

Parish Council of St Margaret's at Cliffe

The South Foreland Valley – an update

The South Foreland Valley is part of a designated 'Heritage Coast' that stretches from Dover Harbour to Kingsdown near Deal. Most of the land is owned by St. Margaret's at Cliffe Parish Council and is accessible to the public. The whole area is a **Site of Special Scientific Interest** for its chalk, flora, and invertebrates.

In SSSIs, certain activities are prohibited and there are legal duties concerning how the areas should be managed and protected.

- It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, disturb or destroy land known to be an SSSI or intentionally or recklessly disturb the wildlife in an SSSI. It is also an offence to take down, damage or obstruct an SSSI notice or sign.
- It is an offence to carry out any activity that may likely damage the SSSI without consent of the relevant conservation agency / landowner.
- The offences carry various penalties, including a fine of up to £20,000 in the Magistrates court or an unlimited fine in the Crown Court for carrying out work without permission, or for causing damage to an SSSI.

Back towards the end of last summer a rave was held in the gun magazine at the end of Seaview Road. The disturbance to residents in both St. Margaret's Road and Lighthouse Road was considerable and inconsiderate parking and litter damaged the South Foreland Valley.

Throughout the summer and on into winter, on occasions, the informal car park at the end of Seaview Road was severely churned up by cars and quad bikes doing wheelies. Camping had also increased with as many as 10 tents on one night and camper vans with tractor-sized wheels parked indiscriminately in the Valley.

The Parish Council works hard to protect and maintain this SSSI of chalk grasslands, in close partnership with The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership and a group of volunteers who work tirelessly; every year shows the good progress they have made.

On advice from the National Trust, the Parish Council decided to employ the services of Dover Security Services (DSS) to help protect the Valley and dissuade people from breaking the rules, which are in place to protect this gem. Furthermore, it was agreed that several measures needed to be put into place to prevent further damage. However, nothing could be done to the Valley without the consent of Natural England and this was obtained.

Last month a trench was dug across the entrance to the informal car park to prevent off-roading; quad biking, camping, firework parties and all the other unlawful activities, which have taken place there since summer 2019. Previously as soon as the grass began to grow again so the bikers etc. returned. The trench is not a pretty sight but in no time at all the

grass will grow and in the meantime the disturbed ground will be enjoyed by some of our rarer butterflies.

There were several places on Seaview Road and Goodwin Road where vehicles and campers found easy access to the Valley. Short posts have been sunk, to prevent vehicular access, but still allow the Dexter cattle to move freely. Along both roads there is room for parking.

It came to the Parish Council's notice that a third track had been made, up at The Front as parts of the other two tracks were becoming very difficult to drive upon. Further consent from Natural England after a site visit, was obtained and three trenches have now been dug up there.

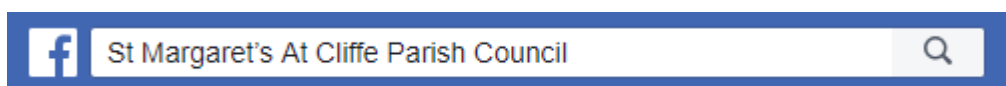
On New Year's Eve another rave took place in the gun magazine and it was then decided that this now needed to be blocked up. This work began on Friday 6th March and the wall would have been filled with concrete the following Monday. However, on Saturday 7th March yet another rave was held and to gain entrance the wall was partially broken through. 2 collapsible posts were also destroyed. Sunday evening the rest of the wall was demolished! The Parish Council asked DSS to increase their patrols for a short time until the new wall was completely set. Groups of youths were cleared from the site on Monday evening; however, the following day it was found that the second wall had been damaged!

The Parish Council is asked from time to time why we don't maintain all the roads in the Valley. To do so would be an enormous cost way beyond the realms of our precept. Furthermore, it states very clearly in the Kent Highways Gazetteer, which gives the status of every road in Kent, that all the Valley roads are 'not maintainable at public expense'.

How can you help to protect and maintain this precious piece of ground all 23.5 hectares of it – the largest Village Green in the country? If those of you who live in St. Margaret's Road and Lighthouse Road become aware of a large number of vehicles passing your property at night or you can hear music please phone Dover Security Services and they will come out straightaway to deal with it. Likewise, ramblers and dog walkers if you see people blatantly breaking the rules please phone this number: **07428 062 944**

Anna Newton

Parish Councillor



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