodies. Tits are gregarious birds and may gather in groups of multiple species, including **coal tits** [2] and **blue tits** [3], which also frequent the site.

This site was once used for grazing pigs. Evidence of **remnant holding pens** are one of the many pieces of history that tie local people to the Commons.

[1]

[2]



Cleavers can be spotted year-round. Some people may know this species by the name 'goose grass'. These clinging climbers are covered in hairs and prickles, which cause it to stick to clothing and animal fur. Historically, cleavers were used by shepherds to strain animal hair from milk!

Large **ant hills** have been observed at Seal Chart and Redhill Wood. Keep an eye out for these distinctive mounds, which are formed by worker ants as they excavate intricate tunnels.

Did you know that the UK is home to 50 species of ant? There are over 13,000 species worldwide!



PLAN YOUR VISIT

● Farley Common

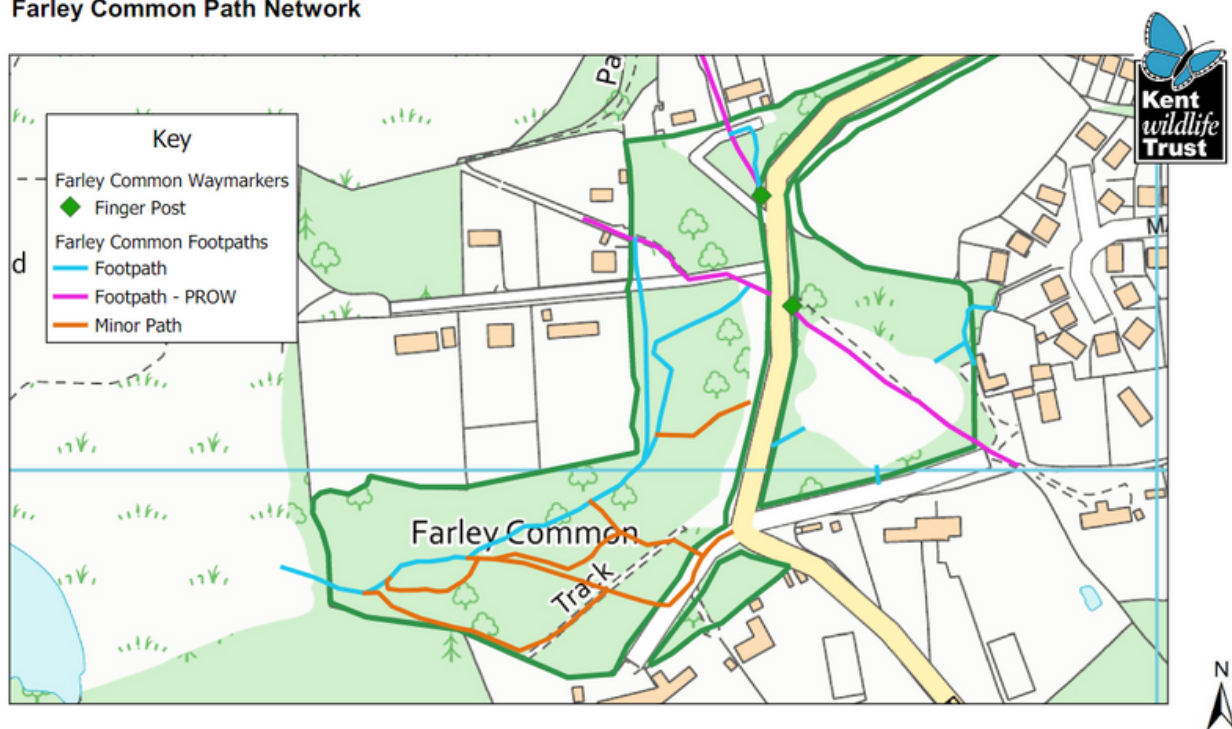
Location: Farley Common, Westerham, TN16 1UB.

Parking: Visitors can park for free in the laybys just outside of the site.

Parking can be found using this what3words coordinate - 'vest.paint.sentences'

Public Transport: The 595 bus from The Kings Arms goes to Farley Lane.

Farley Common Path Network



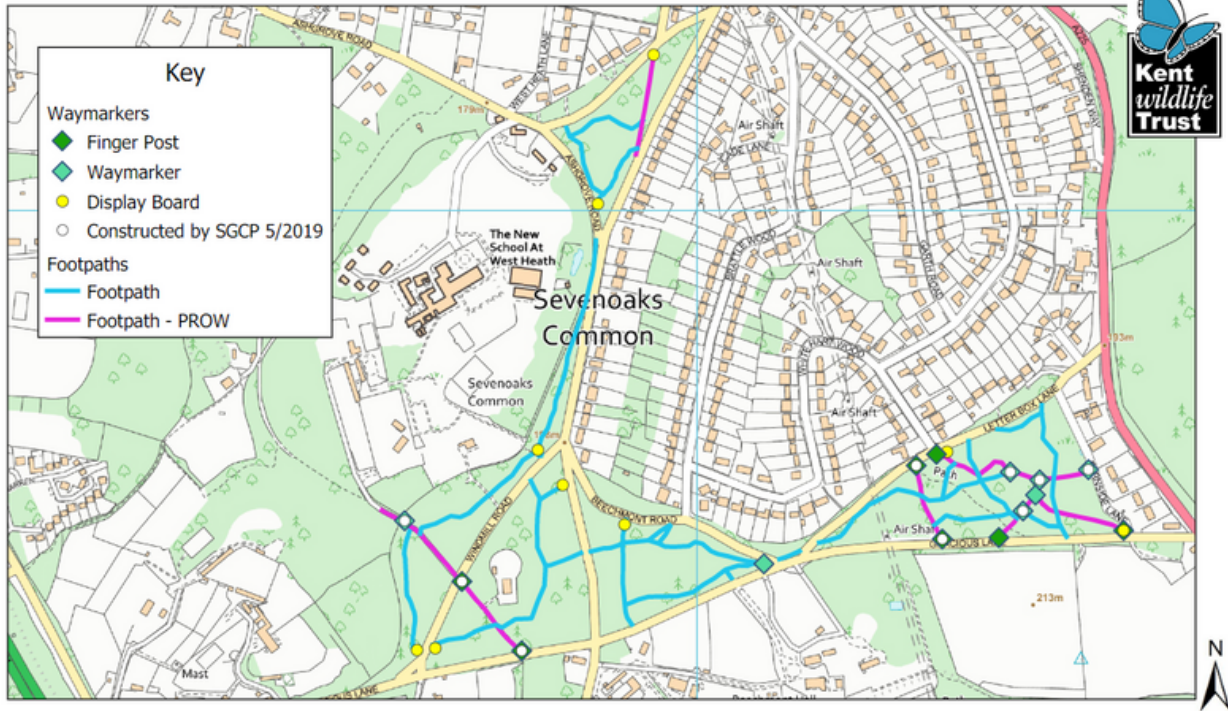
● Sevenoaks Common

Location: Sevenoaks Common, Brattle Wood, Sevenoaks, TN13 1QT

Parking: Visitors can park for free on Brattle Wood, Sevenoaks, TN13 1QT.

Public Transport: The 402 bus from The Chequers runs to the White Hart, which is a 15-minute walk from the site.

Sevenoaks Common Access Audit



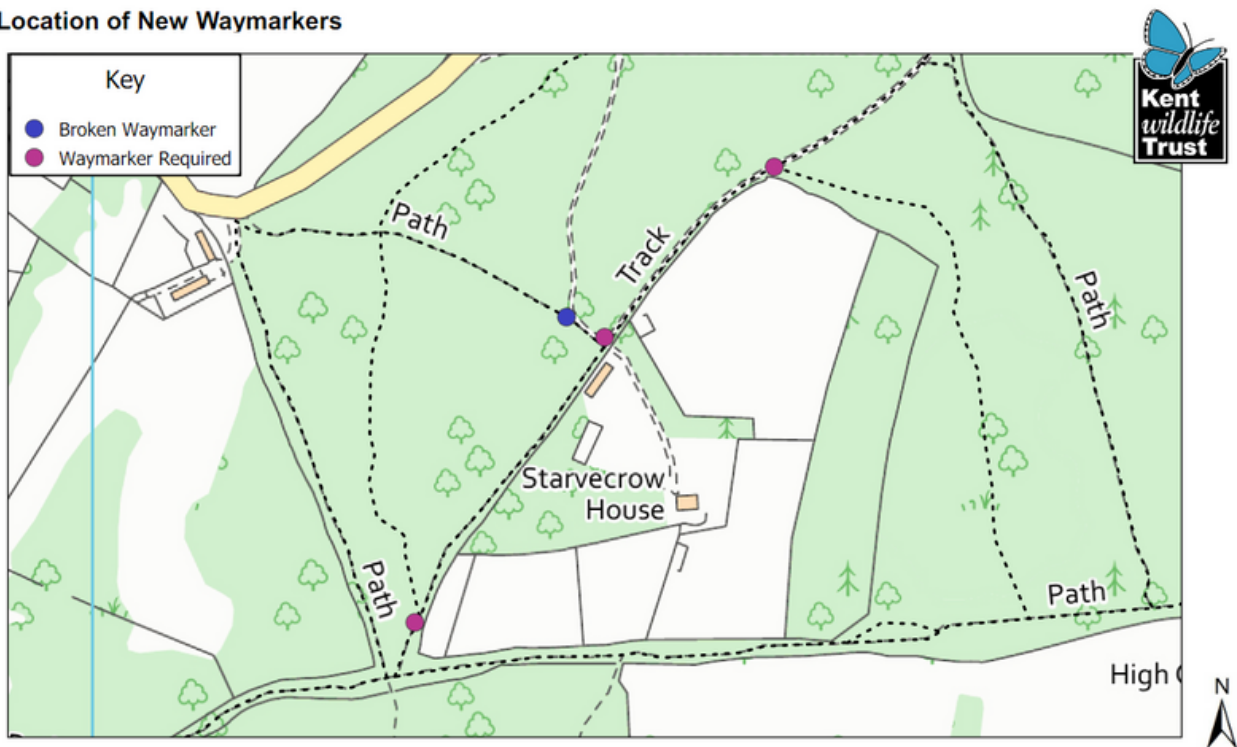
● Bitchet Common

Location: Bitchet Common can be accessed from One Tree Hill Carpark (address below) following the what3words coordinate 'hook.tree.vibe'. Visitors must walk through National Trust woodland for approximately 10 minutes before accessing the site.

Parking: One Tree Hill Car Park, Carter's Hill, Sevenoaks TN15 0SN.

Public Transport: Not easily accessible.

Location of New Waymarkers



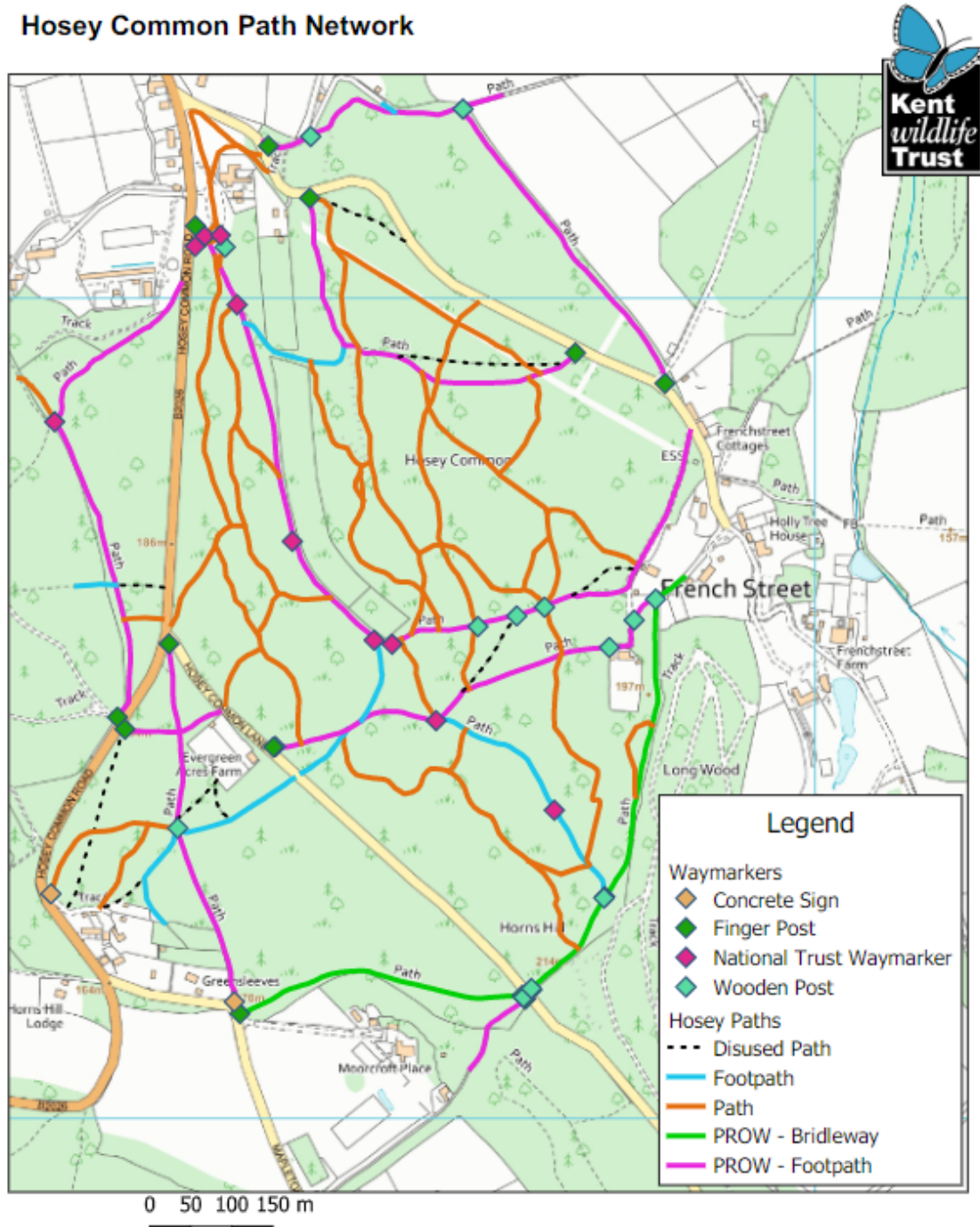
● Hosey Common

Location: The site can be easily accessed from Hosey Common Car Park, Westerham TN16 1PL.

Parking: Visitors can park for free at Hosey Common Car Park, Westerham TN16 1PL.

Public Transport: Not easily accessible.

Hosey Common Path Network



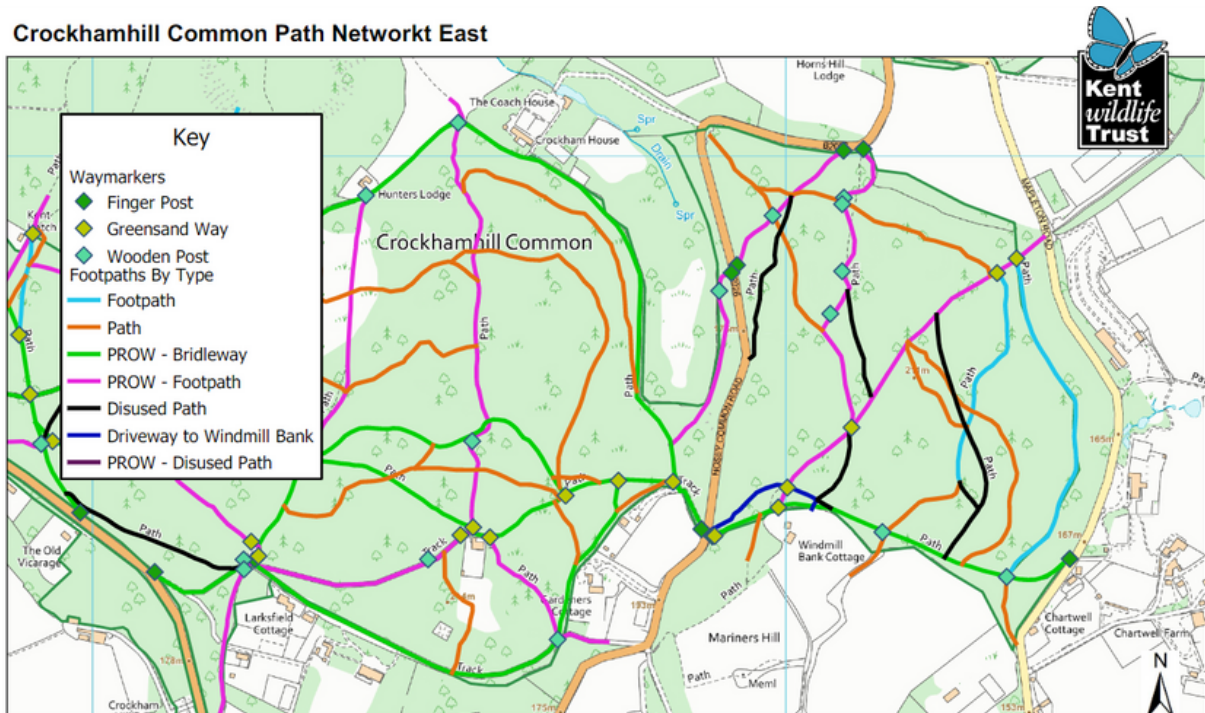
Crockham Hill Common

Location: The site can be accessed on foot from the entrance to Hunters Lodge on Goodley Stock Road.

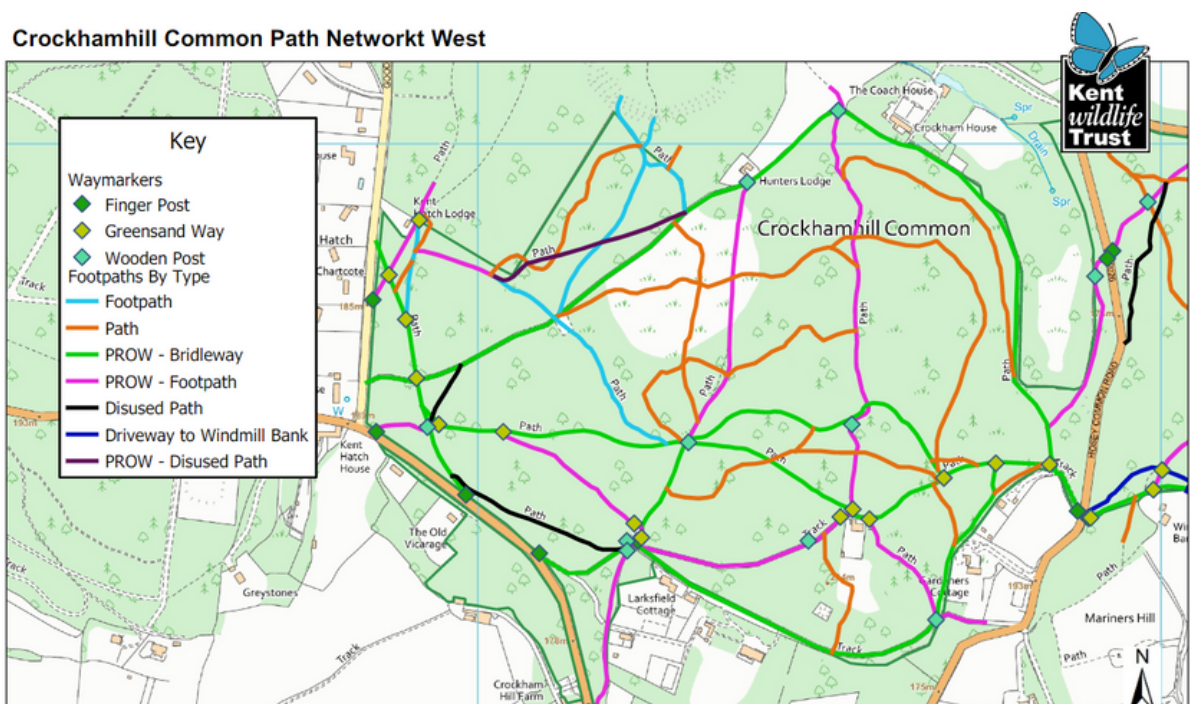
Parking: Layby parking may be available on surrounding roads - Goodley Stock Road, Kent Hatch Road and Hosey Common Lane. **Please exercise caution when parking and walking on country lanes.**

Public Transport: Not easily accessible.

Crockhamhill Common Path Network East



Crockhamhill Common Path Network West



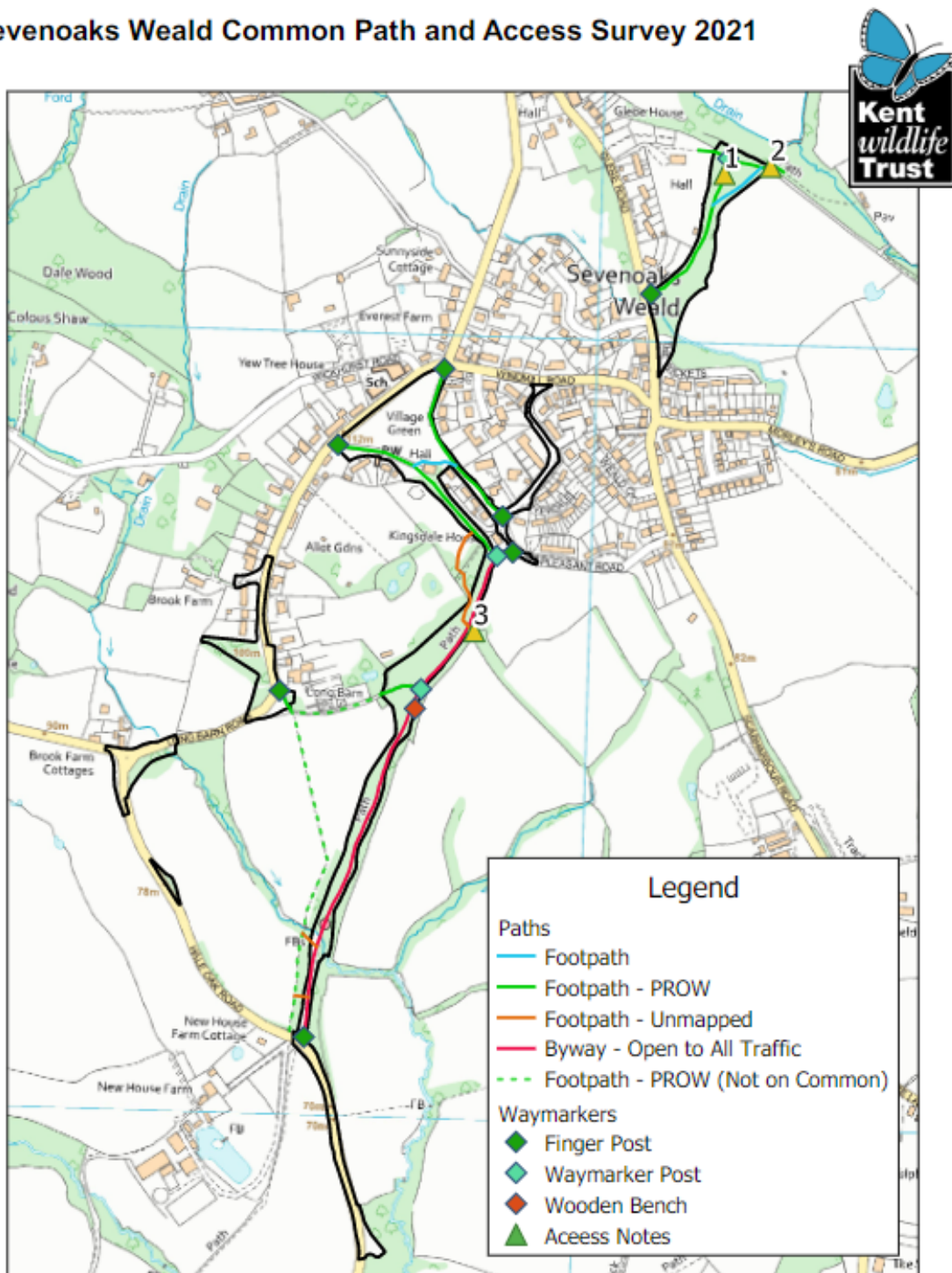
Sevenoaks Weald Common

Location: The site can be accessed from Long Barn Road, Weald, Sevenoaks, TN14 6NJ.

Parking: There is limited on street parking on Long Barn Road adjacent to the green.

Public Transport: The 402 bus from The Chequers runs to Morleys Roundabout, a 30 minute walk from the green.

Sevenoaks Weald Common Path and Access Survey 2021



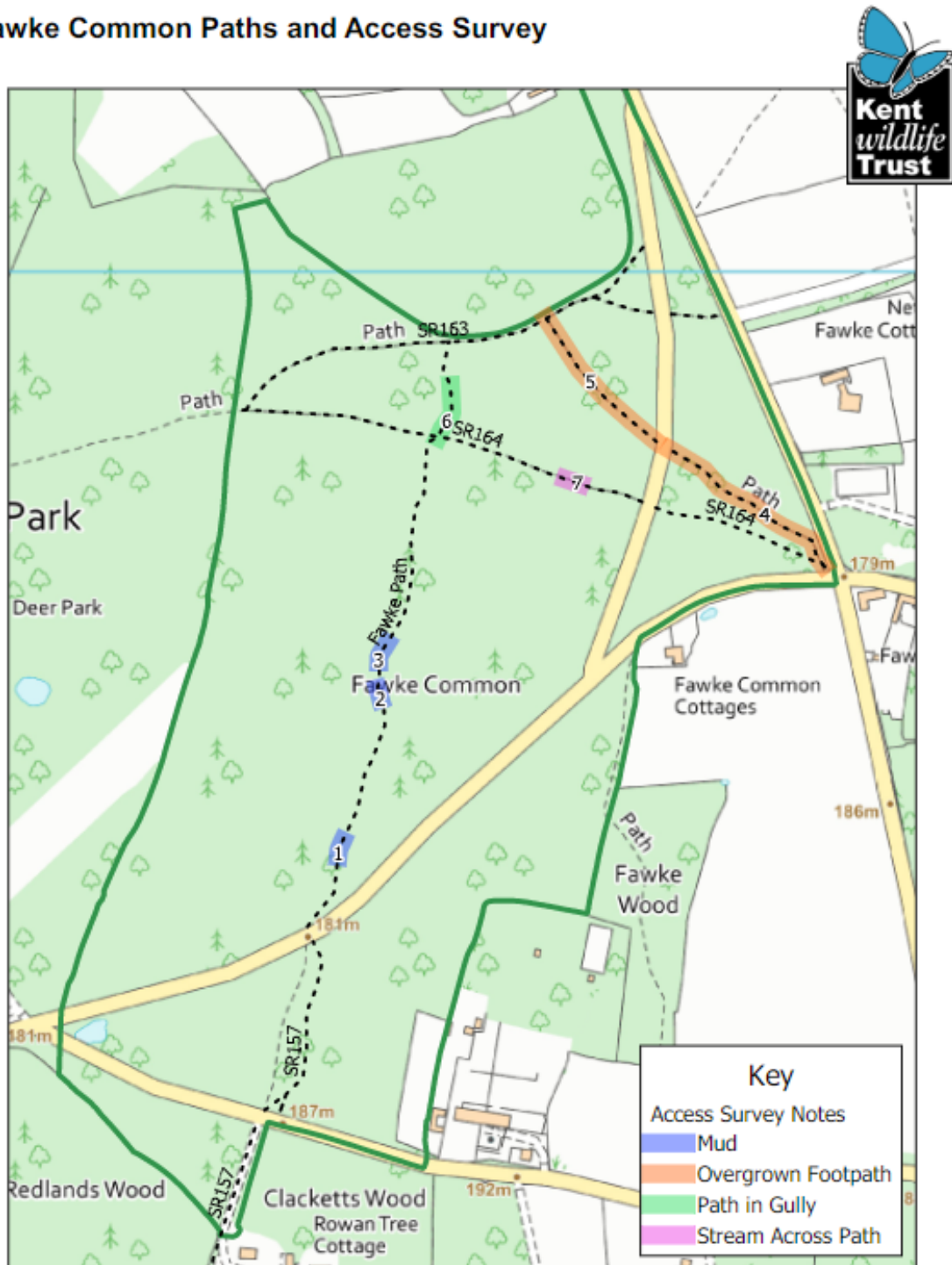
Fawke Common

Location: The site can be accessed from St Julian Road in Sevenoaks, near the junction with Fawke Wood Road. Visitors can use the what3words coordinate 'wires.prices.smug' for access.

Parking: There is limited parking in the laybys on St Julian Road.

Public Transport: The 402 bus to Tunbridge Wells runs to Julians Hill, a stop which is a 25 minute walk from the Fawke Common.

Fawke Common Paths and Access Survey



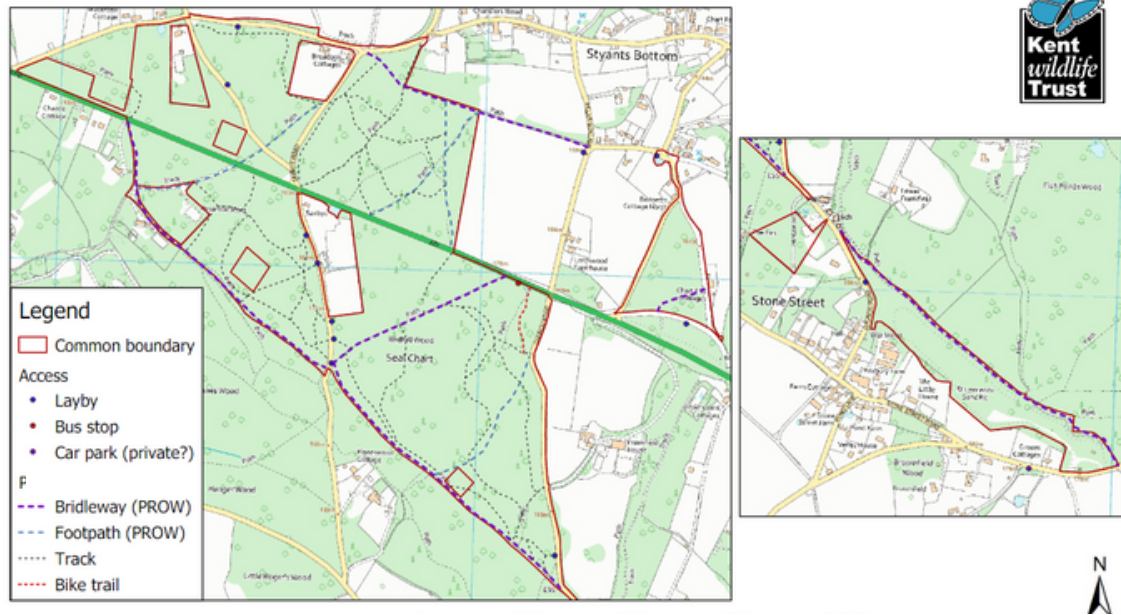
Seal Chart & Redhill Wood

Location: The site is adjacent to St Lawrence's Church, Church Rd, Stone Street, Sevenoaks TN15 0LL.

Parking: There is limited parking outside of St Lawrence's Church.

Public Transport: The 308 bus from the Crown goes to Seal Chart Crossroads, which is a 10 minute walk to the site.

Seal Chart Common 2021



If you require further access information for any of the Sevenoaks Greensand Commons sites, please contact Aimee at aimee.howe@kentwildlife.org.uk.

Our team would love to see your photos! If you have snapped an interesting shot during your visit, please contact Aimee at aimee.howe@kentwildlife.org.uk.

Need help identifying a plant or animal that you have observed during your visit? We can help! Get in touch at info@kentwildlife.org.uk.