



The Greensand Trust

2023

The Greensand Trust Impact Report



Chairman's Introduction:

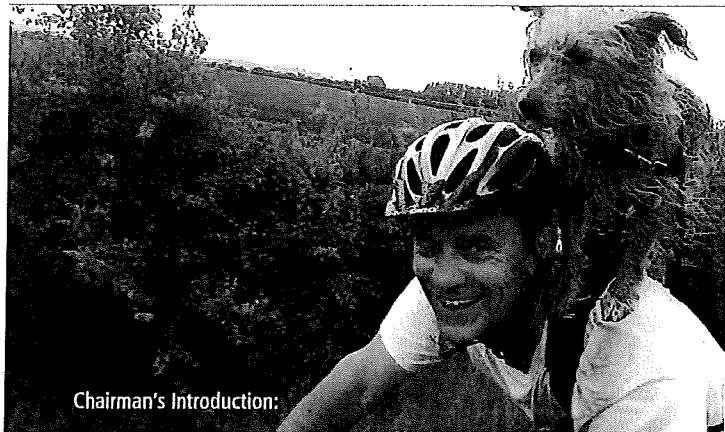
The Greensand Trust is an independent environmental charity that works with local communities and landowners to conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape, wildlife and history of the Greensand Ridge and wider area, through environmental conservation, education and access. Our aim is to raise awareness of this special landscape, improve access, understanding and enjoyment of the area for the benefit of everyone and provide recreational facilities to improve people's wellbeing.

The past year has been one of the most exciting in the Trust's history! Having secured Clophill Lakes in February 2022 the enormous task of getting the site ready to be opened to the public began. All involved appreciate this will take time, money and plenty of effort, but we have made significant steps towards the creation of a nature reserve for local people to enjoy and appreciate the wildlife, landscape and heritage of Greensand Country. The COVID Pandemic highlighted the importance of our local environment to us all, and sites such as Clophill Lakes Nature Reserve will be an essential part of our everyday lives, helping keep us healthy and happy. We look forward to opening the site in 2024!

Trust Teams and our volunteers have worked tirelessly to deliver a huge range of activities and events, conservation projects, education and training. We successfully retained Green Flag status at Rushmere Country Park and took over the reins with the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership following the completion of the amazing programme of projects delivered with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

With record temperatures, three Prime Ministers and the passing of Her Majesty the Queen during 2022-23 was no normal year, but the Trust has continued to do what it does best, working both strategically through partnerships and collaborations for a better future, while delivering real improvements on the ground for wildlife and people. I'd like to thank the staff, volunteers and my fellow Trustees for all of their hard work over the year and look forward to what the next one brings!

Steven Smith



Environmental Education and Awareness-Raising

We strongly believe that increasing awareness of our environment and the issues it faces are vital if we are to achieve change. The Greensand Trust has a dedicated education team working to develop and deliver a range of educational and awareness-raising projects working with schools, youth groups, uniformed organisations, play groups and adult groups. During 2022/23 they worked with 3,037 children with our Education Volunteers giving just over 200 hours of their time. Children studied habitats, investigated plants and growth, pond dipping, bug hunting, explored different sites and had lots of fun. There were visits to Tiddenfoot Watercourse Park, Rushmore Country Park, Maulden Heath and Woods and more.

The team planned and delivered a teacher training session for support staff at a Luton school looking to increase the confidence of their staff in using the outdoors and have supported the Bedfordshire Swift Group in planning and delivering school assemblies for Swift Awareness Week.

Our flagship scheme for young people, the Youth Rangers, works with a group of young people aged 12-18 over a six month period, providing a variety of practical conservation and developmental activities, working closely together and learning new skills – culminating in the achievement of a John Muir Discovery Level Award.

The 2022/23 Youth Rangers completed a variety of tasks at Rushmore including small mammal trapping, heathland restoration, fence building, green woodwork and assembling nestbox kits. Several of the Youth Rangers also helped with "Feed the Birds" event in October and the November fairy lantern making event. 11 Youth Rangers 'graduated' on a beautiful, mild and sunny February day at Rushmore, with their John Muir Awards being presented by Simon Collier, one of our Trustees.

The Education Team also supported the Big Garden Birdwatch at Rushmore, the Friends of Knots Wood with their October half term event and worked towards developing SEND (Special Educational Needs) provision in the Trust's events programme.



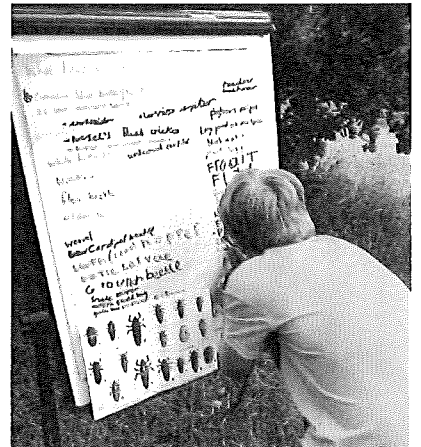
Environmental Education and Awareness-Raising

The Greensand Champions scheme, the award recognising positive environmental action by young people, also runs each year with the overall winner announced in the summer. This year's well-deserved winners were Redborne Upper School's Environmental Group for their engagement with local environmental work in Amphill and Flitwick. Their activities included improving recycling within the school and presenting their concerns about environmental degradation and climate change to an audience of councillors from CBC and town and parish councils at a student 'COP1' event.



Our annual Bug Lab programme returned for its 15th year during the summer holidays thanks to Central Bedfordshire Council's Active Outdoors funding. Seven sessions over six venues attracted over 70 young people to explore, identify and record creepy crawlies with their families. As always the Bug Labs were well supported by Bedfordshire Natural History Society members.

We also embarked on a new programme – WISE wood – with a small group of pupils from Henlow Academy. This offered 12 disadvantaged Year 8 pupils the opportunity to engage in a series of activities to enjoy, learn about and develop a connection to the natural world while building their self-esteem. Based mainly at the Working Woodlands Centre and working with the same group of young people over time enabled a more meaningful experience with deeper learning to take place than the usual one-off school visit. Following very positive feedback from the staff and pupils involved in this pilot project, we hope to repeat and expand this offer to other schools in the future.



Biodiversity and Heritage



The Beds Reptile and Amphibian Group visited Claphill Lakes, Sandy Smith NR and Duck End NR to carry out night-time torching surveys for breeding amphibians. A busy toad crossing was discovered on the road outside the entrance to Claphill Lakes. Monitoring of the impact of deer on the woodland at Sandy Smith Nature Reserve in the spring clearly showed that the reduced stalking over the previous two years caused by lockdowns has resulted in increasing damage to the woodland ground flora, setting back the progress that had been made.

A very successful evening walk was held at the Sandy Smith Nature Reserve for the Beds Bird Club and Beds Natural History Society in June with about 30 people attending.

We worked with the Beds Natural History Society, the Wildlife Trust, the Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre and Chalkscope to develop a Flora Guardians project in the county. The aim is to build up a network of volunteers monitoring rare plants. If this works well it is hoped to extend it to include species from other groups. Trust involvement is being supported by the Peter Smith Charitable Fund for Nature. As part of the pilot work for this project, monitoring was carried out by staff and volunteers over the summer months on species such as marsh violet, sheep's-bit and bog pimpernel (pictured), all rare plants now present in only one or two places on the Greensand Ridge.

With preparatory work moving forward at Claphill Lakes Nature Reserve, there was much activity focused on this site to support this – our objectives for the site include protecting and enhancing its habitats and species while providing opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to explore and engage with the site in a sensitive manner. A great deal of survey work was carried out to help inform the future development of the site and ensure it is protected. Botanical survey work was carried out on Calke Castle Scheduled Monument and survey work was also carried out on the area of the future visitor centre as part of the planning application. Skylark transects were repeated in April and May and the site was again checked for badger activity. The Beds Invertebrate Group paid another visit in October – they have added over 300 species to the site list in 2022!



Biodiversity and Heritage

Our 10-year Higher Level Stewardship agreement at Maulden Heath came to an end in September but, as with many such schemes, it was extended until there is more clarity regarding the future of agri-environment schemes. The Beds Invertebrate Group visited the site in August, making a number of interesting finds.

In July we had a meeting with the Operations Manager and Ecologist from the Bedford Group of Drainage Boards. They were in the process of writing a new Biodiversity Action Plan for the Group which hopefully should lead to some positive collaboration in future.



Forestry England invited us to join a meeting with their Oak Processionary Moth team at Maulden Wood. This invasive non-native species was accidentally introduced to the UK in 2005. It has now been found on oak trees in Maulden Wood and a number of others locally. The caterpillars live gregariously in a web on branches, have irritating hairs which cause rashes and can be a hazard to people and dogs.



Sandy Smith Nature Reserve again hosted a harvest mouse nest survey training morning for the Beds Mammal Group as part of the national Harvest Mouse survey. Trust staff and volunteers have found harvest mouse nests at Claphill Lakes, SSNR and Flitton Moor and Duck End NR.



A new piece of carved masonry from the ruined 19th century folly was found in Upper Alders during woodland work in the autumn. This was therefore able to be included in a general walkover survey of SSNR by archaeologists that was carried out in December. A meeting was held with the Wildlife Trust officer who is updating Bedfordshire's Ancient Woodland Inventory for Natural England. We were able to provide local knowledge and copies of old maps for a number of woodlands, and to help publicise their request for volunteers to help with the project.



Trust Patron Peter Smith MBE and valued donor Thurstan Adsham visited Kings Wood in Heath and Reach with staff to look at woodland plots the Trust has secured in the last few years, including the plot Thurstan specifically helped to buy. Significant areas are now owned by The Greensand Trust, Wildlife Trust, Central Bedfordshire Council and Tarmac, all of whom work with Natural England to ensure this wonderful ancient woodland (and the only National Nature Reserve in Greensand Country) is managed appropriately.

Flagship Sites

Welcome to RUSHMERE Country Park

Rushmere Country Park remains the Trust's flagship site for engaging large numbers of people with the wildlife, landscape and heritage of Greensand Country. Jointly owned with Central Bedfordshire Council, and managed by the Trust on a day-to-day basis, this 167ha site with woodland, heathland, meadow, wet woodland and open water habitats provides much to explore. A network of trails for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, with two sculpture trails, all supported through the Herons View Visitor Centre, Treetops Café and café facilities at the Stockgrove entrance means there is something for everyone.



Visitor numbers continued to recover following the impacts of the pandemic and the flurry of named storms that impacted the previous year. There was a great turnout of around 2,000 people in June for the Summer Fayre & Dog Show - our first major event since the pandemic. We partnered with the RSPCA who organised the dog competition and the trade stalls. The Trust managed the set up, car parking and catering. We had just over 500 vehicles throughout the day which equates to roughly around 2,000 visitors, plus those local visitors who walked in.

Low water levels caused by hot dry weather caused problems for a visiting red kite, which had to be rescued from Heron Lake after landing on exposed mud and subsequently sinking! It was taken to a nearby animal sanctuary to recover.



Rushmere was successful in retaining its Green Flag Award for the third year with excellent feedback - this is really important to us, as the Green Flag Award is the international standard for public parks. Lots of activities took place on the site over the year, including a summer picture trail, two scavenger hunts, two CBC 'Xplorers' events plus a Midford Drawing event. As usual the site hosted its annual Feed the Birds event in October and the café hosted Christmas craft activities during December. A Greensand Country Art Exhibition was displayed in the atrium of the Visitor Centre with sculptures by artist Emily Tracy.



The annual Heron Watch attracted many people to witness the spectacle of our grey herons breeding. Several new volunteers joined the 'team', and about 18 pairs of herons nested, so it was an all-round success!

In March, Rushmere successfully hosted the British Orienteering Championship.



Flagship Sites

THE WORKING WOODLANDS CENTRE

The Working Woodlands Centre, Maulden Wood, provides the infrastructure to support and stimulate the positive management of woodlands, to benefit wildlife, people and the local rural economy. We have agreed a memorandum of understanding with Forestry England to enable joint working on shared objectives, including enabling learning activity sessions at Maulden Wood, in addition to further developing the training and education events held at the Working Woodland Centre.



The Working Woodlands Centre has been a key training hub, supporting rural crafts and skills. There have included hedge laying workshops and guided walk training, giving the public and our volunteers the opportunity to learn new skills taught by experts in their fields.

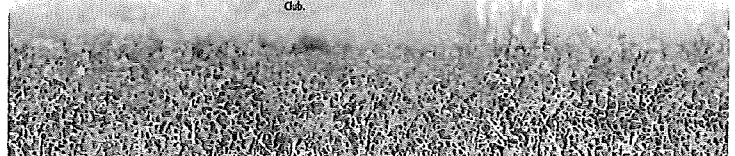
The Trust also led a Teacher training Day for teachers to visit with the education team to build confidence in using the outdoors for teaching. The day was followed with two visits in June where the teachers returned with 120 of their pupils for summer woodland walks.

Through our workshops, the Working Woodlands project continues to support start-up woodland craft businesses. As incubator units, the workshops have given our tenants a helping hand to grow and develop their woodland businesses, sharing heritage skills and products with the public.

The Working Woodlands Centre has also supported like-minded initiatives across Greensand Country, providing them with a space to meet and run training courses. A wide variety of groups have benefited, including Bedfordshire F3, the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and Flora Guardians project, and the South Midlands Orienteering Club.

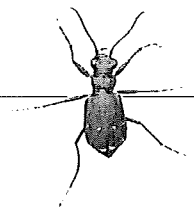


The Trust's first WISE wood programme was delivered with disadvantaged young people engaging in meaningful activities to develop a stronger connection to the natural world. Children were able to build their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing whilst enjoying the woodland setting and using the Centre as a base.



Site Management & Development

The Trust manages a range of sites, from the tiny Duck End Nature Reserve in Maulden, right up to Rushmere Country Park. These include sites such as our own Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, sites we lease such as Maulden Heath, and sites we manage on behalf of others including local authorities. Across all of these sites we seek to manage them for the benefit of wildlife and the people visiting them and provide opportunities for local people to volunteer.



At Clapham Lakes Nature Reserve we planted the remaining 7,000 trees in the area identified to become a 'wet woodland', an important habitat in the Filt Valley. Funding was secured from Grantscape to create a 50m length of boardwalk between the two main lakes, complete with a viewing platform, which will help provide access during wetter periods, creates a viewpoint over the western lake and protect habitats and species from trampling.

Staff and volunteers have been busy doing preparatory work clearing the routes of future pathways and facilities, and also preparing areas for archaeological surveys. Views have been opened up across the lakes and to Calhoe Castle.



Working with CBC the Trust continues to support invaluable local Friends Groups, usually made up of local volunteers focused on a single site. Activities during the year have included coppicing with the Friends of Linslade Wood, while the Friends of Studham Common planted various species of apple tree to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. We helped the Friends of Edgwick Farm at Woburn Sands manage this important site, supported hedge laying at Knolls Wood and a holly clearance task at Heath Wood and Meadow. Hedge-laying has also been taking place with the Friends of Tiddenfoot Waterside Park.



At Sandy Smith NR the volunteers have been putting their new hedge-laying skills to good use, tackling a further stretch to add to the length done at their training day last year. The annual reedbed cut was carried out in February and scrub control has taken place. Scrub control was also the order of the day in one of the SSSI fields at Maulden Heath. Work for Central Bedfordshire Council included two ride management tasks at Centenary Wood and a tree planting task at Firwick Wood.



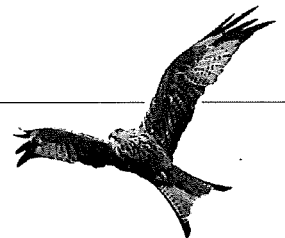
At Rushmere, heathland restoration continued in Oak Wood, Nighthar Valley and on Lords Hill with the assistance of our weekly volunteer groups. The Youth Rangers helped clear and open up the viewing area on Lords Hill looking back across to the visitors' centre and also installed a rustic fence.



In Ampthill, where the Trust supports the Town Council with the management of this and other green spaces, the key site is Ampthill Great Park. A range of activities have taken place here, from the usual maintenance and safety work to the management of the County Wildlife Site and grassland together with bracken cutting. Other tasks included woodland management and cutting back trees and scrub to reduce shading on the great-crested newt pond.



Work at Aspley Woods involved the ongoing maintenance of trails, removal of unofficial trails, repair work to vandalised fencing and installing drainage to keep water off the bike park trails.



"Lake from Castle" - A mosaic of wetland habitats being conserved and enhanced within the Filt Valley

Volunteering and Community Engagement

The Trust could not achieve a fraction of what it does without the support of its many and varied volunteers. We aim to offer a range of interesting and rewarding opportunities to get involved in our work, which includes supporting educational activities and visitor engagement alongside practical conservation volunteering.



194 registered volunteers contributed a staggering 12,496 hours across the Trust's area during the year, improving habitats and helping people of all ages learn about and enjoy the Greensand Country area. At Rushmere, volunteers played a key role at the Summer Fayre and Dog Show, manning a stall, marshalling car parking, running children's activities and helping with setting up and packing away. Throughout the year Visitor Services volunteers have played a crucial role in providing information and support to thousands of people, helping them make the most of their visit.

During the year we introduced a series of volunteer-led guided walks, aimed at both staff and volunteers, helping everyone find out more about the sites we manage.



The Trust attended the Unslade Canal Festival once again, promoting Greensand Country and also talking to local people who don't visit Rushmere, to hopefully help engage a wider range of people in the future. The Trust also had a small stall at the Hiltun Moor barnstorm in July, with information on the Trust's work and on Himalayan balsam.

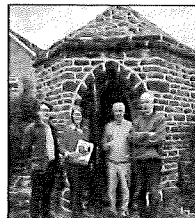
Volunteers featured in a Countryside Code Video created by Central Bedfordshire Council. The video showcased Rushmere Country Park in a positive manner and sent out a great message.



Partnerships and Development Projects

The Greensand Trust recognizes that working in partnership with others helps increase what we can all achieve, plays to the strengths of everyone and helps the area magnify its voice to a higher level – "Environmental Partnership in Action" is more than just a strapline, it is an important way of working.

We work in partnership at all levels, including with national and regional organisations as well as local partners, landowners, businesses and communities.



As the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership came towards the end of its Lottery-funded phase, the National Lottery Heritage Fund visited the area to look at a range of completed projects including the newly refurbished 'Cage' in Silsoe, a former village lock-up for housing local miscreants.

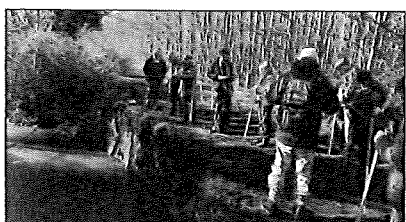
This was followed by a celebration reception at Moggerhanger Park in early December. The Partnership has received a glowing endorsement from Liz Bates of the Heritage Fund: "Starting a Landscape Partnership from scratch is a huge challenge and all the partners and the team have worked hard since 2015 to deliver long-lasting change to the Greensand Country landscape and its communities. This sustained effort has created a resilient partnership that continues to develop beyond our support, making the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership an exemplar in successful collaborative working".



The Trust is now leading the Partnership in its 'Forward Plan' phase, with funding secured from a local charitable trust to support the Partnership Co-ordinator role for the next two years. Our first post-NLHF AGM was held and working groups established to develop and support the delivery of new collaborative projects, such as our new "What's in this field?" QR code based interpretation project.

Through GCLP the Trust also supported the High Sheriff Lady Jane Clifford's "Walk the Walk, Talk the Talk" event which involved walking the entirety of the Greensand Ridge Walk over five days. We were especially pleased that Lady Jane chose to use the Greensand Ridge Walk as the focus, visiting Rushmere and the Working Woodlands Centre. The aim of the event was to connect people working in different parts of the charitable sector, with the local environment at its heart, and the Trust is continuing to work up potential new opportunities as a result.

Partnerships and Development Projects



Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a key element of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, and through our work with the Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership, Natural England and the three local authorities we have led on the initial stages to prepare to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Bedfordshire. The Strategy will create a blueprint for where best to invest in nature to create joined up networks of habitats, helping nature recover recent and historic losses but also adapt to our changing climate.

The state of our rivers and streams has risen rapidly up the agenda over the past year, and the Trust continues to play an active role in the Upper and Bedford Ouse Catchment Partnership. The Trust has led activities including the supporting and development of volunteers, river restoration and project development. We helped pioneer the River Restoration Centre's new 'Citizen River Habitat Survey' and presented at their national conference in early summer and have delivered the largest and most ambitious programme of river habitat surveys over subsequent months.

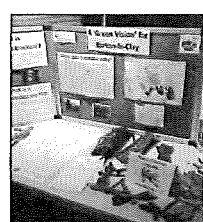


The Trust has also helped secure funds for the Catchment Partnership to raise awareness of issues around low flows and flooding and continues to be a key partner in the ambitious 'Himalayan Balsam Eradication Project' alongside the Wildlife Trust and Bedfordshire Council. Funding from Anglian Water's Invasive Species Fund enabled us to carry out considerable work controlling Himalayan balsam this year, mostly at Ciohill Lakes where it is abundant after years of neglect. The year was topped off with a 'Volunteer Celebration Event' held at the Rufus Centre, Flitwick. Inspiring the volunteers for the future, the keynote speaker was Joe Pecorelli of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), a pioneer of the 'Outfall Salad' survey methodology and leading advocate for the use of 'citizen scientists'.

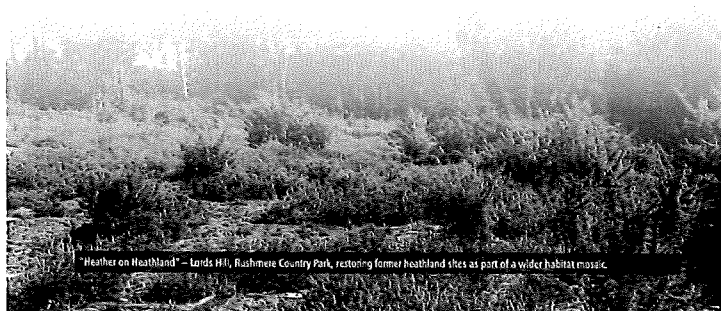


The Trust is helping Flitwick Town Council transform an area of former arable farmland into a 'Nature Park' to improve habitats and provide low key recreational access for local residents. The proposed Nature Park will include woodland and meadow areas, ponds, trees and hedgerows – all set out in a 'Masterplan' developed by the Trust and endorsed by Flitwick Town Council in the summer. We look forward to continuing our work with FTC and others on this project to turn the Masterplan into a reality!

The Flitwick Nature Park will also be an important element of the Ampthill and Flitwick Green Wheel, for which a Masterplan is also being developed by the Trust and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. We will be working in partnership with BRCC and Central Bedfordshire Council on other Green Wheel Masterplans in the future, helping identify opportunities to create walking, cycling and horse riding routes connecting people to the countryside and green spaces close to where they live.



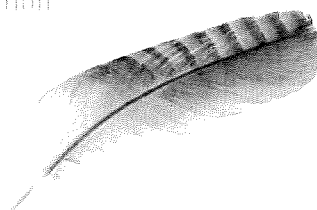
Neighbourhood Planning helps local communities have a stronger voice in how their local area develops in the future, and protecting and enhancing the local environment is an essential part of this. Green Infrastructure Plans, produced with the input of local communities through workshops and surveys, are the perfect way to do this, and over the past year the Trust has completed the Ciohill Green Infrastructure Plan and begun work on GI Plans for Barton-le-Clay and Aspley Heath. We've even crossed the county boundary and begun work on an 'Environmental Enhancement Strategy' for the parish of Wing in Buckinghamshire, as they review their Neighbourhood Plan.



"Heather on Heathland" – Lords Hill, Rushmere Country Park, restoring former heathland sites as part of a wider habitat mosaic.

Environmental
partnership
in
action

The
Greensand
Trust



Communications

The Greensand Trust website receives on average 18k visits per quarter. Rushmere is the most popular section and most frequently searched term followed by Amphill Park, Aspley Woods and Aspley bike passes which continue to be the top performing pages. Feedback on Rushmere via Google reviews is very positive with a rating of 4.6 out of 5.

Press releases issued in 2022/23:

- the 2022 Greensand Champion winners.
- The Youth Rangers scheme launch for autumn 2022
- Rushmere's Green Flag Award Summer 2022
- Rushmere Non-User Survey
- Clophill Lakes appeal
- Leighton Buzzard Gateway Feature

The Greensand Trust Facebook page audience increased to 1.8k over the year. The Rushmere Country Park Facebook page had around 18k followers by the end of the year with Twitter followers reaching around 1,300.

The autumn saw the start of our fundraising appeal for Clophill Lakes, and by the end of March 2023 just over £139,000 had been raised towards our £250,000 target, with donations ranging from £1 to a significant donation from the Peter Smith Charitable Trust, which pledged to double any funds raised during the year! We are extremely grateful to everyone who donated.



We hope that you have enjoyed reading about the wide range of work that we do across the Greensand Country area. If you would like to find out more about the services we offer, or get involved in our work, please contact:

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