

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Royal Military Canal Management Plan

2026 – 2030



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Introduction

The Royal Military Canal (RMC) was constructed between 1804 and 1809 as a defensive structure against Napoleonic invasion. Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC) own the eastern section, a 7km stretch between Seabrook Outfall and West Hythe Dam. The canal continues for a further 38km (23miles), to Cliff End near Hastings. The canal corridor opens up a window to nature previously inaccessible to many resulting in a greater understanding of the rich diversity of the canal.

A Heritage Lottery grant provided a range of enhanced facilities including a children's play area, improved footpaths and bridleways, life size bronze sculptures, interpretation panels and an acoustic sound mirror. The canal also provides a valuable amenity area for fishing, boating, cycling, horse riding, walking and educational interpretation. An extensive dredging programme was also carried out to remove thousands of tons of silt from the canal. F&HDC continues to invest in further environmental and landscaping projects alongside the canal, to make key areas more attractive and improve facilities.

The plan will help to ensure that the gardens fulfil the vision statement that all parks should:

- Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal
- Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
- Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
- Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities

This management plan helps in achieving the key principles and service ambitions set out in the Corporate Plan (2020 -2030) and the department Service Plan.

The six key principles are:

- Locally Distinctive
- Sustainable Recovery
- Greener Folkestone and Hythe
- Transparent, Stable, Accountable
- Continuous Improvement
- Working Effectively with Partners

The four service ambitions are:

- A Thriving Economy
- Homes and Infrastructure
- Excellent Community Services
- Quality Environment

2 Site Details

2.1 Population distribution

Folkestone & Hythe District Council covers a total area of 36,525 hectares and encompasses the towns of Folkestone, Hythe, New Romney and Lydd. The population of Shepway is 113,000 (2019).

2.2 Diverse countryside

Kent has a varied and diverse countryside including the largest area of ancient semi-natural woodland of any county in Great Britain. The pattern of agriculture, including fruit, hops and general produce, has earned Kent the title of “Garden of England”.

The coastline of Kent stretches for 350 miles from the industrialised Thames-side to the great shingle expanse of Dungeness. Along the Medway and Swale estuaries are the mudflats and salt marshes known as the North Kent Marshes. The White Cliffs, around Dover and Folkestone are internationally renowned and have been designated a Heritage Coast by Historic England. There are also numerous attractive towns and villages throughout the region, many of which are relatively quiet and unspoiled. The landscape, attractive settlements and coast represent the major assets of the region.

2.3 Transport links

Road

The Folkestone / Hythe area is well served by an excellent transportation network. The A259 serves the length of the South East coast encompassing the canal corridor. The M20 motorway links Hythe and Folkestone to the M25 and London and east to Dover. Regular buses travel on the A259, alongside the canal stopping at Seabrook and Hythe. National Express coaches provide a service from Folkestone to London with at least 4 departures each day.

Rail

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link has increased passenger activity throughout the district, with Hythe 4 miles from the tunnel terminal at Cheriton. The shuttle operates between Folkestone and Calais, with a 35 minute journey time.

Whilst Hythe itself has no mainline railway station, Westenhanger and Sandling Stations are approximately 2 miles away.

Folkestone Central and West stations provide regular services to the rest of the South East and London. The high speed rail service is available from Folkestone West Station arriving at London St Pancras in just under 1 hour.

Hythe is served by the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Light Railway which follows the coast along to Dungeness. Primarily a tourist attraction and transportation for school children, it carries around 140,000 passengers a year and is the world’s longest public miniature railway.

Sea

The Port of Dover is within easy travelling distance from Folkestone and Hythe, providing regular services to France and the wider continent. Passengers using the cruise terminal at Dover Eastern Docks take the opportunity to explore the area before embarking on their cruise.

2.4 Directions to the Royal Military Canal

By Car – Reach 1

Leave M20 at junction 11 and take the third exit at the roundabout, then follow the signs approx. 1 mile to Lymgne. Drive through the village until you reach the t-junction and face the village hall. Turn left past the school and down the hill 200m where you will see the Shepway Cross. Turn immediately right down Lymgne Hill for approximately half a mile and turn right into the RMC car park before the canal road bridge. There is a 2m height barrier although bays for minibuses are provided on the right hand side before the barrier. For disabled car park facilities for fishing, drive over the bridge and turn left immediately into the small designated car park.

By Car – Reach 2

Leave the M20 at junction 11 and take the third exit at the roundabout. Take the first left, then the first right following the signs to Sandling train station. Pass the train station on your left and continue to follow the signs to Hythe driving through Saltwood at the bottom of the hill. From here turn right at the roundabout, onto the A259 and turn left into Waitrose, where two hours free parking is available. (Satnav or AA route planner post code: CT21 5NH) This is adjacent to the canal footpath where you can Senior east towards Seabrook or west to Ladies Walk where rowing boats can be hired during the summer months.

By Car – Reach 3

Leave the M20 at junction 12 and take the third exit towards the large Tesco store. Senior towards the traffic lights and turn left onto Horn Street following the signs to Seabrook. Continue over the narrow bridge and down the hill through the hamlet and pass the pub on the left. Once you arrive at the t-junction turn left past the pub onto the A259 heading towards Sandgate, passing the school on your right. Once you are parallel to the petrol station turn immediately right, travelling on the left lane, heading towards the sea onto Princes Parade. Take the first right into Seabrook car park where currently pay and display parking is provided. There is a 2.2m height barrier for the prevention of camper vans as over night stopping is not permitted. (Satnav or AA route planner post code: CT21 5RL)

2.5 Site Description

The site is a 7km linear section of the Royal Military Canal between Seabrook Outfall and West Hythe Dam. This corridor provides a network of footpaths, cycleways and bridleways on both sides of the canal, passing unique 'kinks' giving the canal its distinctive zig-zag pattern. Located every 600 yards these sharp double bends enabled the waterway to be covered by crossfire from big field guns, today they serve as picnic areas.

Three distinct canal reaches are used to divide the canal based on their ecological characteristics;

Reach 1

Reach 1 is the western most section of approximately 4km in length and runs between West Hythe Dam and Scanlons Bridge. This reach is a designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and contains the most species rich and diverse habitats.

Reach 2

Reach 2 is the central section of the canal, approximately 1.5km in length and running between Scanlons Bridge and Twiss Road Bridge. This section is maintained as formal parkland and as such holds less ecological interest than the other reaches.

Reach 3

The final 2.5km reach lies between Twiss Road Bridge and Seabrook. The left bank runs parallel to a residential area and the right bank is bounded by a golf course along much of its length. This reach also forms part of the LWS.



Reach 1

Reach 2

Reach 3

For ease of maintenance the canal is also divided into smaller sections using the road and foot bridges as the boundaries. See maintenance maps in section 4 for details.

Royal Military Canal - Reaches



1,100 550 0 1,100 Meters

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3 Site History

The following chronology gives a brief overview of the canal's history and achievements.

- 1644** The River Rother is linked with Rye
- 1803** War starts again with France
- 1804** Lieutenant Colonel John Brown suggests the idea of building a canal to protect England from invasion by Napoleon. Prime Minister William Pitt agrees to the building of a canal and a line of Martello Towers. The hand digging of the canal begins.
- 1805** There is a serious threat of invasion in August. Britain defeats France at the battle of Trafalgar in October. 1,500 men are working on the building of the canal.
- 1806** Heavy rains flood the canal and work has to be abandoned for several weeks. By July, the canal is completed from Hythe to the River Rother.
- 1807** Works starts on the building of Iden Lock to link the canal with the River Rother. Work starts on the canal section between the River Rother and Pett Level in Rye.
- 1808-10 Hythe Barracks are built
- 1808 Iden Lock completed. The RMC receives its 1st income of £100 from cut hay
- 1809 After 4 years, The Royal Military Canal is complete: 28 miles, running from Seabrook (Kent) to Cliff End (East Sussex). The total cost for the building of the canal and road was £234,310
- 1810** The 74 Martello Towers are completed along the coast between Folkestone and Eastbourne. The canal is opened for public use including barges carrying goods and a passenger service, all activities are subject to tolls.
- 1812 Highest toll receipts on the Royal Military Canal
- 1846-8 Highest revenue from tollgates on the Royal Military Road
- 1847 Greatest tonnage carried on the Royal Military Canal
- 1851 Barge traffic is significantly reduced after the Ashford to Hastings railway is built.
- 1860 Hythe Venetian Fete first held
- 1877 Royal Military Canal leased to Hythe Corporation and the Lords of Romney Marsh.
- 1909 Barge traffic to the entire length of RMC ceases, after the last barge passes through Iden Lock in December.
- 1940 With the outbreak of the Second World War, the canal is fortified with concrete 'pill boxes'. These are used by armed soldiers watching for signs of an enemy invasion.
- 1987 The unique military monument was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument by English Heritage.
- 2004 A £3.35 million restoration programme in the eastern section of the canal provides a range of new and enhanced facilities for all to enjoy. Dredging works are carried out to remove thousands of tons of silt from the canal. An Environment Officer is appointed to work on a programme of habitat enhancement for ten years, to improve on the ecological diversity and landscape value of the site.
- 2010 Works start in laying the newly upgraded bridlepath from West Hythe Dam to Aldergate Lane, subsequently opened in early 2011.
The canal is awarded it's first Green Flag Award
- 2011 Launch of the passenger electric boat 'La Tienne' to provide a valuable green tourism facility and a transportation route for locals.
- 2013 Canal leaflet re-vamped
- 2018 Red poppy memorial commemorating WW1 centenary installed. The project was funded by local councillors and their ward grants.
A pontoon at Seabrook outfall area installed by Seapoint Canoe Centre. The installation represents the first phase of the development of the new centre. The cost of the

discharge of conditions and installing the pontoon was met from a S106 contribution secured by F&HDC from the adjoining residential development.

2020 20 new rowing boats purchased by F&HDC

2023 Floating Pennywort control management project. Working in a partnership with CABI and the Environment Agency

2023 Weedbarge replacement purchased

2024 Release of *Listronotus elongatus*, Pennywort weevil and its subsequent successful breeding

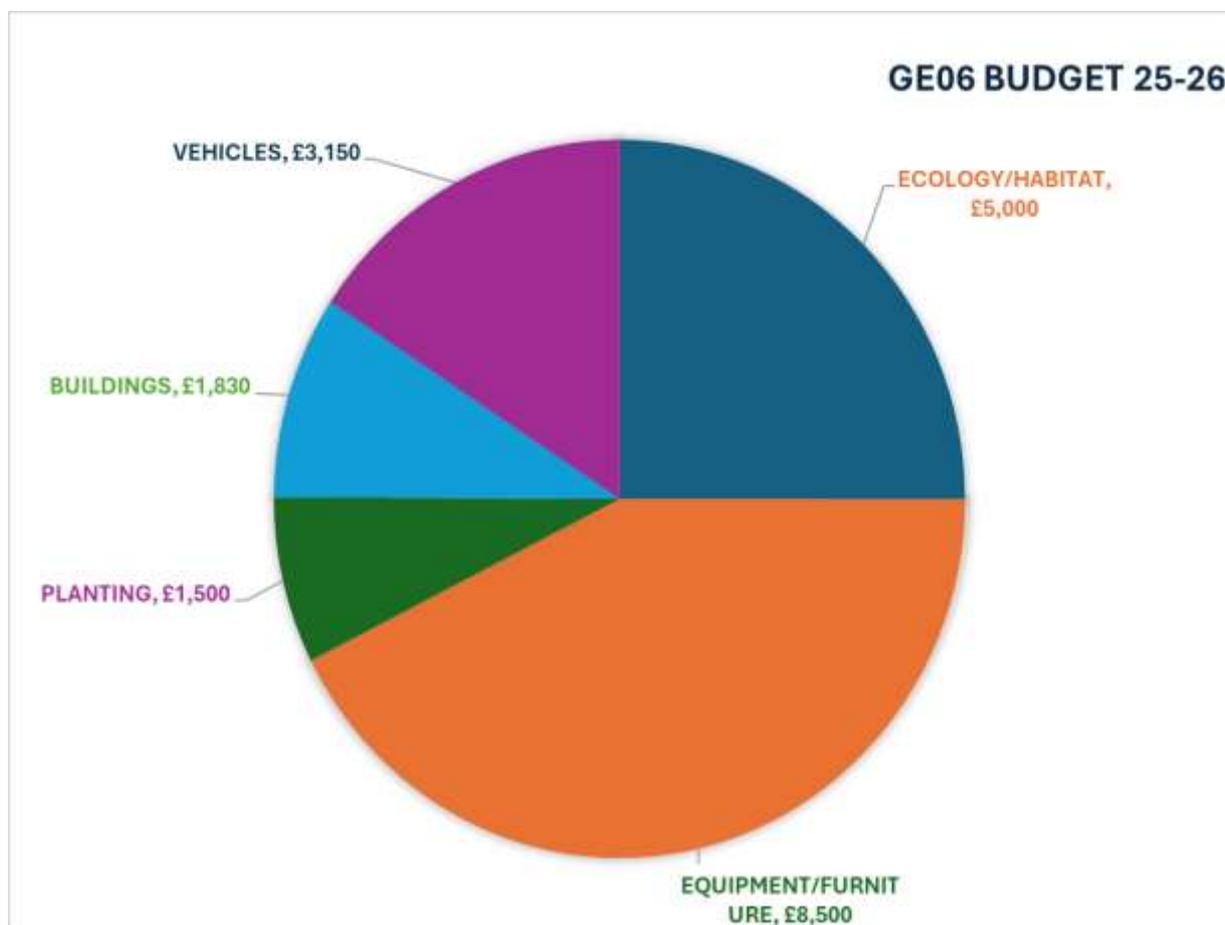
2024 Purchase of hybrid remote controlled bank mower



Further information can be found on the RMCP's canal website <http://www.rmcp.co.uk/the-royal-military-canal/>

4 Maintenance Plan

Overall management of the canal falls to the Horticultural Manager who controls the work force. This consists of 1 Head Gardener, 2 full time permanent gardeners and 1 seasonal gardener. These site-specific staff can respond to issues as they arise allowing a high standard to be maintained at all times. There is a £24,240 annual maintenance budget which is split between different cost headings according to the chart below:



Further £10,000 is allocated for various path improvements.

In addition to set annual budgets, capital scheme is used to fund larger, more expensive projects, such as building renovations, specialist equipment etc.

The Head Gardener oversees work allocated by the manager to the staff in accordance with the maintenance schedules, key principles, risk assessments and best horticultural practice. The risk assessments are available to view on request as are all other documents relating to Health and Safety (COSHH, Safety Data Sheets etc). The Head Gardener is responsible for ensuring all day-to-day duties within the area are completed in a timely fashion and to a high standard.

The manager and/ or designated FHDC Health and Safety Officer will make regular inspections to ensure all works are carried out to the correct standard and frequency. The manager also selects native planting required for gapping up newly cleared areas which includes trees and hedging.

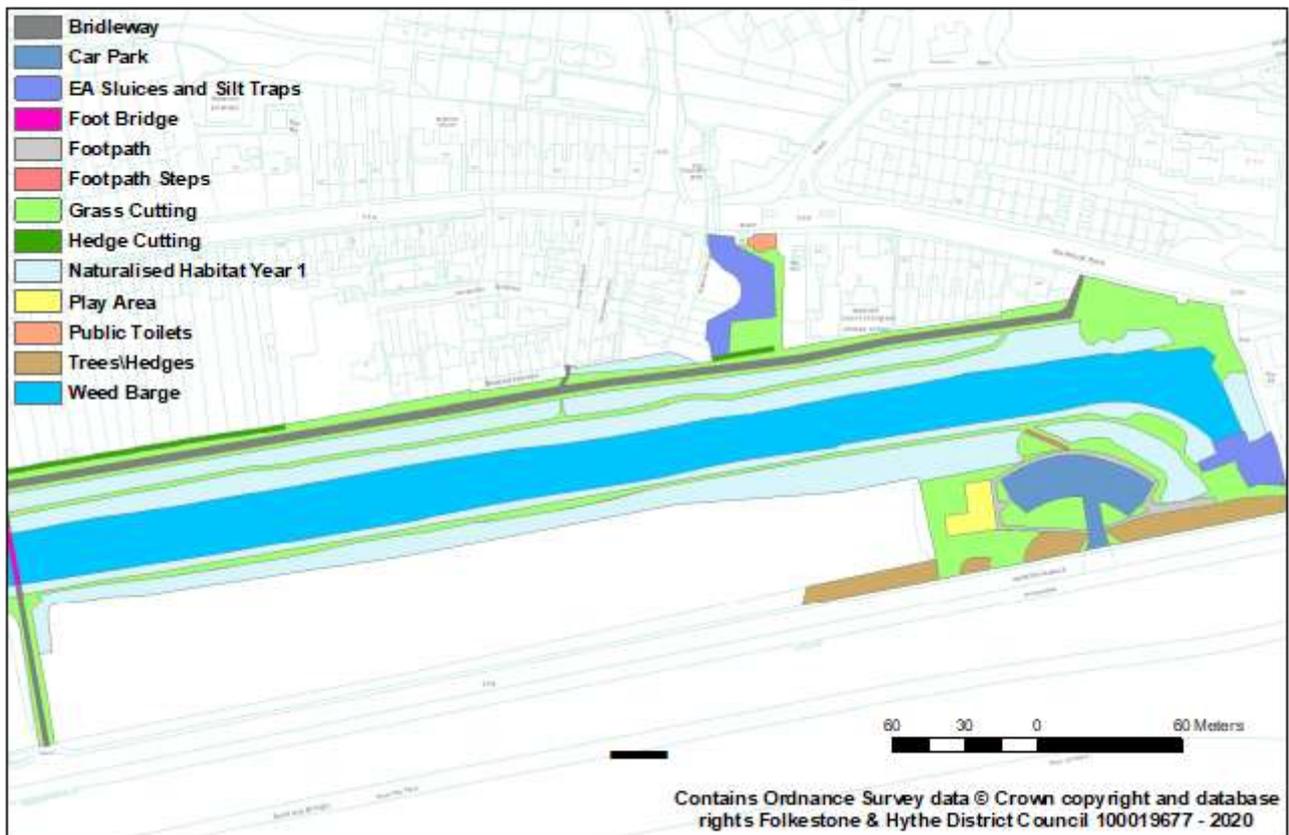
External contractors such as Zurich are commissioned to carry out annual safety inspections on all play equipment in the district and selected mechanical plant and equipment inspections on six monthly basis.

The RMC staff are supported by other members of the grounds maintenance team such as the Technical Services Manager (fleet and machinery), the Arboricultural Manager (Biennial tree inspections and tree maintenance by Arborists) and the Supervisors (supporting all managers within the section).

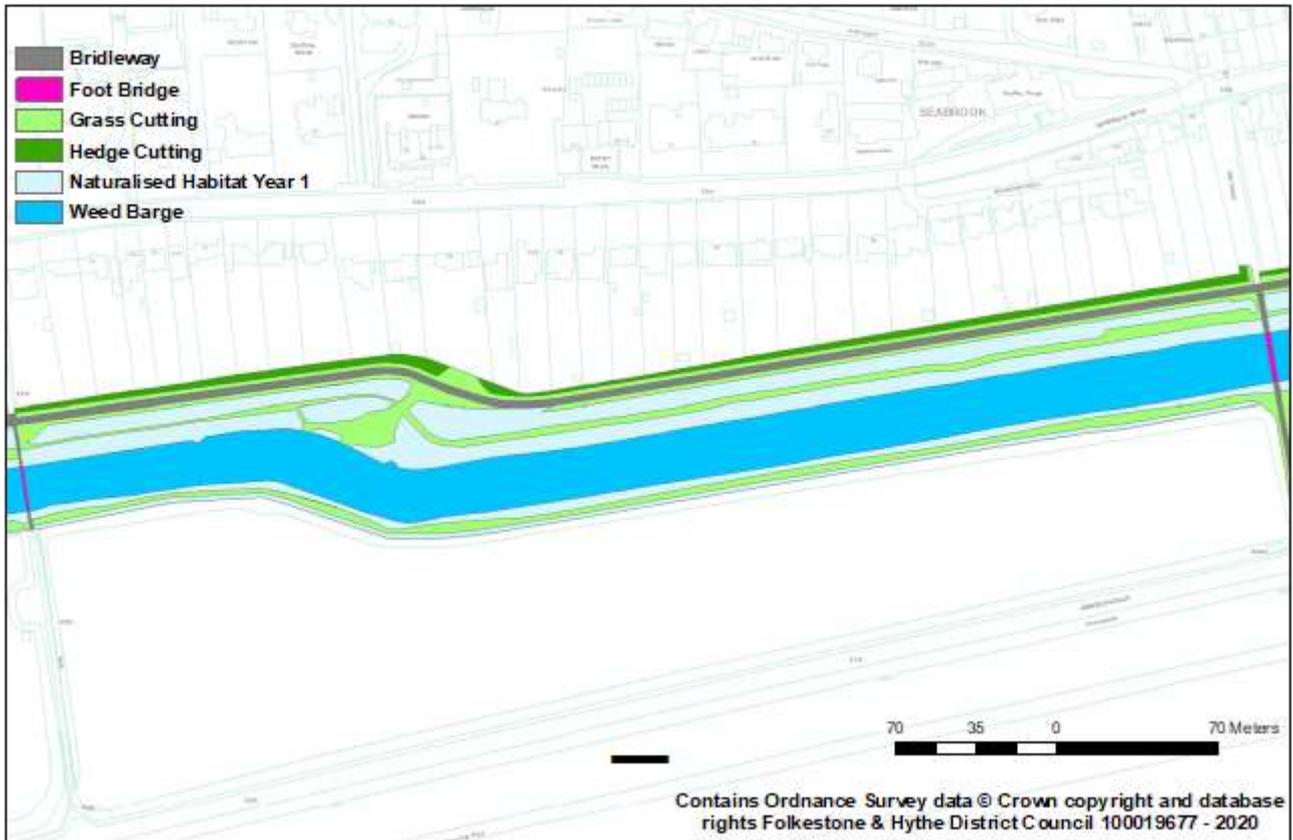
4.1 Grounds Maintenance Specification Maps

The maps and table below detail the main maintenance operations carried out by the team of canal gardeners. Splitting the canal into small sections using the road and foot bridges as boundaries is useful in allocating works and ensuring staff, contractors and managers have commonality in site operations.

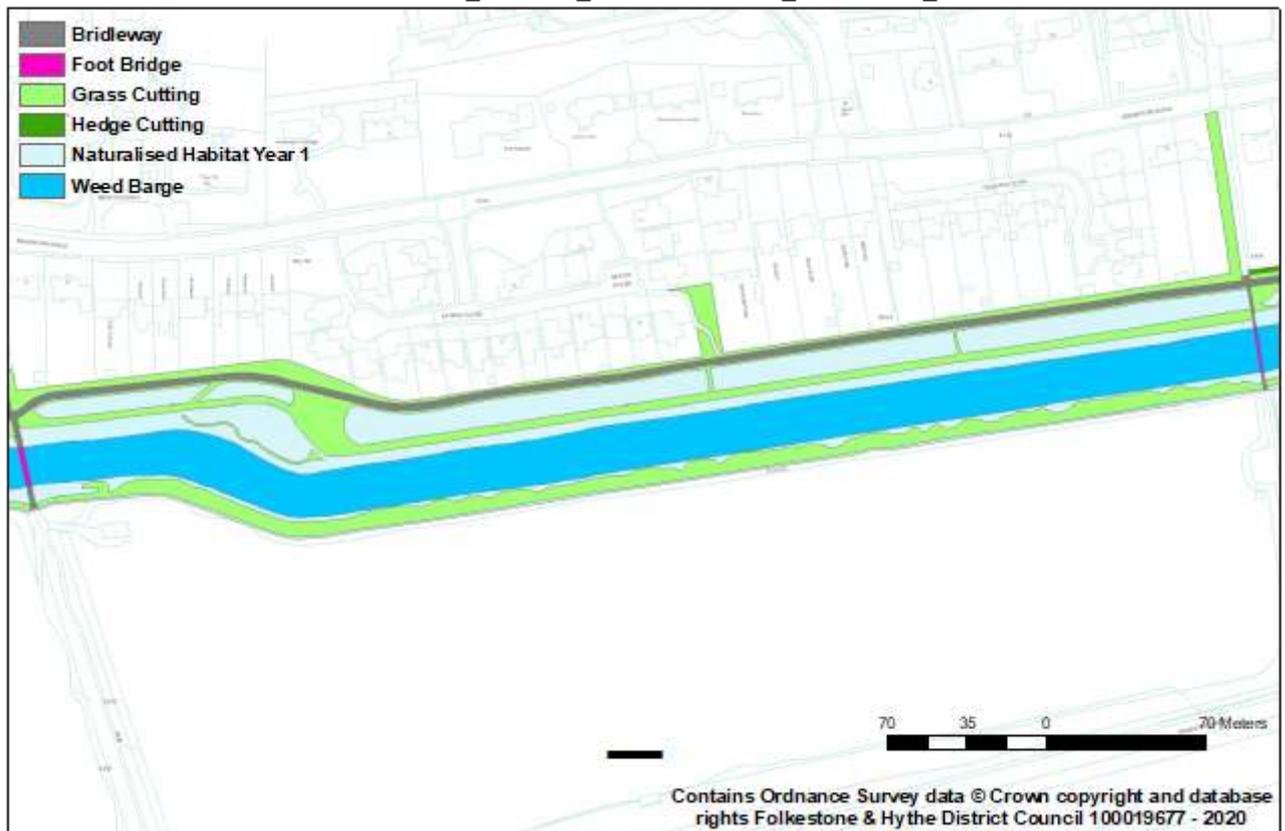
Seabrook Outfall to Seaview Bridge



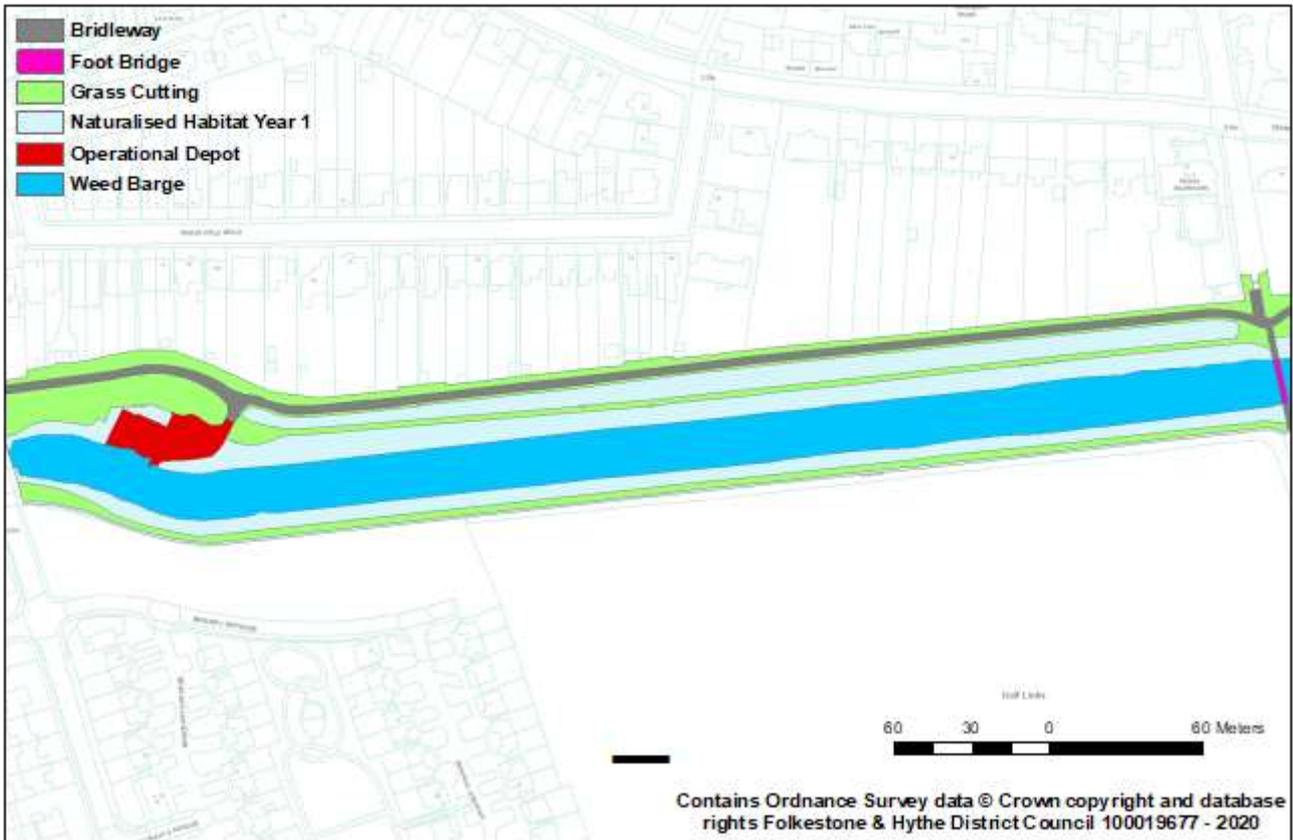
Seaview Bridge to Seabrook Lodge Bridge



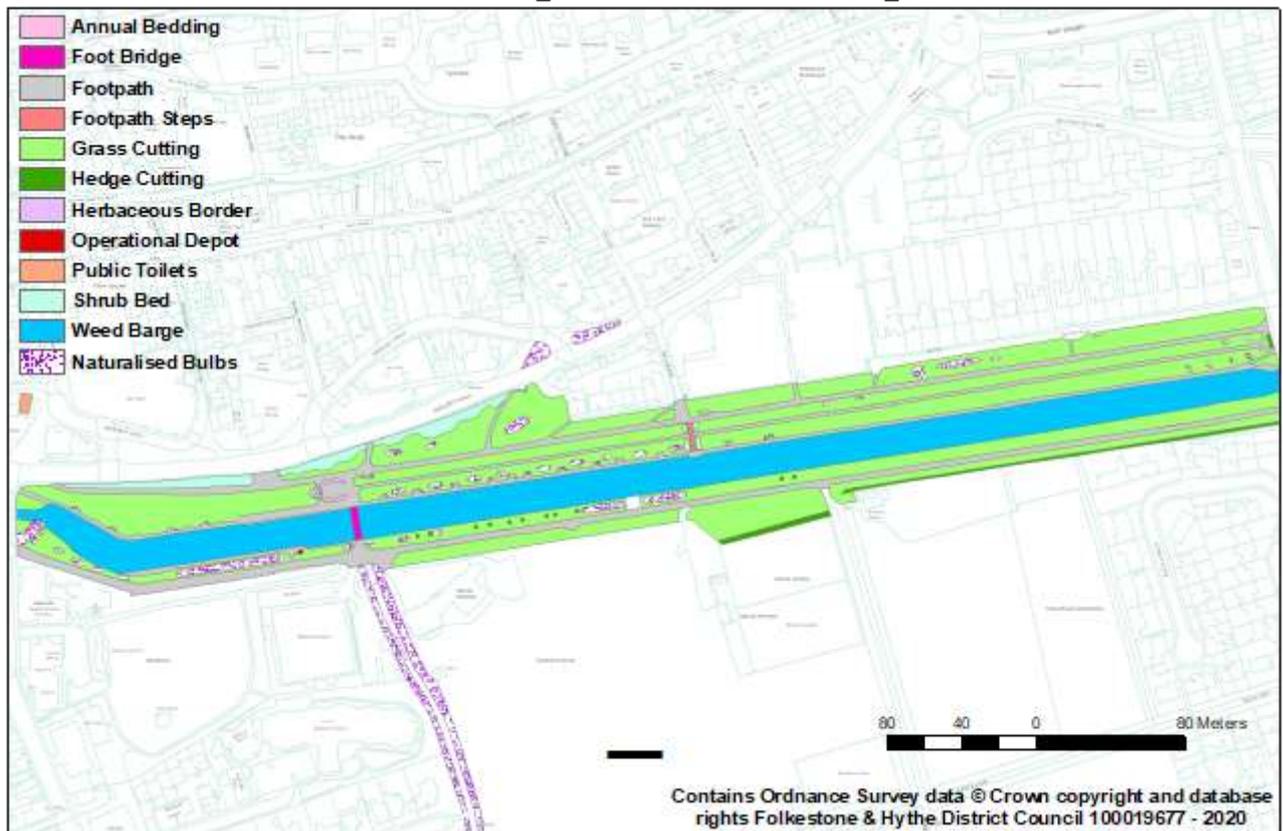
Seabrook Lodge Bridge to Cannongate Bridge



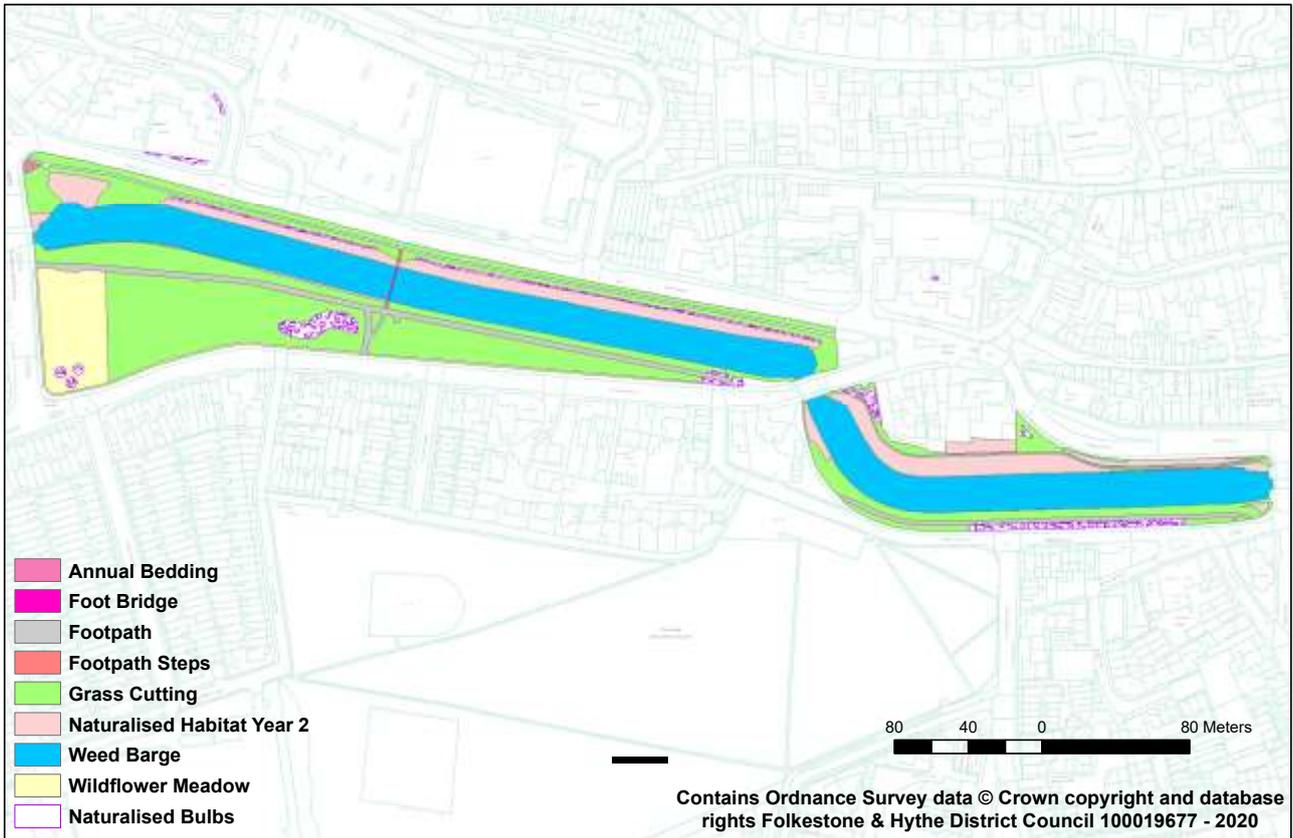
Cannongate Bridge to Twiss Road Bridge



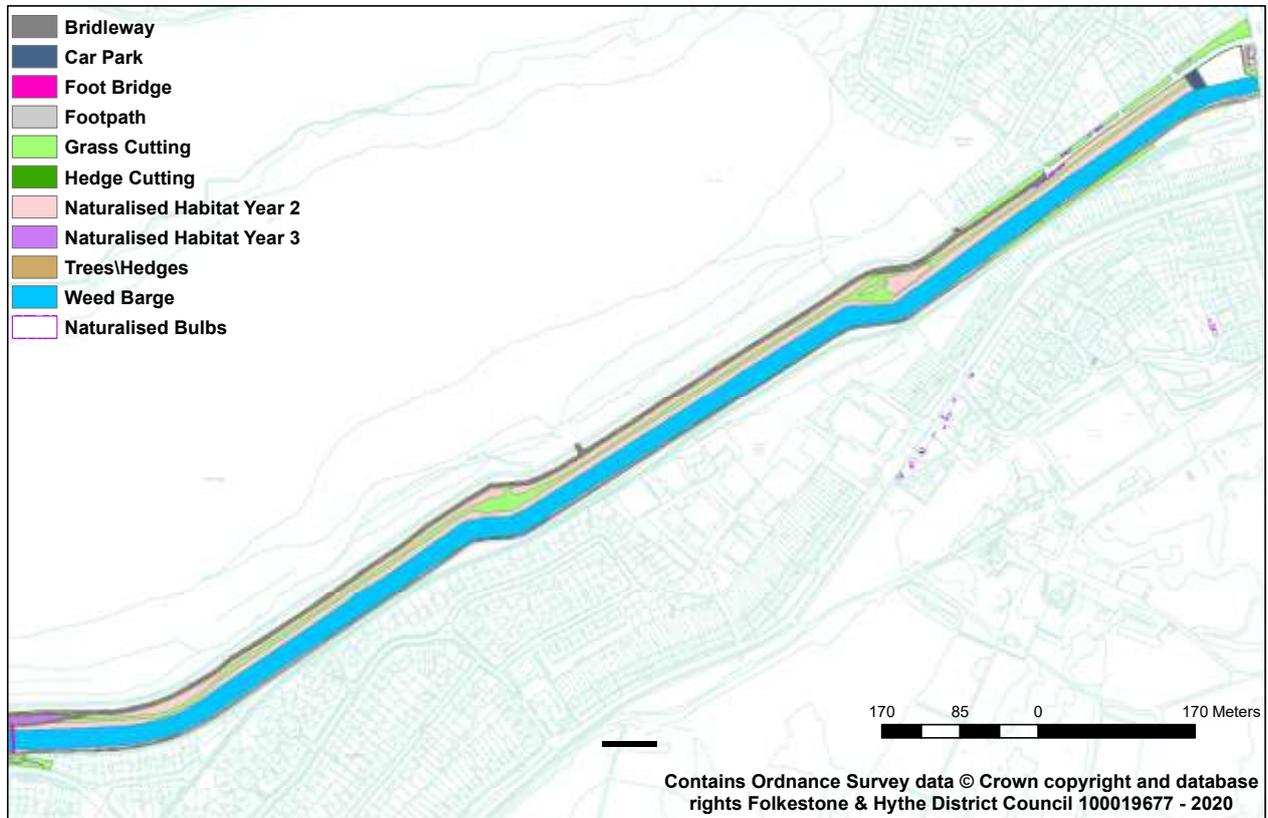
Twiss Road Bridge to Stade Street Bridge



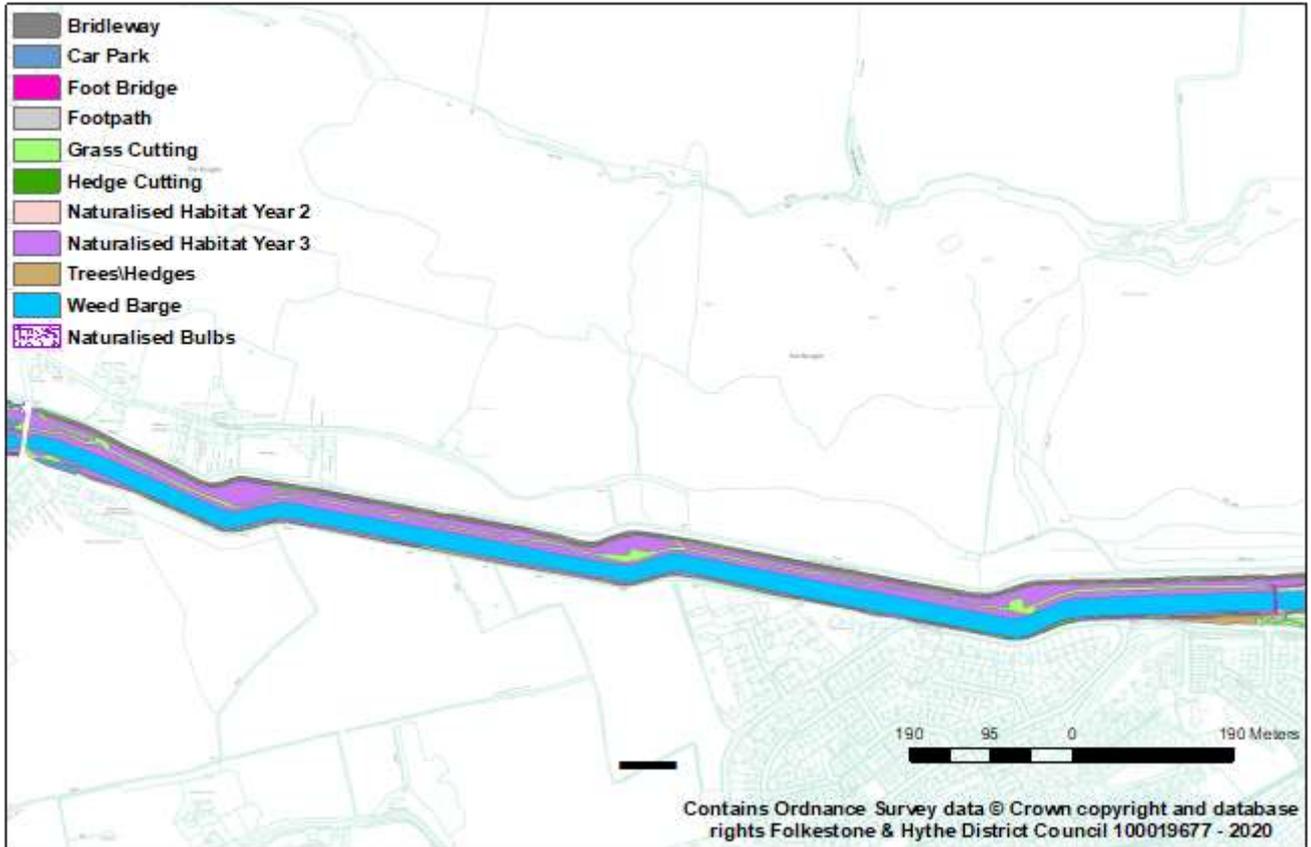
Stade Street Bridge to Scanlons Bridge



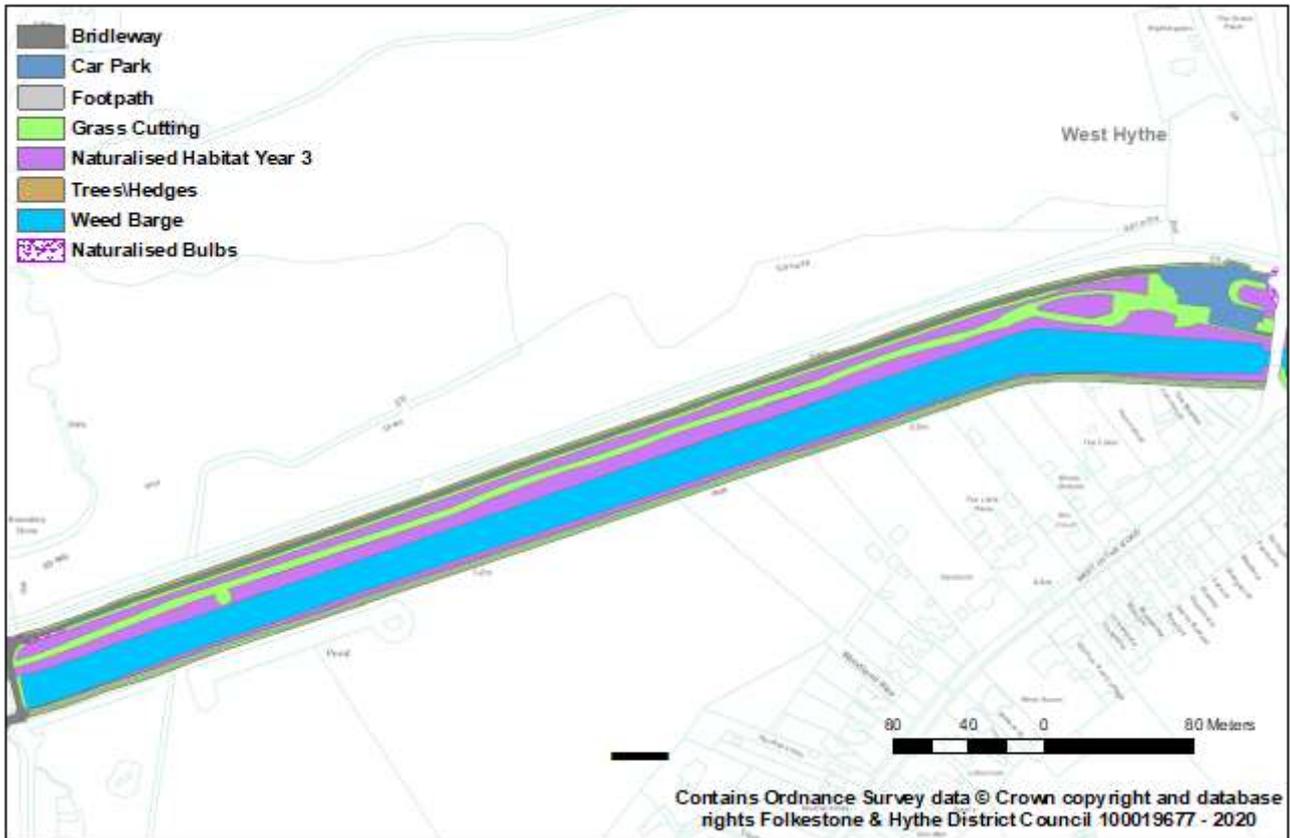
Scanlons Bridge to Burmarsh Bridge



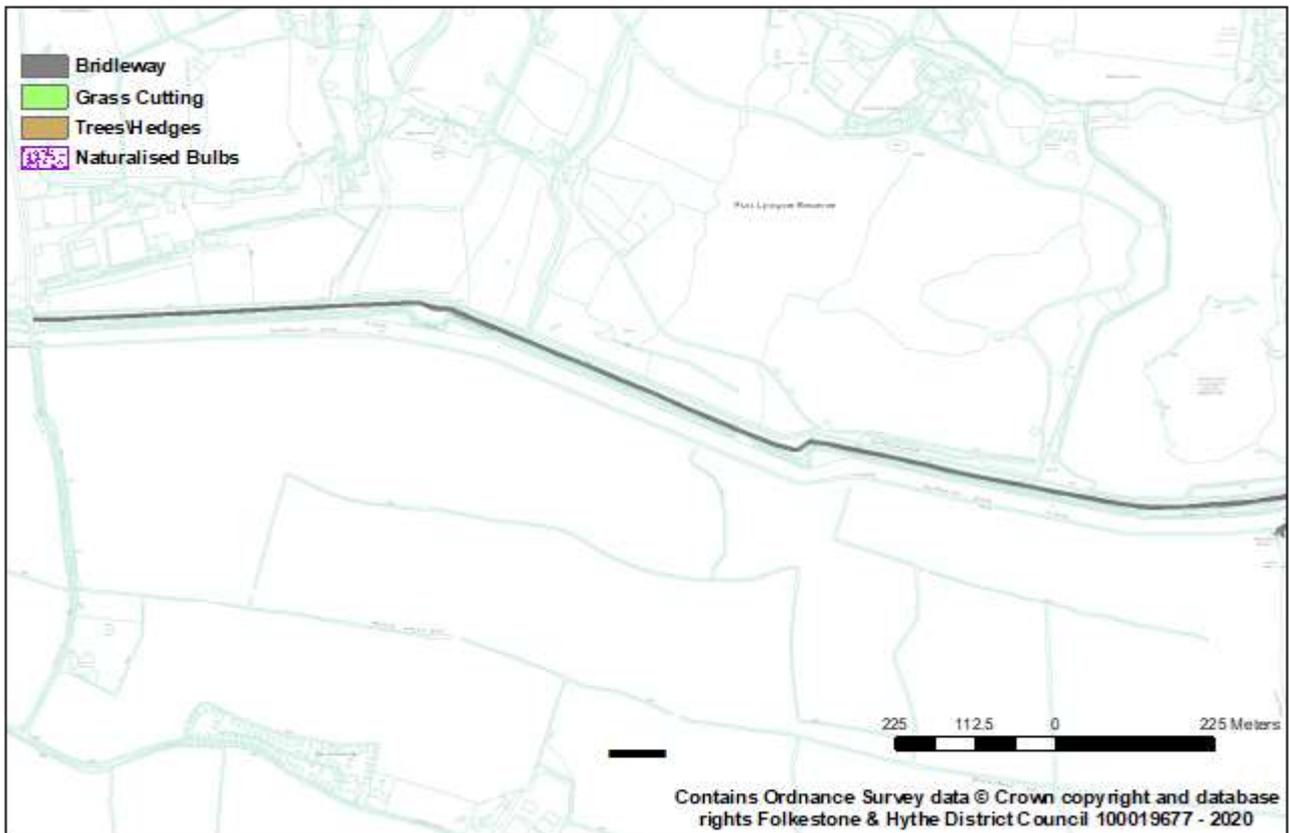
Burmarsh Bridge to West Hythe Bridge



West Hythe Bridge to West Hythe Dam



West Hythe Dam to Aldergate Lane



4.2 Grounds Maintenance Specification Table

Area	Operation	Frequency
Bridleway	Ensure dust surface is in good repair. Maintain short sward 1m strip to each side	Monthly or as required
Grass Cutting	Large amenity areas are close mown for recreation. Ride-on mower or flat deck used, backed up with small mowers / strimmers	Fortnightly or as required from March to October
Hedge Cutting	Reaches 1 & 3 – flail cut to maintain access, encourage A shape for wildlife Reach 2 – maintained as formal hedges	Annually in rural areas, at least twice per year in town section, avoiding bird nesting season in all areas
Naturalised Habitat (All reaches)	Commencing at Seabrook in year 1, flail down highlighted areas, moving on through to reach 3 in the third year to maintain a mosaic of habitats with age diversity. Avoid any newly planted whips. Clear out old wood and stack on banks.	Cyclical 3 year maintenance operation
Herbaceous Border (Reach 2)	Hand weeding, edging, dead heading and pruning to maintain plant health. Cutting back old growth and removing debris in winter	Fortnightly from May to October or as required
Naturalised Bulbs (All reaches)	Daffodils, crocus, bluebells and snowdrops allowed to naturalise. Grass cutting and strimming regimes are adjusted to allow die back and bulb regeneration.	Allow 6 - 8 weeks after flowering before maintenance operations resume
Annual Bedding (Reach 2)	War memorial and adjacent to Holman's Field, remove existing planting, rotovate soil and re-plant as per plans provided. Weeding throughout season	Summer and winter bedding cycles. Weeding at least fortnightly
Rose Beds (Reach 2)	Pruning to ensure good plant health and maintain safe access. Weeding as required throughout the year	Annual or as required in March or October
Wildflower Meadows	Areas planted for insects using a mix of pollinator friendly plants, wildflowers and bulbs	Mow off after seeding, collect arisings where possible
Shrub Border (Reach 2)	Pruning to ensure good plant health and maintain safe access. Gapping up as required. Weeding as required throughout the year	Annual or as required in October
Trees (All reaches)	Ensure good plant health and layer vegetation under the canopy. Replace dead, diseased or dying specimens with suitable species. Leave dead wood on site where practical to create wildlife habitats.	As and when required. Tree survey carried out biennially by Arboricultural Senior Specialist

Green Waste	Green waste which can not be left on site as wildlife refuge is to be transported to Hawkinge Depot, the council's in-house composting site. Compost is used on council flower beds.	Weekly or as required
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All gardeners are required to:-

- Use knapsack sprayer if required
- Maintain chemical store and complete monthly inventory
- Inspect vehicles and trailer daily, complete inspection sheet and arrange any repairs with the F&HDC Mechanics
- Ensure all works on site are carried out safely
- Ensure all tools are safe and properly maintained
- Ensure graffiti is removed immediately or within 24 hours or report to Area Officer for large or persistent instances
- Report all fly-tipping as appropriate

Cleansing Contractor

- Empty all litter bins as identified in contract, daily in summer, weekly in winter and replace sacks
- Litter pick reach 2, including paths and steps
- Sweep paths and steps as necessary including beneath benches
- Remove broken glass as soon as practicable
- Use mechanical sweeper to remove fallen leaves (autumn)
- Collect rubbish sacks from agreed locations and frequencies
- Remove all instances of fly tipping

Engineering and Estates team

- Maintain Twiss Depot, alarms, buildings and surfaces
- Maintain boat hire hut at Ladies Walk Bridge
- Effect any repairs reported by the RMC team
- Play area equipment checks, repairs and maintenance
- Survey all foot bridges and organise repairs when necessary and painting every five years
- Survey canal banks with the manager and organise re-instatement work annually or as required. Arrange and oversee repairs to canal sides as required
- Liaise with Historic England regarding Scheduled Ancient Monument Standing Consents
- Arrange leases with relevant concessions / clubs (Seapoint Canoe Centre, Rowing boat contract, Hythe Venetian Fete Society, Cinque Ports Angling Society, Ice Cream vendor)

External Partners

- Kent County Council Public Rights of Way department maintain the bridleway surface, trees and vegetation beyond the 1m strip either side of the bridleway from West Hythe Dam to Aldergate Lane. They are sometimes able to provide finance to assist in maintaining the Public Rights of Way along the canal.
- The Environment Agency maintain the water levels, sluices, outfalls, silt traps and monitor any pollution incidents. They are responsible for keeping the waterway free from silt and ensuring the canal is effective in it's role as a flood defence. The Romney Marsh is drained by way of ditches, cuts and dykes all of which drain into the RMC. It is therefore imperative

that the water level in the canal is maintained at an appropriate level so following rain events, excess water can be drained into the canal to prevent flooding on the wider area.

- Kent Highways maintain all road bridges which cross the canal (Twiss Road, Stade Street, Portland Road, Scanlons Road and West Hythe Road).
- Cinque Ports Angling Society manage the fishing rights on the canal, assisting anglers, collecting the appropriate fee and enforcing the rules.
- Historic England enforce the Scheduled Ancient Monument status of the canal ensuring that the historic importance of the site is not adversely effected by its use by the public and that operations undertaken by the council are not damaging the protected areas.

4.3 Water management

The weed barge is a dual propelled boat, with interchangeable attachments on the front for different operations. These include: forks – raking and scooping, basket – collecting vegetation and litter, finger bar cutter – cutting reeds and bank vegetation and occasionally lilies.

The barge is kept at Twiss depot and a concrete ramp allows it to be winched in and out of the water. To take the boat as far as West Hythe can take 45 minutes and therefore tasks are programmed for each location for the whole day.

The weed barge is pivotal in keeping the waterway open and healthy for wildlife, fisherman and pleasure boaters. Vegetation is cleared from the central channel and in front of the fishing swims. This vegetation is placed on the north bank to provide suitable refuges for wildfowl and invertebrates. By leaving the cut vegetation on the canal bank, aquatic wildlife is able to return to the water and remain safe from predators. The cut vegetation composts down over time.

Water management	Frequency	Management
Reed bed (swamp plants i.e. Common reed and Bulrush)	Winter months only	Finger bar cutter used. Forks scoop the cut reeds and place on the far bank.
Lilies (floating leaved plants i.e. Yellow fringed water lily and Duck weed)	May to October Cutting monthly	4x 6ft metal blades trailing from the back of the weed barge. Forks scoop up the vegetation and place on the side of the bank.
Weeds (totally submerged rooted plants i.e. Water-crowfoot)	May to October Cutting monthly	4x 6ft metal blades trailing from the back of the weed barge. Basket scoops up vegetation. This allows aquatic life to escape back to the water.
Dredging	Annual inspections to monitor silt accumulation by the	Dredging should be restricted to the middle section of the canal in

	Environment Agency Indications from the EA suggest that the RMC will require dredging within the next 10 years	areas with less vegetation and avoiding the scarce plants present in the margins as an essential part of the LWS.
Invasive species Floating Pennywort/Azolla	Control and management	Scoop out mats using weed barge, leave on site but well clear of waterway. Clean off basket, forks and boat to prevent spread. Biological control.

Management regimes of the marginal flora, include the maintenance of established reed-beds and the creation of new ones to encourage wider distribution in reaches 1 and 3.

Invasive non-native species

Invasive aquatic weeds such as Floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) and *Azolla filiculoides* are managed under the Environment Agency guidelines. The presence of these pose new and unprecedented challenges; their eradication or long-term management.

The Royal Military Canal is widely known for its rich biodiversity which can be threatened by non-native invasive species.

Floating pennywort FPW (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*)

FPW is a one of the most invasive aquatic weeds in the UK, having spread rapidly from garden ponds into the waterways.

FPW forms dense mats of rounded leaves which float across the water's surface, depleting oxygen levels and light for photosynthesis, threatening fish and invertebrates, and outcompeting our native water plants.

In addition to its negative environmental impacts, the economic costs of this species can be high. Losses in tourism revenue are caused through disrupted fishing, river navigation and water sports. The weed also blocks pipes and pumps which damages waterworks and can lead to flooding. Across Great Britain and Europe, these costs are estimated to exceed £25 million per year. It has been banned from sale since 2014. It is also illegal to cause floating pennywort to grow in the wild.

FHDC grounds maintenance have so far managed to limit the weed growth, however it needs to be understood that without additional control methods, the plant could spread beyond control.

In spring 2023, FHDC, in conjunction with the Environment Agency, engaged with the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) to trial a new biological control technique.

CABI is a UK based international, intergovernmental, not-for-profit organisation. CABI specialise in the control of invasive species and identified the weevil, *Listronotus elongatus*, as a FPW predator.

DEFRA funded research began in 2011 and after a decade of safety testing and research, a South American weevil was approved for release in England to act as a natural pest control.

A comprehensive scientific dossier (Pest Risk Assessment) was submitted to the UK regulators and underwent peer review, public and stakeholder consultation. The weevil was subsequently given ministerial approval for release in 2021 and a coordinated release strategy began during the summer of 2022 to trial the weevil at selected sites in England to try to establish populations.

CABI have released on 13 sites since the approval and have 7 more sites planned for 2023. One being the Royal Military Canal. This was implemented in August 2023 when a population of young weevils was released in a selected area in West Hythe.

First monitoring visit took place in October 2023 when CABI representatives were able to find evidence of the weevils (adult feeding on the leaves, larval mining in the petioles/stolons of the plant, plus larvae and eggs). There was clear damage caused by larval mining in the release area. Adult feeding wasn't extensive or present in the surrounding areas, suggesting that the next wave of new adults are yet to emerged.

CABI returned in spring/early summer 2024 for a full assessment of overwintering survival; The first monitoring visit showed evidence of adults feeding on the leaves and larval mining in the stems of the plant. This was to be seen as a success, due to the late release and the cooling temperatures which slow the weevil until an overwintering hibernation.

The second visit in July 2024, showed extensive damage to the FPW, with the plants leaves reduced in size, indicating that the plant is under stress. This was over a section of the canal that was over 60m in length. Weevils have been found to spread around 50m – 100m in a year given suitable conditions making this a successful trial.

The third release of weevils at RMC took place on the 11th July 2024 this included site-wide monitoring. Subsequent monitoring took place on the 24th September 2024 and then on 18th June 2025 to assess the floating pennywort and weevil status at the site.

In summary:

- Following a third release of weevils, strong growth in the population was seen in 2024. The infestation progressed from localised to widespread across the floating pennywort mat.
- Weevil establishment at this site after a second year of releases was very positive, with two years of successful overwintering achieved.
- The impact of the weevil population was noticeable, with a marked reduction in floating pennywort cover leading to very sparse patches interspersed with native vegetation (June 2025).
- No further funding has yet been secured for monitoring the weevil population on the Royal Military Canal. It is hoped that funding can be sought to ensure that the success and impact of this trial is captured in future years.
-

The Environment Agency have been impressed with the results and have offered their continuous support towards the control and management of aquatic invasive species.

Azolla filiculoides

Azolla is one of the UK's most invasive water plants.

Native to the Americas, *Azolla filiculoides* was introduced to the UK in the 19th century and became naturalized, going on to become widespread on slow moving and stationary water bodies, frequently infesting valuable or threatened habitats. *Azolla* can have a variety of impacts: it can reduce light and oxygen reaching submerged flora and fauna; outcompete native aquatic plants; alter pH and other physiochemical variables; block drainage systems; inhibit leisure activities such as angling and boating; and pose a risk to livestock and people when mistaken for solid land.

Azolla can propagate itself vegetatively, rapidly doubling its population size in suitable conditions. Manual or mechanical control is typically expensive and leads to short-term clearance and must be repeated as the *Azolla* recovers. Chemical control faces the same challenges with additional risks to the aquatic habitat. *Azolla filiculoides* was one of five aquatic weeds banned from sale in the UK in 2014.

The first sighting of *Azolla* plants in the canal was identified in April 2021 in the West Hythe area. With the stretch between Scanlon's Bridge and West Hythe bridge being completely colonised by early May. The GM spent almost two months of continuous mechanical treatment (lifting plant masses out of the water, disrupting the growth etc) with excellent results. Two floating barriers were installed downstream to prevent further spread. Currently, there are no signs of the plant.



Azolla infestation, May 2021

Environment Agency Training Day

Following the outbreak of floating pennywort in the canal, the EA gave a briefing day to all staff who work on the canal and near other watercourses, ponds and streams. The session focussed on prevention of spread, management of invasive species and more general information about biodiversity and how to manage waterways in terms of pollution control. Staff responded well and the session increased their understanding of aquatic environments learning about how their work can have positive impacts on the wildlife supported by the habitats that they maintain.



4.4 Interpretation and Signage

Numerous signs, panels and interpretative features are found along the canal providing visitors with directions and information and controlling access. They are checked at least once per month by canal staff for damage. Any graffiti is cleaned off using cloths and / or graffiti wipes. Council policy states that offensive graffiti must be removed within 24 hours. Painted surfaces are renewed at least every 4 years and any damage or major issues are reported to the Engineering and Buildings team.





4.5 Seabrook Play Area

The play area at Seabrook Car Park, installed some 20 years ago, has a multi-play unit designed as a canal bridge to complement the theme of the RMC. There are also swings, a toddler rocker and picnic tables. A trim trail and wooden net climber were added in 2015 to increase play value. The play area is suitable for children aged between five and nine years old. A car park is provided and public toilets can be located opposite The Fountain Pub on the A259 in Seabrook, a 10 minute walk.

The Engineering and Buildings team play a pivotal role in ensuring the equipment and in particular the play area is safe for use. It is essential that all aspects are checked and found to be safe on a very regular basis. The programme of inspection is as follows

Weekly – RoSPA trained staff carry out a visual inspection. These inspections assess the safety of the equipment and form the basis of maintenance schedules.

Quarterly – RoSPA trained staff carry out an operational inspection. These inspections are more meticulous, inspecting bearings and other hidden elements, records are provided using a risk based approach.

Annual – Zurich Insurance inspection

It has been acknowledged that the play area and its equipment are in need of upgrading. The new design will create better, more accessible facility. The project, funded internally, will include consultation with nearby primary, residents and other users and should be completed in 2027.



4.6 2026 – 2030 Management Action Plan							
Action	Timescale					Comments	Objectives Delivered
Maintenance Plan	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030		
Decorate sound dish and all interpretation plinths	X			X		Ongoing maintenance, Completed March 2024	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Footpath and bridleway re-surfacing (rolling programme)	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing maintenance	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Twiss Depot Buildings / Boat hire hut		X	X	X	X	Improvements to buildings, addition of extra storage	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Dredging the watercourse						EA project to remove silt from the canal within the next 10 years. Capital Bid submitted and a decision is expected 2025. This has now been delayed due to current financial constraints	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Dredging Seabrook Stream silt trap	X				X	Silt traps capture silt before entering the canal which helps to keep the water course clear (EA Project). Now moved to 2026/ 2027	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities

Dredging Twiss Road silt trap			X	X	X	Silt traps capture silt before entering the canal which helps to keep the water course clear (EA Project). Now moved to 2026	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Planting of native bulbs and herb strip in Holman's Field	X	X	X	X	X	Working with BCT and Historic England	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Regenerate, strip and plant herbaceous border in the town to increase biodiversity, reach 2	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing maintenance working with Hythe Civic Society	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Replacement of large diamond wooden railing and addition of parking spaces in West Hythe car park	X					Buildings and Engineering Completed 2021	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Health and Safety	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Risk assessment, COSHH, safety data sheets - monitor and update	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing good practise	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Staff Health Surveillance including HAVS	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing good practice Specialist HAVS ware purchased to monitor daily exposure	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management

Follow industry trend on battery powered or low vibration equipment	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Remote controlled bank mower				X		Completed	Safe working environment
Weedbarge replacement			X			Apply to CLT for capital budget, approved and purchased	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Additional playground wood chippings		X		X		Ongoing maintenance	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Replace bank of batteries to Electric Boat				X		Ongoing maintenance	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Update staff training on pest control (rodent and wasp)		X			X	Ongoing training requirement	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Update staff training on use of tractors (Lantra)				X	X	Ongoing training requirement	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Facilities	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Monitor and assess all picnic furniture	X	X	X	X	X	Replace as required	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal

							Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Replace landing platforms at Scanlon's bridge and West Hythe Dam				X		Replace as required	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal
Upgrade parking for users with mobility issues West Hye				X		Resurface as required	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal
5 year licence with Rowing boat concessionaire due				X		Engineering and Buildings	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Bridge Painting – (footbridges only) 1 per year	X	X	X	X	X	To include buttress survey and subsequent re-pointing	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Play area at Seabrook		X				Play area refurbishment	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities

Conservation and Heritage	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Investigate opportunities to return to traditional methods of management such as scythe cutting grass	X	X	X	X	X	Working with volunteers following the implementation of the Volunteer Charter	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Engage staff / volunteers in training on biodiversity and wildlife monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	Engage Kent Wildlife Trust and other charities / local volunteer organisations to gain skills / experience	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Increase populations of pollinators	X	X	X	X	X	Work in partnership with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, increase volumes of fauna beneficial for pollinators	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Create log piles for dead wood and pruned timber in reaches 1 and 3	X	X	X	X	X	The ability to leave dead wood and felled timber on site reduces vehicle movements and creates habitats for decomposers	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Investigate potential for on-site compost facility	X	X	X	X	X	Ensure HE consent is given.	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management

Monitor and control any non-native invasive weeds	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing treatment for Floating Pennywort and Giant Hogweed	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Royal Military Canal Biodiversity survey	X		X		X	Ecological Survey to take place every two years	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Environmental Sustainability	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Continue in-house composting	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing good practice	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management
Continue the installation of recycled plastic street furniture	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing maintenance. Ensure all new street furniture is consistent with current provision.	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Investigate replacement of fishing swims constructed using recycled plastic in Reach 3		X	X	X	X	As budget allows. Grant received in 2024. Completion date pending consent from Historic England. Possibility of using fishing club members to install	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities

Marketing	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Monitor notice boards, signs and posts for repairs	X	X	X	X	X	Investigate use of magnetic boards rather than cork boards. Replace timber notice boards with recycled plastic models as required	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Increase use of social media to advertise events / wildlife sightings / volunteer opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	Communications team	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Community Involvement	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Comments	Objectives Delivered
Hythe Environmental Community Group	X	X	X	X	X	Monthly litter picks	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Fishing competitions (arranged by Cinque Port Angling Society)	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities

Assist with events (Venetian Fete, Hythe Festival, Historic Walking Tours etc) as required	X		X		X	Ongoing support to volunteer groups	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Assist the Hythe Civic volunteer group events and activities	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing support to volunteer groups	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art Maintain heritage value while providing modern facilities
Continue to support volunteers undertaking wildlife surveys and collate data		X		X	X	Hythe Environmental Community Group	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art
Litter picks co-ordinated by Seapoint Canoe Centre	X	X	X	X	X	Ongoing	Provide high quality, attractive recreational spaces with inclusive appeal Embed sustainability and ecological practices into management Encourage community involvement through events, volunteering and art

5 Health and Safety

5.1 Introduction

Folkestone & Hythe District Council is required by law to state its policy for managing health, safety and welfare. Good health and safety at work is a task shared by Members, Corporate Leadership Team, employees and contractors alike. All employees are required, as a condition of their service, to comply with F&HDC policies and procedures.

It is essential that the relevant risk assessments (RA's) and Safe Systems of Work (SSW's) are read and understood by every employee. These are reviewed annually or when necessary to take account of any new circumstances that might affect its validity.

The GM team have a suite of task specific RA's that will, where necessary, be supported by service and corporate policy statements and/or codes of practice set out in the SSW or other specific requirements relating to current Health and Safety at Work legislation. Where there is a reliance on SSW, in house training will be provided.

All managers have undertaken a 4 day H&S Managing Safely course provided by IOSH. This equips managers with the ability to assess risk in their own individual areas for tasks which their staff undertake. All seasonal employees are provided with a day-long H&S briefing where all the pertinent RA's and SSW are read through. All employees are encouraged to contribute to the documents, ensuring that these dynamic documents remain relevant and practical.

RA's are held electronically and hard copies are held at each depot. Some tasks particularly those relating to chemical use and tree works require onsite RA's, all staff are trained to complete these forms. All these documents are available to view on request at the Civic Centre.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome monitoring is undertaken alongside annual health monitoring (hearing and vision tests, whole body vibration testing, health screening questionnaire) for all staff. GM staff use HAVS monitors that digitally measure their daily exposure. Data is collected daily and notifications sent to individual managers for assessment. Daily vibration exposure log books are available should there be technical issues with the HAVS ware. These monitors are dynamic in their application and have been recently used to maintain social distancing of staff, ensuring smooth service provision through the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.2 Security

Facilities are in place to ensure the RMC and its visitors are safe and secure. Lamp columns provide lighting along the canal through the town section, maintained by the Engineering and Buildings team. There are no lights in reaches 1 or 3 as any light pollution would have an adverse effect on nocturnal wildlife e.g. bats, owls and badgers.

In addition to Police response and patrols, Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) patrol the canal during the day and into the late evening to discourage anti-social behaviour and disperse any individuals or groups who may be abusing the equipment or facilities. They are a friendly and approachable presence who can help the public with any problems or queries regarding local issues. They are uniformed and the RMC staff have their mobile telephone numbers should they need them.

F&HDC employs Environmental Enforcement Officers to investigate and enforce environmental incidents and crimes. They are able to deal with dog fouling, fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and a wide range of other community issues. They patrol the park regularly at times when dog fouling is

likely to occur (e.g. early mornings) which has proven very effective in educating park users and reducing incidences. The EEOs can issue Public space protection orders when they feel it is necessary.

All EEOs are trained to handle stray dogs.

Area Officers are also employed to provide a point of contact for residents and visitors. They are allocated specific areas within the district and build up extensive knowledge of their own particular patch. They organise and lead work parties, remove graffiti, recruit volunteers and unite the local community through effective liaison and conflict resolution.

The fishing bailiff regularly patrols the canal, mostly on the south path. He monitors fishing methods used, fishing licences but can also sell day tickets. The bailiff receives the appropriate fee, whilst talking to the locals and where necessary enforcing F&HDC by-laws. This can include cyclists on the incorrect path, unauthorised camping, parking and motor vehicles on the canal.

The manager works closely with all these officers to ensure the canal is being used appropriately. Numerous information posts have been installed with attached signage in key locations, e.g. picnic sites. These pictorial signs include no camping, fires, swimming or dog fouling.

5.3 Equipment and facilities

All of the staff have a real sense of pride and ownership in the canal and are keen for it to be maintained to the highest standard. All staff are provided with uniforms so they are easily identified by visitors. The gardeners wear practical clothing, hi-vis vests or jackets with the F&HDC logo on the back. Should a defect prove to be beyond the capability of the onsite staff the Engineers and Buildings team are allocated the job. A team of six handymen with a wide skills base are able to attend site and repair or replace most street furniture and equipment. A range of electrical and mechanical engineering contractors are also available.

The gardeners maintain the street furniture, cleaning off bird droppings and replacing any damaged equipment. All staff undertake a First Aid at Work course and each depot and vehicle has a well stocked first aid kit.

5.4 Chemical use

Chemical use is kept to a minimum at the canal although it is unavoidable in some circumstances. Designated gardeners are trained in pesticide storage and spraying (City and Guilds NPTC PA1 and PA6). Although this is a qualification for life, staff undergo refresher training every 5 years. Before any spraying operation the relevant paper work is completed and held on file for future reference. The only chemical used on the canal is the herbicide Glyphosate, mainly for invasive weeds such as Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*). The council has consent from the EA to spray near the water course. Occasionally the path edges and steps will be sprayed in reach 2.

The Horticultural Supervisor monitors all chemical use and keeps records of all spraying operations and chemicals kept at depots. Safety data and COSHH sheets are kept for each chemical and the Horticultural Supervisor ensures chemicals are not kept beyond their using up period. Twiss Depot has chemical and fuel stores clearly marked with relevant safety warning signs at. All documents relating to chemical and fuel use are available to view on request at the Civic Centre.

5.5 Vehicles and machinery

The canal fleet consists of specialist vehicles i.e. weed barge, a pontoon, 2x Kawasaki Mules, John Deere tractor with attachments (flail, finger bar cutter), 1x 4x4 Ford ranger and Kubota ride

on rotary mower. Each morning before starting the vehicle the driver completes the daily vehicle checks. This system ensures that the vehicles remain in good condition and any faults can be rectified by the F&HDC mechanics. All machinery is serviced annually. The vehicle fleet is complimented by a range of smaller mowers, strimmers and hedge cutters. The triple was replaced in 2019 for more efficient ride-on rotary mower.

Summer 2024 saw the purchase of Ferris FRC7 hybrid remote controlled bank mower. This was partially funded by capital scheme and partially funded by the pesticide motion/ battery powered equipment funds. Its benefits are increased operators safety, zero exposure to hand and arm vibrations, lower carbon footprint, safer access to and safer maintenance of banks and slopes.



Smaller machinery and mowers are replaced accordingly as detailed in the 10 year vehicle and equipment capital plan.

Small electric tools and equipment are subject to Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) every 12 months.

5.6 Personal Protective Equipment and Signage

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is issued to all staff to be worn at all times when appropriate. The uniform has been developed through discussions with the staff, managers and Health and Safety Officer. The basic kit consists of:

- Steel toe capped and mid soled boots
- Brush cutter trousers with high-viz strips
- Polo shirt with F&HDC logo
- Body warmer with embroidered F&HDC logo
- Sweater with F&HDC logo
- High-viz coat with F&HDC logo
- Waterproof jacket and trousers
- Baseball cap with F&HDC logo
- Sun protection cream
- Gloves – different types are available depending on personal preference or task in hand
- Forestry helmets with ear and face protection
- Chemical spray suit including wellington boots, chemical resistant gloves and face shield
- Leptospirosis awareness card.

In addition to this the arborists must wear higher grade PPE to protect them from chainsaw injury. When working near ponds and water courses, staff may require waders, floatation suits, life jackets and water proof gloves.

All vehicles and depots are equipped with a fully stocked first aid kit. These are checked annually or when used to ensure all salient items are included and that they are not past the best before date. Lone working is covered by a policy and where this is unavoidable staff are made aware of emergency procedures, i.e. write on the white board at Twiss depot of their location and check in with the manager or another team member at regular intervals.

Grass and hedge cutting signs are used on site to warn the public of maintenance operations occurring. The staff are encouraged to use common sense when carrying out operations e.g. weed barge operations would cease during fishing competitions or canoe club activities. Maintenance and major works to play equipment is programmed to take place outside school holidays where ever possible.

In the case of injury or damage to a visitor or their property, staff fill in the relevant paperwork and hand the visitor a letter from the Insurance Officer detailing how claims are dealt with and providing contact details.

6 Facilities

6.1 Boat hire

For over 100 years the Royal Military Canal has provided pleasure boating hire from the centre of Hythe in Reach 2, near Ladies Walk Bridge. The boating concession is provided by a local businessman on a five year contract with F&HDC, administered by the Engineering and Buildings team.

20 rowing boats are available for hire from Easter weekend to October, 10am until dusk, weather permitting. The boats were replaced in 2020 and have a number on the side for clear identification. Life jackets are provided and are mandatory for all children with adults supplied on request.

Health and safety signs are displayed outside the hut for public information. Life buoys are positioned at each end of the landing stage during opening times. Further information and advertising of the boat hire can be found outside the hut, F&HDC website, local magazines, shop windows and leaflets in the local pubs and shops.

The electric passenger boat, *La Tienne* (She's Yours), provides visitors with a regular service through Hythe from the boat hut, Scanlons bridge pier and Waitrose jetty. Up to 10 passengers can enjoy wildlife, historical and sunset cruises ranging from an hour to a couple of hours.



6.2 Canoeing and boating

Permits need to be purchased from the Licensing department before private boating activities can take place on the canal. All vessels must be non-powered and a licence must be granted under Section 94, Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907, for the use of pleasure boats.

Paddle boarding is a popular activity on the canal and is subject to the same controls as other craft used on the waterway.

Any person using their vessel on the canal must first obtain public liability insurance to the sum of £2,000,000. This is to insure against third party risks and all liability in respect of death or injury to passengers and shall indemnify F&HDC from all actions proceedings, cost and damage claim demands. Further details and applications forms can be found on the Council's website and information posters are displayed on the canal's notice boards along the full stretch. Remote control vessels are not permitted.



6.3 Seabrook play area

Seabrook Outfall currently offers a car park and play interpretation feature within a large open area of amenity grass and good views of the sea. Due to the close proximity to the beach, ice-cream kiosk, mobile fast food trailers in the summer, petrol station and residential area, this is a busy and vibrant area. The local primary school is on the northern side of the canal and this proves to be a popular safe walk for parents and children on route to school.

There are interpretation panels around the wooden play feature, shaped as a bridge and fortress over the canal. The play area also features a net climber, trim trail and swings. Play grade bark chip surrounds the equipment as a safety surface. There is clear safety signage on the main entrance.

There are 2 large picnic tables in the near proximity, one of which provides easy access for mobility scooters or wheelchair users. Litter bins provided with the facility to recycle cans.

The proposed Princes Parade development would have seen big changes in the current play area. A new sports complex, car parking, housing and retail outlets would update the area providing excellent new facilities for residents and visitors. The road would have been diverted creating a huge promenade next to the sea with new parkland spreading west, culminating in a new destination play area and park at the western end of the site.

The new Seapoint Canoe Centre would have been sited at the outfall, sunken into the bank with ecologically friendly features such as a living roof, rain water harvesting and modern sustainable aspects inside.

Following election in May 2024 (resulting in a new political leadership), the project has been stopped. However, members of public have been asked to take part in a survey to help steer new Local Plan and the best use of the site.

[Princes Parade Public Engagement Survey](#)

Play Area Strategy 2020-2030

This document sets out a vision for the future of play provision in the district:

Play experiences are fundamental to the health and development of children and young people. Folkestone & Hythe District Council will therefore seek to ensure all residents are able to access a high quality and high value play area. We will work with town and parish councils, together with other providers, to create play spaces which offer challenging and exciting environments for children and young people of all ages and abilities.

To ensure that the strategy is deliverable there are a number of objectives:

- Improve the location, quality, value and accessibility of play provision for all children and young people.
- Effectively utilise planning policy to benefit play provision.
- Raise awareness of play opportunities and the importance of play.
- Maximise funding opportunities for the maintenance and enhancement of play areas.
- Communicate and engage with key partners and stakeholders.
- Ensure appropriate and regular communication and review.

Within this document Seabrook Play Area is recognised with the highest designations:

- Type D: Destination play area

Play spaces which can attract visitors from a wider catchment, usually within larger parks they often have supporting facilities such as car parking, catering and toilets.

- Priority Play Area (PPA)

Objective: Continuing to maintain and seeking to enhance the Priority Play Areas (PPAs) as identified in this Strategy.

- Strategically Important Play Area (SIPA)

Objective: Supporting the provision of a network of Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPAs) to ensure the majority of the district's residents are within a 15 minute walk of a high quality and high value play space, which meets the needs of the community.

The Play Area Strategy (2020 – 2030) is published and available to view online.

6.4 Fishing

All fishing must be from the designated fishing swims maintained by F&HDC canal staff. There are approximately 200 swims, of which five are suitable for wheel chairs with a wide surfaced area and small wooden barrier to prevent wheelchairs rolling into the water.

The Cinque Ports Angling Society (CPAS) hold the fishing rights along the full stretch of the canal. Reach 1 from West Hythe dam to West Hythe bridge is for CPAS members only. Day tickets are available from the local fishing tackle shops in Hythe or purchased on the day from the fishing bailiff. Applications for membership can be made online at www.cinqueportanglingociety.org. The club rules must be followed and are displayed on the notice boards, day tickets and in the membership application pack.

A rod licence is required from the Environment Agency for all open waters and details can be found on their website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

6.5 Public rights of way

The 7 km stretch, north and south side of the canal provides a network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes.

The south path from Seabrook outfall to Twiss Road Bridge is a grass surface and was upgraded from a footpath to bridleway in 2003. The north bridleway is 3m wide and surfaced with type 1 stone base with limestone dust on top.

The footpath and bridleway on the north side follows the full length of the canal, with suitable facilities such as picnic sites, benches and bicycle stands. Signage is positioned at bridges and path entrances, identifying the designated path type for visitors and users.

The footpath from West Hythe dam to Aldergate Lane has been upgraded to a bridleway with partnership working at Kent County Council's, Public Rights of Way department and Port Lympne Wildlife Park. This has resulted in an extension to the existing surfaced bridleway, 2km further west.

Ashford Borough Council have plans to further extend the bridleway and are working with local land owners to achieve this, using the F&HDC stretch as an example of good practise.

Click2Cycle

Bikes can now be hired via an app from a number of stations within the district and returned after use. There are stations near to Seabrook Outfall and at the Light Railway Café, the canal is featured on the website as a suggested cycle trail. The scheme also offers rider discounts in local cafes, bars, restaurants and shops. For further information visit <https://www.click2cycle.com>



6.6 Picnic sites

There are 14 picnic sites. Although portable BBQs are discouraged, a metal plate has been secured onto part of the tabletop to prevent the furniture from fire damage. There are cycle stands at the picnic areas close to the bridle path for security. Solid oak benches have been installed on the south and north side of the canal in reaches 1 and 3.

Large wooden animal sculptures have been installed for children to sit and play on and provide visual pleasure for visitors. These include; grasshopper, frog, butterfly, dragonfly and sheep. These animals are indigenous to the canal and the sheep can be found in the Roughs adjacent. The wooden animal sculptures are part of a visual educational theme along the canal, along with bronze sculptures and interpretation panels.

Geocaching is popular along the canal and the manager is in contact with families who put out their own geocaches so the staff are aware of their locations.



6.7 Near by facilities

The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway Station starts in Hythe near Scanlons Bridge, adjacent to the canal. It is Kent's first miniature railway, opened to the public in July 1927. It is open all year round, with several trains a day heading to the end of the line 13.5 miles away in Dungeness. The station is easily accessible for wheelchair users and specially adapted carriages are available.

The toilets are opposite the car park and a local bus route stops outside the station, just off the A259. Further information can be found on their website, www.rhdr.uk.

Even though the canal does not have toilets on site there are many public blocks situated in reach 2, clearly signed in close vicinity to the canal. Reach 3 on the north side of the canal has toilet facilities adjacent to the A259 road, next to the primary school less than 50m from the canal. All F&HDC toilets provide nappy changing facilities and wide cubicles for easy access.

7 Nature Conservation and Heritage

7.1 Nature conservation

The Lympne Escarpment SSSI boundary runs from West Hythe dam to West Hythe Bridge along the north side of the RMC bridlepath. Much of the canal is designated a Local Wildlife Site and adjacent areas form part of the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

A full ecological appraisal from Seabrook Outfall to Aldergate Lane will be commissioned in 2026 - 2030. The route will be surveyed over spring, summer and autumn alternating both sides of the canal to obtain representative coverage of the different habitats along the 7km length.

The section will be described in tabular form with accompanying habitat overview for each section, and a photographic record of general habitats.

Flora and fauna will be recorded throughout (not exhaustive). The extent of species will reflect the time of year. This document will be updated accordingly.

Wildlife surveying by volunteer / community groups

Hythe Ecological Community Group (HECG) have been surveying Reach 3 for bees since 2017. The table below gives a summary of the data they have recorded along with historical records held by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. There is potential to expand this monitoring to Reach 1.

Bee species	Number of records	Years Recorded
<i>Anthophora plumipes</i>	1	2018
<i>Apis mellifera</i>	22	2002, 2017, 2018
<i>Bombus hortorum</i>	15	2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus hypnorum</i>	7	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus lapidarius</i>	28	2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus lucorum s.l.</i>	34	2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>	152	2002, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus pratorum</i>	14	2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus ruderatus</i>	1	2019
<i>Bombus sylvestris</i>	1	2019
<i>Bombus terrestris</i>	89	2002, 2007, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Bombus vestalis</i>	4	2018, 2019, 2020
<i>Colletes hederæ</i>	4	2012, 2014, 2018
<i>Colletes similis</i>	2	1971, 1972
<i>Lasioglossum smeathmanellum</i>	1	1999

HECG began recording vegetation in 2020 in Reach 3 and have provided the following data

Alexander <i>Smyrniololus atrum</i>	Hedge Woundwort <i>Stachys sylvatica</i>
Apple Tree <i>Malus spp</i>	Hogweed <i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Bedstraw <i>Galium spp</i>	Ivy <i>Hedera helix</i>
Birds foot trefoil <i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Ladies smock <i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Black horehound <i>Ballota nigra</i>	Mallow <i>Malva spp</i>
Black mustard <i>Brassica nigra</i>	Meadow vetchling <i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>
Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Mugwort <i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>

Bramble <i>Rubra fruticosus</i>	Nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i>
Bristly ox tongue <i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>	Nipplewort <i>Lapsana communis</i>
Buddleia <i>Buddleija davidii</i>	Old man's beard <i>Clematis vitalba</i>
Burdock <i>Arctium spp</i>	Pale persicaria <i>Persicaria lapathifolia</i>
Butterbur <i>Petasites hybridus</i>	Periwinkle <i>Vinca minor</i>
Buttercup <i>Ranunculus spp</i>	Pineapple mayweed <i>Matricaria discoidea</i>
Cherry plum <i>Prunus spp</i>	Poppy <i>Papaver rhoeas</i>
Comfrey <i>Symphytum officinale</i>	Prickly sow thistle <i>Sonchus asper</i>
Common sorrel <i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Privet <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Common vetch <i>Vicia sativa</i>	Ragwort <i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>
Corn marigold <i>Glebionis segetum</i>	Red clover <i>Trifolium pratense</i>
Cow Parsley <i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Red dead nettle <i>Lamium purpureum</i>
Creeping cinquefoil <i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Ribwort plantain <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
Creeping thistle <i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Rosebay willow herb <i>Chamaenerion angustifolium</i>
Cuckoo Pint <i>Arum maculatum</i>	Scabious <i>Scabiosa spp</i>
Cut leaf cranesbill <i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Sheeps sorrel <i>Rumex acetosella</i>
Cyclamen (miniture) <i>Cyclamen spp</i>	Slender thistle <i>Carduus tenuiflorus</i>
Daisy <i>Bellis perennis</i>	Spanish Bluebell <i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>
Dandelion <i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Spear thistle <i>Cirsium vulgare</i>
Dog Rose <i>Rosa canina</i>	Spotted medick <i>Medicago arabica</i>
Elder flower <i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Stinking Iris <i>Iris foetidissima</i>
European plum <i>Prunus spp</i>	Sweet violet <i>Viola odorata</i>
Field bindweed <i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Water dropwort <i>Oenanthe spp</i>
Great willow herb <i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Weeping willow <i>Salix babylonica</i>
Greater plantain <i>Plantago major</i>	White bryony <i>Bryonia alba</i>
Green alkanet <i>Pentaglottis sempervirens</i>	White campion <i>Silene latifolia</i>
Grey poplar <i>Populus × canescens</i>	White clover <i>Trifolium repens</i>
Grey willow <i>Salix cinerea</i>	White dead nettle <i>Lamium album</i>
Ground Ivy <i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	White willow <i>Salix alba</i>
Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Hedge bindweed <i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Yellow flag iris <i>Iris pseudacorus</i>

Additional data collected by local enthusiasts has been passed on to the council. These records are mainly for birds and moths but include some butterflies. While the whole dataset dates back to the 1950s, some data has been extracted and gives an idea of species found in each reach from 2010 to 2020 and is given at the end of this document.

Aquatic wildlife

The aquatic wildlife habitat is an important food source and the start of the food chain, i.e. algae and invertebrates are found in abundance along the fringes of the bank and in the water. The ongoing sensitive maintenance regime to enhance the marginal vegetation has encouraged scarce plant species and created new reed-beds. Nationally scarce aquatic marginal plants found on the canal include:-

Fringed water lily *Nymphoides peltata*,
Hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*

Tubular water-dropwort *O.fistulosa*
Parsley water-dropwort *O.lachenalii*
Fine-leaved water-dropwort *O.aquatica*
Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsusrana*
Greater water parsnip *Sium latifolium*.

Numerous insects such as dragonflies and damselflies lay their eggs into living or rotting aquatic vegetation and timber which hatch the following spring. Many have an aquatic larval stage, usually developing over two or three years and can be found in abundance stalking prey from beneath plant cover.

Regular weed cutting is carried out during the summer months and vegetation piled on the canal bank to rot down. These piles provide suitable wildlife refuges for wildfowl, reptiles, amphibians, insects and occasionally grey herons *Ardea cinerea* and cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

Wild flowers

Following a sensitive grass cutting regime in reach 1 pyramidal orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* have been seen on the top footpath. This area is mostly grassland, nettles and wildflowers. Working with the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust, areas of the canal have been planted to enrich floristic diversity which in turn provides more opportunities for invertebrates. The shape, size and flowering period of different plants encourages a variety of pollinators.

Equally, following our rewilding programme in Holman's Field, where some of the frequently cut grass had been left to grow, 2025 has seen an increase in pyramidal orchids sightings and a rare sighting of Lizard orchid *Himantoglossum hircinum*. Its petals of the orchid's flowers form the head, legs and long tail of a lizard. They are greenish, with light pink spots and stripes, and smell strongly of goats! Their preferred habitat is chalk grasslands and dunes in the South East.



Anacamptis pyramidalis



Anacamptis pyramidalis & *Galium verum*



Himantoglossum hircinum

Wildflower plugs have been planted with young native whips in reach 1 to provide a natural, wildlife screen from the residential properties adjacent. Additional wildflower plugs suitable for butterflies have been planted around the edges of some picnic sites

Birds foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*
Common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*
Common toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*

Field scabious *Knautia arvensis*
Garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata*
Greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*
White campion *Silene latifolia*
Wild primrose *Primula millefolium*
Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*.
Horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*
Chicory *Cichorium intybus*
Common vetch *Vicia sativa*
Devils bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*
Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
Red valerian *Centrathus ruber*
Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*
Viper's bugloss *Echium vulgare*
Wild teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*

Birds

53 bird species were detected in reach 1 in a bird survey conducted in 1998 (Halcrow Water, 1998). This section held the greatest diversity of bird life, including three red list species: Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and goldcrest *Regulus regulus*.

In addition woodland and scrub management encourage birds by providing food sources and shelter. Native tree species have specifically been chosen to provide berries and flowers, i.e. hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and English oak *Quercus robur*.

Mammals

The canal offers good habitats for mammals and a wide variety are present. Bat, shrew, grey squirrel, fox, stoat, weasel, mole, rabbit and mice are frequently spotted along the canal, mainly in reaches 1 and 3. American Mink are also present. The linear nature of the canal is particularly suited to bats alongside good invertebrate populations.

Reptiles

Three different species of reptile have been identified in reaches 1 and 3. These include; grass snake *Natrix natrix*, slow worm *Anguis fragilis* and common lizard *Lacerta vivipara*.

Amphibians

The common frog *Rana temporaria*, marsh frog *Rana ridibunda* and common toad *Bufo bufo* have all been identified in reaches 1 and 3 along the canal banks in the fishing swims and the vegetation piles cut and left by the weedbarge. The ditches adjacent to the canal also provide a valuable habitat with undisturbed dredged material left on site.

Fish

The canal supports a variety of coarse fish including: bream *Arbramis brama*, carp *Cyprinus carpio*, roach *Rutilus rutilus*, rudd *Scardinius erythrophthal*, perch *Perca flavescens*, eels *Anguilla rostrata* and pike *Esox spp.* CPAS monitor and control predatory fish populations (e.g. eels and pike) where necessary. The introduction of native young fish (fry) helps to keep a healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystem.

Insects

A glow worm *Phosphaenus hemipterus* colony can be found in reach 1. Maintenance regimes accommodate the life-cycle of the glow worm which may take one, two or even three years to

reach maturity. The vegetation is left long and uncut in reach 1, providing an ideal habitat for an abundance of snails. The larvae are ground-dwellers and generally live in log piles and sheltered areas in the car park.

Records obtained from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust show good numbers and diversity of bumble, honey and solitary bees along the RMC. Many of the records were obtained during Bee Walks run by the BCT from 2017 – 2020.

Rare visitors

From time to time the canal receives rare winter migrants such as osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and green heron *Butorides virescens*. The great white egret *Ardea alba* has also been identified at West Hythe. All these visitors have proved to be extremely popular with bird enthusiasts and the media.

7.2 Habitat management

	Existing situation	Wildlife Benefit
Reed beds	Reaches 1 & 3 have a good marginal plant community dominated by reeds and rushes.	Creation of reed beds will provide refugia for waterfowl, fish, amphibians, invertebrates
Log piles	Within areas of woodland, there is a good supply of standing wood and fallen dead wood	Important habitat for woodpeckers, invertebrates, fungi, amphibians, small mammals and reptiles
Grassland	Reach 1, most floristically diverse stretch. Towpaths and embankments have short grass swards dominated by common grasses and flowering plants	The grass is cut once a year in late summer on a rotational basis and cuttings removed where practical. This increases floral diversity, reduces nutrient levels and provides different sward heights
Trees	Reaches 1 & 3 tree avenues. Reach 2, numerous parkland trees	Planting native trees provides further habitats for wildlife, such as birds and insects. This will improve ecological interest in reach 2
Weed / scrub removal	Towpaths and embankments have a meadow grass habitat containing grasses & flowering plants – brambles need to be sensitively controlled	Removal of scrub vegetation on a 3 year rotational cycle will create diversity in age and species. Some areas left to mature where they do not impinge on meadow areas
Deadwood (Standing dead trees)	There are numerous standing dead wood along the length of the canal, in woodland areas. These are monitored closely for risk	Suitable habitat for a great variety of wildlife including woodpeckers, invertebrates, fungi and bats
Invasive species	All reaches are monitored and stands dealt with as they arise mainly through stem injection. Odd occurrence of Himalayan Balsam. Giant Hogweed present on Princes	Eradication of invasive alien plant species will prevent encroachment on native flora and damage to the canal bank

	Parade, management in place	
Formal Planting	Annual bedding and herbaceous borders	Many open flowering plants used to provide a suitable food source for insects

7.3 Tree management

Tree and shrub species found on either side of the towpath are dominated by native species with ornamental specimens complementing the town section. Species include:

Lime *Tilia xvulagaris*
Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*
Sycamore *Acer pseudaplatanus*
English oak *Quercus robur*
Alder *Alnus gluntinosa*
Elder *Sambucus nigra*
Wild cherry *Prunus avium*
Horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*
Hazel *Corylus avellana*
Willow *Salix spp.*
Maidenhair tree *Ginkgo biloba*
Japanese cherry *Prunus serrulata*
Handkerchief tree *Davidia involucrate*
Foxglove tree *Paulownia tomentosa*
London plain *Platanus x hispanica*
Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus pauciflora*
Elm *Ulmus sapporo* 'autumn gold'
English oak *Quercus robur*
Silver birch *Betula pendula*

An under storey creates further habitat opportunities and comprises:

Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*
Bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.*
Regenerating English elm *Ulmus procera*.

The main aim is to manage the woodland areas to sustain and increase its amenity, heritage, recreational and nature conservation value over time.

Key objectives are to:-

- Create a diverse canopy, increase species and age structure
- Maintain and enhance the woodlands biodiversity value
- Improve the woodland amenity
- Monitor all reaches for Ash Dieback
- Remove ivy from trees
- Leave standing deadwood as appropriate
- Create log piles

The Arboricultural Manager carries out a tree survey every other year in all reaches. The council purchased a GPS/GIS software package (MyTrees) to record all tree surveys. The team at MyTrees start with a comprehensive survey of the tree stock across all sites. Each tree is surveyed and recorded in terms of species, spread, age, height, maintenance works etc. This is

then downloaded and added to the GIS database. Where appropriate trees are grouped and this is the case for sections of the RMC and Coastal Park. The initial survey indicated that there are

- 3,875 individual trees
- 365 trees in groups (small dense tree groups in parks)
- 22,201 tree groups (RMC/ Coastal Park predominantly)

MyTrees records tree stock on a centrally held database accessed through a remote server. The software enables management of tree stock by updating and adding records where necessary, allocating work to the in-house team of arborists and used as a tool to demonstrate that the council are actively managing their tree stock. Once works have been completed, the database is updated accordingly. Newly planted trees are simply added to the database.

7.4 Heritage

The canal was primarily built as a military defence and has sharp bends or kinks engineered along the corridor in regular 600 yard intervals. A cannon was placed at each kink and today remnants of some of these raised platforms can be found on the north side by the picnic sites and next to the footbridges at Seabrook.

Other military installations along the canal include the redoubt wall built in 1832 at Seabrook outfall on the north side. Today adjacent to the Military Road in Hythe, stone slabs outline the Hythe staff corps barracks which were originally built back in 1833.

Interpretation panels can be found on site, detailing the historical information and exact location of these areas. Life size bronze sculptures of the navvies and soldiers are situated with an interpretive panel at Ladies Walk Bridge and Prospect Road.

Historic Lanterns at Stade Street Bridge

These four ornamental lanterns were in need of replacement and upgrading to modern, efficient LED lights. The stands were corroding and a project involving F&HDC, Kent County Council and local contractors has seen them completely restored.



8 Sustainability

Folkestone & Hythe District Council declared a climate emergency along with many other councils in 2019 and a budget of £10m has been set aside for initiatives which will help the council hit its net-zero carbon emissions target by 2030.

A low carbon and sustainability specialist has been appointed to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group which is in the process of producing a Carbon Action Plan.

In the short term the council has made the following moves towards the 2030 goal:

- Planting 900 trees across the district in 2019/20 including small, native and semi-mature trees
- Installing a network of electric vehicle charging points across the district, including charging points in the council's own Civic Centre car park
- Planting wildflower areas and managing land to promote biodiversity
- Reducing pesticide applications
- Purchasing battery operated grounds maintenance equipment where suitable to replace petrol powered equipment

Managing the RMC in a sustainable manner is accepted as essential. In the wider Council it is common place to consider sustainability in all functions.

Many daily activities can be reduced or made “greener” such as turning lights and other electrical items off and reducing the amount of paper used in the office.

Office and washroom lighting is motion activated and all toilet facilities are fitted with low flush, touch free systems.

8.1 Biodiversity

The Royal Military Canal has been managed to increase the species count for the last 15 years. An ecological survey will be carried out in 2027 to show the results of this management programme. The GM teams have been closely working with the Bumble Bee, Butterfly and Moths Trusts and spent many volunteering hours planting moth, butterfly and bumble bee friendly habitat.

8.2 Green Waste and Composting

- 95% of in - house produced green waste is processed (mulched and composted) in F&HDC Hawkinge depot.
- In place since 2010, this reduces the need to buy compost or mulch from external companies, reducing transport and waste costs.
- It reduces the need to water newly planted shrubs or bushes by providing a protective barrier.

- The use of mulch reduces the use of pesticides used to stop weeds competing with the new plants.
- Localised composting units have been installed in key areas such as Ladies Walk, Kingsnorth Gardens and the Coastal Park. This reduces the need to move the green waste to Hawkinge to be composted.

8.3 Peat

- The GM department never use raw peat for their own planting schemes or soil replenishment. When purchasing potted plants and other nursery, nurseries are asked to supply a certificate stating peat sustainability.
- Seasonal bedding and floral displays (baskets, troughs) are now 100% peat free.
- Tree stock purchased from our preferred supplier has been peat free since autumn 2012.
- Aim to be 100% peat free by 2030.

8.4 Waste management

- The main parks are popular spots for family picnics and gatherings.
- Visitors are encouraged to either take their litter home or to use the tin & plastic recycling points and general waste points.

8.5 Tree Stock

- F&HDC has 3,875 individual trees found within its parks and open spaces.
- There are a further 22,201 trees contained within groups and woodlands such as those on the Leas Escarpment and the Royal Military Canal.
- Last year GM planted in excess of 50 new trees.
- In order for tree planting to be more successful F&HDC will be planting between thirty to forty trees per year so that all of them receive appropriate aftercare providing net gain over the next ten years.

8.6 Grass Cutting

- GM maintains open spaces in-line with their use and to ensure the character of the area. The total cuts per year can be dependent on many factors.
- Areas such as the Leas and Parks can be cut every two weeks, wild areas on the canal may be just twice per year.
- GM managers have been working on identifying areas where cutting regimes can be reduced to help increase biodiversity and reduce all environmental impacts.

8.7 Furniture and Equipment

GM has invested in electric equipment where appropriate including;

- 5 long reach hedge cutter
- 7 hedge cutters
- 4 drills
- 4 chainsaws
- 2 pole saws

The capital investment plan (2026-2036) will ensure environmentally friendly options are adequately investigated.

Hand tools with replacement parts such as blades are purchased where available rather than having to buy complete new items.

Any new equipment or furniture purchased must be sustainably sourced or use recycled materials and add to the initiatives detailed above as part of the council's ongoing commitment to protecting the environment and achieving net-zero-carbon emissions by 2030.

The RMC is a rural site and uses mainly recycled plastic or wooden furniture and play equipment to reduce the impact of these features on the natural feel of the site. Replacement furniture in the future will be sustainably sourced i.e. it will be made from recycled or sustainable materials, as locally as possible.

Replacement play equipment is purchased through suppliers who use sustainably sourced timber.

Arc Creative Design has been used for one off and bespoke items due to their local premises, quality products, environmental ethos and excellent working relationship, built up over a number of years.

Traditional Buildings Ltd are a small local building conservation group who use traditional methods and materials on new and old buildings and furniture.

The canal's rustic oak notice boards and benches have been built with British hardwood.

Woodscape timber products have been used in picnic sites since the lottery project started in 2004. Woodscape Ltd is committed to protecting the environment through the implementation and maintenance of its Timber Purchasing and Processing policy, which can be found on their website.

There are many litter bins and benches which are made from recycled plastic.

8.8 Chemical Use

The GM department use minimal volumes of pesticides and only where absolutely necessary.

Designated staff are trained in pesticide storage and spraying (City and Guilds NPTC PA1 and PA6). Although this is a qualification for life, staff undergo refresher training every 5 years. Before any spraying operation the relevant paper work is completed and held on file for future reference.

- Control of blanket weed in small ponds, however natural treatment methods have been tested and are preferred.
- Trees - Eco plugs are applied to tree stumps to inhibit regrowth where stumps are in locations where they cannot be removed through grinding.
- Wasps/Rats - Pests are treated with pesticides where public safety is impeded, there are currently no cost effective alternatives.
- Use of glyphosate is minimal within Grounds Maintenance, with an average of just 14L (diluted) being used annually across the service in the last 3 years (compared to 55L 5 years prior).
- The council does not use any chemical treatments (herbicide or pesticide) in children's play areas.

An exercise to assess current chemical use has shown that usage and staffing cost is low with most areas receiving 2 visits per year and an average of 14L (diluted) of glyphosate used per year. The council has agreed a motion to phase out the use of herbicide and pesticides where possible. Trials into alternative methods such as hot foam, water or burner treatments and mechanical removal methods are scheduled to take place during the timeframe of this management plan on council land. Once this trial has been conducted and evaluated, where new methods of weed

control are found to be effective and financially viable they will be adopted and implemented into this management plan and the wider management of the council's estate. It is understood that alternative methods for weed removal and treatment are being developed and officers will continue to monitor any significant developments.

The Horticultural Supervisor monitors all chemical use and keeps records of all spraying operations and chemicals kept at depots. Safety data and COSHH sheets are kept for each chemical and the Technician ensures chemicals are not kept beyond their using up period. Each depot has chemical and fuel stores clearly marked with relevant safety warning signs. There is also a flambank for storing fuel. All documents relating to chemical and fuel use are available to view on request.

8.9 Vehicles and Machinery

Council vehicles are purchased and re-newed on a roughly 8 year basis. A procurement exercise looks in particular at economy, efficiency, localism, specification and servicing plans. New vehicles are purchased on a rolling programme in order to fit with available budget. The canals vehicles form part of this plan with the exception of the weed barge which has a long serviceable lifetime.

A diesel fuel tank is installed at Twiss Road depot and other fuel is purchased from petrol stations in Hythe.

Machinery is kept to a minimum with hand tools being used where ever possible. Using these methods encourages better plant health and also increases experience within the staff. The staff are also less susceptible to problems associated with excessive machinery use such as hand arm vibration syndrome (HAV). Noise pollution is also reduced on the canal creating a quieter environment for visitors.

The composting machine based at the Hawkinge depot adds to the sustainability aspect of the parks management. After composting, green waste generated by the service is re-used on site, eliminating the need to purchase compost. Wood chip from tree felling operations is also used on mixed borders.

8.10 Recycling

Facilities for drinks can recycling have been positioned next to litterbins in The Triangle, West Hythe and Seabrook car park and outside the rowing boat hire hut. A recycling bin has been installed in the town section and receives cans, glass and paper.

Other areas of recycling on the ground include path edgings, reused in other areas along the canal to go around drain covers and kerb edges, to eliminate trip hazards or fill in eroded banks and fishing swims.

8.11 Horticulture

Where public safety is not impeded, dead wood is left on site as wildlife habitat. Large dead trees which do not pose a risk should they fall are also left standing. This works particularly well in reach 1 where a good population of woodpeckers exist. Excess wood is chipped on site and used as mulch in flower beds or taken away for composting.

The service now composts very nearly 100% of all green waste generated. The first batch of composted material was used in autumn 2011 and the savings on green waste skips meant that the composting machine paid for itself within 6 months.

Planting schemes now use drought resistant plants this is both financially and environmentally sound practise. Horticultural methods commonly employed across the service include:

- Deeply cultivate the soil, digging in large quantities of organic matter from Hawkinge compost site, to improve soil structure, soil retention and water availability for plants.
- Planting small specimens so the plant gets used to their growing environment gradually as they develop.
- Thoroughly watering in new plants and keeping them watered for the first season after planting to ensure they establish well.
- Using water from the canal to irrigate plants and trees (EA extraction license in place)
- Use peat free alternative when purchasing plant and tree stock
- Reduce grass cutting frequencies to increase park's biodiversity and to decrease noise and fumes pollution and exposure to hand and arm vibrations

The herbaceous border and small shrub beds in the urban zone are predominantly filled with drought tolerant plants. Some of these plants are listed below:-

Ice plant *Sedum spectabile*
Califonian lilac *Ceanothus burkwoodii*
Lavenda *Lavandula spp.*
Strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*
Honey spurge *Euphorbia mellifera*
Yarrow (ornamental) *Achillea millefolium 'Paprika'*
Perennial lobelia *Lobelia tupa*
Orange ball buddleja *Buddleja globosa*
Blue fescue *Festuca glauca*
Leatherleaf sedge *Carex buchananii*
Jerusalem sage *Phlomis fruticosa*
Verbena *Verbena bonariensis*
Foxtail lily *Eremurus stenophyllus*
Bear's Breeches *Acanthus mollis*
Red Hot Poker *Kniphophia spendida*

9 Marketing

9.1 RMC leaflet

The Royal Military Canal leaflet, which was available in a multitude of venues, has now been replaced by the use of various social media feeds.

9.2 Events

The following events occur on the canal – for further details see section 10.

- Hythe Venetian Fete
- Hythe Festival
- RMCP guided walks and activities (full details available on www.rmcp.co.uk)
- Various fishing events organised by CPAS
- Various canoe events organised by Seapoint Canoe Club
- Hythe Civic Society Guided Walks

The Council now promotes ‘*Apply4*’ eventapp. *Apply4* is a cloud based permitting platform which streamlines the application process. <https://apply4.com>

Customers apply and make payments online at the same time, enabling F&HDC to issue permits as soon as the application has been approved. Messaging and document management tools help stakeholders and the Council to manage queries and communicate with ease.

The systems store contacts of all relevant stakeholders, allowing the Council to notify them at the touch of a button. Residents and other stakeholders tend to support events more when they are consulted in the process.

List of Stakeholders

Emergency Services
Kent County Council
Hythe Town Council
The Environment Agency
Angling Club
Boat Hire
Historic England

9.3 Interpretation and signage

There are eight notice boards located at strategic points, numerous interpretation panels alongside the bronze statues and sound dishes. Some of the panels include French translation and cover natural history and heritage of the canal.

In addition to this, two large entrance signs mark the beginning of the canal at Seabrook car park. These entrance panels welcome visitors to the canal with pictures of what activities can be carried out on the canal e.g. canoeing, fishing, walking and wildlife.

Arc Creative Design made the entrance signs which are replicated and made smaller at suitable entrance locations. The signs are constructed from sustainably sourced oak and stainless steel.

Due to the number of activities and events being held on the canal, notice boards have been installed covering all reaches. This is the quickest way to display events, licence fees and other pertinent information.

The number and style of signs on site is of great importance and needs to be of a continuous style to ensure the site identity is protected. Signage should be pertinent to avoid flooding the site with unnecessary and unsightly signage.

9.4 Social Media and Web Advertising

The Communications team use popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and sometimes LinkedIn to promote the Royal Military Canal. The manager feeds information, good news stories and any changes on site through to the Comms team who post using the most appropriate platform. Visitors are encouraged to use websites such as TripAdvisor and Trust Pilot to review their experience and these websites are monitored by the council in order to gain insight into how the sites are performing in terms of visitor satisfaction.

The council website features a page for the canal with basic, pertinent information about the site and links to various downloads (leaflet, management plan and standing consents).

There is a wealth of information on the internet about the canal, its history and the wildlife value it holds today. Websites such as Visit Kent and the Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership give visitors detailed information about the canal.

<http://www.rmcp.co.uk/>

<https://www.whitecliffscountryside.org.uk/>

<http://hythevenetianfete.co.uk/>

<http://visitkent.co.uk>

10 Community Involvement

10.1 Events

The RMC hosts one major event, occurring biennially. The Hythe Venetian Fete (HVF) is charity funded and attract thousands of visitors to the canal and surrounding area. The HVF is a floating carnival and has been held since 1890. Around 30 floats parade on the water once during the afternoon and again, fully illuminated, after dark. Entries come from schools, community groups and businesses. Fairground entertainment, food and drink stalls and local businesses are given permission to set up on the canal for the day during August. Other events held a week before the fete, include free concerts at the canal's bandstand and guided tours of the canal and the town. The event is organised by volunteers and is self-funding and can attract up to 10 000 visitors.



HVF August 2024

The council promotes the use of the canal to community groups. The council supports all events by providing officer time and expertise and some equipment.

The Council now uses Apply4, a cloud-based platform which streamlines the event application process. Event organisers apply and make payments online, enabling F&HDC to issue permits as soon as the application has been approved. Messaging and document management tools help stakeholders and the Council to manage queries and communicate with ease.

<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/article/1068/Apply-to-organise-an-event->

10.2 Community groups

The Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership (RMCP) is a non-profit making organisation sponsored by Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency and many others. It aims to raise awareness of the local countryside through volunteer events, publicity and interpretation. The RMCP carry out numerous countryside activities throughout the year which include guided walks and conservation activities. All are advertised on leaflets distributed in schools, public places and venues throughout the district.

Hythe Civic Society organise work parties undertaking herbaceous border maintenance and litter picking in conjunction with Hythe in Bloom, The Green Preservation Society and Hythe Environmental Community Group. They also lead historical walking tours throughout the town and canal area. It is estimated that during annually, HCS events attract up to 21 people per week adding up to 2100 volunteering hours to the upkeep of the canal.



Seapoint Canoe Centre organise water-borne litter picks weekly using the large bell boats clocking up around 450 volunteer hours annually.



Bumblebee Conservation Trust

In 2017 F&HDC joined other local landowners and farmers in supporting the Shorthaired Bumblebee Re-introduction Project by allowing volunteers to plant pollinator friendly plants at West Hythe and altering the timing of grass cutting in order to provide early forage opportunities for bees.

Following the success of that project the council continues to work with the BCT to improve opportunities for bees and other insects along the canal.

10.3 Volunteers

Volunteering helps people connect with each other, the wider community, provides health benefits and helps make parks and open spaces even better. F&HDC is committed to making volunteering an enjoyable and safe experience. This is reflected in the Volunteer Charter launched in spring 2021.

Volunteers can get involved in many ways, from managing habitats and surveying wildlife to keeping parks clean and safe. People have the chance to get involved with their local community, meet new people, develop skills and learn more about the parks and the environment while helping to inform current management. Between October 2021 and October 2025, volunteers donated 7,200 hours to working on the RMC open space..



Volunteers from Hythe Civic Society collecting cut grass from the wildflower meadow in Holman's Field (October 2022) and first sighting of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, the pyramidal orchid in this area (May 2024)

11 List of Appendices

All appendices are available to view either online or on request at the Civic Centre.

- COSHH and Safety Data Sheets
- Corporate Plan (also available online)
- Service Plan
- Risk Assessments
- Safe Systems of Work
- Boating Contract
- Consent Approval documents (also available online)
- Play Strategy (also available online)
- Volunteer Charter (also available online)
- MyTrees Database
- Carbon Action Plan
- Site Safety Inspection sheet
- CABI Annual reports
- Species Lists 2010-2020 collected by local enthusiasts