



*Herts Year of Walking Culminates in Events Fiesta!*



The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with landowners and communities to develop projects that enhance landscape and bio-diversity, as well as encouraging people to understand and enjoy the countryside. The service plays an active role in encouraging volunteer and local action groups to identify and become involved in projects. The CMS also provides opportunities for informal recreation through events, guided walks, cycle routes linking towns and the countryside, leaflets and interpretation.

**Contact us:**

Countryside Management Service  
Office (Car Park H)  
Environment Department  
County Hall  
Hertford, Herts, SG13 8DN

T 01992 588433  
E [northeast.cms@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:northeast.cms@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

For further news about topics in CMS News and links to activities, see the CMS web site [www.hertslink.org/cms](http://www.hertslink.org/cms)

The Countryside Management Service is sponsored by Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Council, Hertsme Borough Council, North Herts District Council, St. Albans City and District Council, Three Rivers District Council.



# Welcome to our Spring edition

Engaging Hertfordshire residents in the work of the Countryside Management Service has been an essential pillar of our activity now for more than 40 years. This has never been more important than in 2016 when Hertfordshire is launching a year-long campaign to promote the benefits of volunteering and to celebrate the contribution of those who volunteer already. The Year of Volunteering aims to boost the number of people taking part in volunteering activities; celebrating the contribution of existing volunteers towards making a difference and; demonstrating that Hertfordshire has a strong sense of community and its residents are proud to volunteer.

The launch will take place at the Herts County Show on 28 and 29 May 2016, CMS staff will be there with some of our volunteers – come and see us in the Herts County Council marquee! CMS is also planning to launch a new volunteering opportunity in 2016 – find out more later this year.

Big thanks go out to all of you who have contributed so far to the Year of Walking. This campaign has gone from strength to strength with 1000s of residents pledging to be more active through walking.

The culmination of YoW will be our first Walking Festival with lots on offer for everyone throughout May. CMS has been busily training volunteer leaders who have been preparing their offerings, all of which can be found on the CMS Walks and More web pages.



Walking and cycling are both ideal ways to take short journeys bringing health benefits as well as cutting down on congestion, pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We have been working recently on a number of access projects that provide opportunities for people to choose “active travel” as a means of getting from A to B. The improvements we have made to signage and surface have gone hand-in-hand with improvements to the nearby natural habitats, ensuring that these route ways are a better place for people and wildlife. Hertfordshire’s redundant railways and our plentiful green spaces can really contribute to the transport mix in the county – read about this work further into the newsletter.

*Tony Bradford*

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All aboard the Alban Way



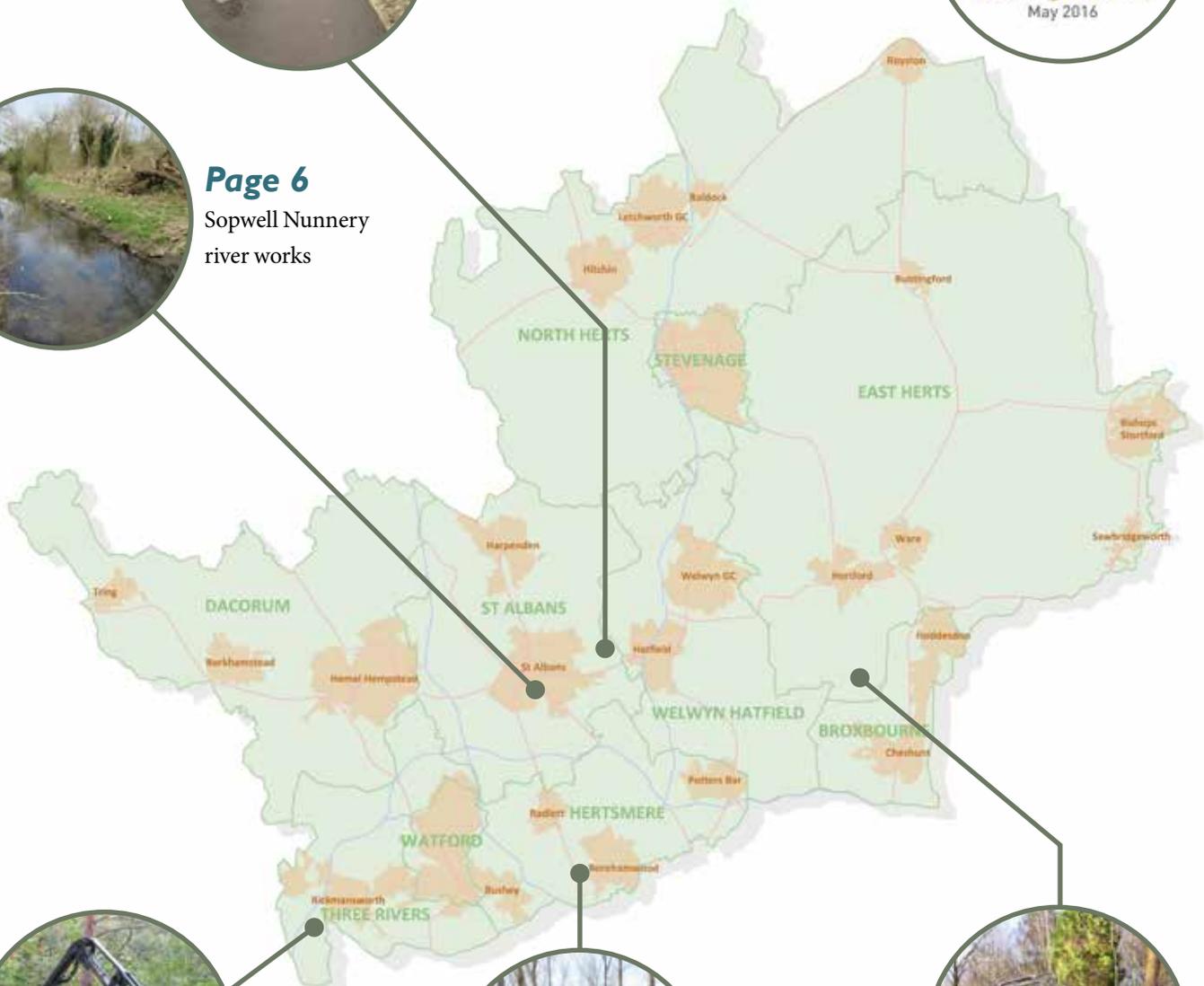
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# Hello, goodbye, hello, goodbye and hello again...

**Above:** *Matt Watts*  
**Centre:** *Bronwyn Scholes*  
**Right:** *Sian Price*

### Land Management Team

We are delighted to welcome *Matthew Watts* to the team who joins us from the far reaches of the Isle of Harris in Scotland, where he worked as a Ranger for the North Harris Trust. Originally a native of south-west Cornwall, Matthew studied Sustainable Forest Management at Inverness and has practical experience working in a range of environments and landscapes. We look forward to putting his acquired knowledge and skills to good use.

### Hertfordshire Health Walks

Following her very marked success in initiating and establishing our newest Health Walk scheme in Welwyn and Hatfield District, *Sarita Bansal*, Project lead, has departed CMS for a permanent post within County Council's Highways Communications Team. We thank Sarita for her valuable contributions and wish her the very best of luck in her new role.

In Sarita's place, to see out the remainder of this fixed-term contract until the end of March 2016, we welcomed *Bronwyn Scholes*. Bronwyn joined us with recent experience of positions within the Health and Social Care Industry and consequently a very good understanding of the benefits of exercise on health and wellbeing. Bronwyn was tasked with continued

development of the scheme with a view to ensuring a sustainable programme of events, catering for a range of abilities, with a strong body of trained volunteer leaders and healthy numbers of regular attendees. We are pleased to report that the Welwyn and Hatfield scheme is in very good health!

Sadly, at the end of March, we also saw the departure of Matt Green from Hertfordshire Health Walks. Matt joined us in July 2014 as Assistant Project Officer and made an immediate, positive impression. Matt's great enthusiasm and competencies made him an excellent fit to step into the role of Health Walks Project Officer when Sian Price went off on maternity leave and he has done sterling work during the period that she was away. Matt had taken a break from the very demanding role as a paramedic and now returns to this calling. We thank Matt for all his excellent work and wish him well for the future.

Following a period of maternity leave we are also delighted to be welcoming *Sian Price* back to her post of Hertfordshire Health Walks Project Officer. Sian returns to us ever enthusiastic and full of ideas about how we continue to build upon the very significant achievements of Hertfordshire Health Walks to date.



## Tree pests and diseases: stop the spread

In the last edition we described some of the issues we are facing around the threat to our trees and woodlands from tree pests and diseases. Some of these are already in Hertfordshire and others are not far away.

We'd guess that most readers of CMS News visit the countryside regularly, whether it's enjoying your local greenspace, leading a Health Walk, as a conservation volunteer or just walking the dog. Although we believe, and scientific advice remains, that the risk of diseases such as Chalara Ash Dieback being spread on boots, clothes, etc. is very low (even where the disease is known to be present) there are sensible precautions that people can take to minimise this risk.

Firstly, try to ensure that your footwear and other kit is clean before you go out on a walk, ride, conservation task or other activity in the countryside. Once out, clean any leaves and the worst of mud from your footwear, pushchairs, dogs, bikes, work tools, etc. before you head home. Clean footwear and other gear properly at home. If you can dry it, that's even better, as there's some evidence to suggest this might for instance help kill Chalara spores, although we do appreciate this may be difficult during a typical British summer...!

You can also be vigilant for signs of pests and diseases. More information, including photographs and a video on signs and symptoms, further advice on preventing the spread of disease and who to contact if you come across a suspect tree can be found at the Forestry Commission website - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases>.

We also have a new Tree Health page on the CMS website <http://www.hertslink.org/cms/treehealth/> with information on the current situation in Hertfordshire and further guidance, including the Chalara Action Toolkit for landowners and parish councils.

*Above left: Ash dieback - healthy and infected leaves*

*Right: Horse Chestnut leaf with leaf miner moth larvae damage*

*Both photos*

*Copyright Forestry Commission*

## Conservation Grazing at Ivel Springs

Ivel Springs meadow truly is a wonderful sight in the summer months – one that Countryside Management Service and site owners North Hertfordshire District Council can be proud of. An important feature of this Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Local Wildlife Site, the meadow was created in 1992 by seeding a previously arable field.

Without management in the form of cutting or grazing, a meadow like this would soon develop into woodland, resulting in the loss of plants and associated wildlife. Tree growth would also disturb the site's important underlying archaeology.

Conservation grazing is the most sympathetic management method for grassland species. Four, docile, English Longhorn cows are due to arrive in July and will be on site for 3 months. We have designed infrastructure in such a way that the public are not excluded from any part of the site and are free to continue enjoying Ivel Springs LNR all year round.

<http://www.hertslink.org/cms/getactive/placestovisit/ivelsprings/>

*Larger trees coppiced in the hedgerow at Sopwell Nunnery and overshadowing riverside trees removed to allow light in*



### **Clean for The Queen**

Many will be aware of the nation-wide campaign that has been running in recent weeks and months to raise awareness of the massive problem of litter in our localities. The campaign tied in with the lead up to the Queen's 90th birthday on 21st April. Litter-lifting blitzes have been organised right across the country between January and March.

CMS were involved in the organisation of a very successful event on the 10th February which saw County and District representatives and a group of our practical volunteers engaged in a concerted litter lift along a section of the Alban Way greenway, which runs between Hatfield and St Albans. Lady Verulam addressed and joined the party as the Queen's representative on a hugely productive morning, resulting in the collection and disposal of a very significant quantity of litter.

## *Sopwell Nunnery River Works*

A project aiming to improve the quality of a stretch of the River Ver chalk stream that runs alongside Sopwell Nunnery, St Albans is currently well underway. The work is being funded through the River and Wetlands Community Days initiative.

Environmental and habitat improvements along the river will allow more wildlife to flourish in this important and threatened habitat. Wherever possible, practical work is being undertaken by community volunteers provided through a combination of the Ver Valley Society and the Countryside Management Service's mid-week volunteers.

Improvement of the river will be achieved in several different stages. The first stage of de-shading the river is now complete; the aim of this work was to

remove several trees along a short section of the river that were blocking light from reaching the riverbed. The large trees in a nearby hedge have also been coppiced, leaving the more manageable sized plants in the hedge to be laid by volunteers. Enabling more sunlight to reach the riverbed will allow a greater diversity of plants and animals to exist and thrive here.

Another aspect of this project is to address poor water flow rates. Several woody structures will be built in the river to improve flows and increase energy in the water, so as to shift mud and silt that has built up over time and expose a gravelly riverbed habitat that is vital for many invertebrates and fish.

Finally, the project also seeks to address problems of bank erosion in this area, much of which can be attributed to dogs entering and exiting the river. We will designate a number of entry/exit points for dogs by building specially designed dog steps. By specifying the locations at which dogs can access the river we will hopefully reduce erosion along the remainder of the bank thereby allowing marginal plants to become better established.





**Left:** Before and after on The Alban Way, approaching the Camp Road bridge



# All Aboard the Alban Way

ALBAN WAY

A lot has been happening along the Alban Way over the last 12 months, with plenty more to come. The delivery of the second phase of woodland management works was completed during February 2016. Coppicing - cutting trees to ground level to promote their growth - and thinning works to allow trees the space to grow to maturity; has been carried out between Camp Road Bridge and Ashley Road.

This has been a great success, bringing vast improvements for both people and wildlife; more light now reaches the path and ground flora, and a more diverse woodland structure is developing. The works are part of the five year Alban Way Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) – covering the St Albans end of the route, produced for St Albans City & District Council by CMS.

The beginning of February saw a discrete event take place to celebrate 150 years since the opening of Smallford Station. While back in October 2015, hundreds of people turned out to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the opening of the Hatfield to St Albans branch line – now the Alban Way, a popular traffic free multi-user route. Events were held along the whole route with plenty to see and do, from stalls and displays, to a miniature railway. Both of

these events were organised by a team of dedicated volunteers from the Smallford Residents Association.

During the summer months CMS will carry out access improvements along the route, as part of the GAP. Improvements will include: removal of old barriers, resurfacing sections of path, renovations to the original platforms and halts, car park improvements and new signage. An updated leaflet and new logo have already been produced for the Alban Way. CMS volunteers will continue to be actively involved in the delivery of the GAP.

*Read more about the project and download the leaflet from:*  
<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/albanway>



## More Moo-vellous Grazing on Oughtonhead Common

One of Hitchin's former Cow Commons, Oughtonhead has been grazed for centuries. After a period of absence, cattle were reintroduced to the common in 1995, helping to keep the encroaching scrub in check and maintain floral diversity.

The fencing is due for renewal and permission has been granted to extend the grazed area to include significant portions of important dry and wet grassland, that are difficult to manage by any other means.

There will be only minor changes to access arrangements. The existing path network will remain and two new sections of perimeter path will be created.

See following link for further detail:-  
<http://www.hertslink.org/cms/content/features/ohcfencing>

This work is part of the Oughtonhead Greenspace Action Plan 2011-2017,  
[http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/man\\_plan\\_v3.pdf](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/man_plan_v3.pdf).

Funding for this project has been awarded as part of Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

## Bentsley Spinney Update March 2016

Bentsley Spinney is a small area of woodland in north east St. Albans. CMS working in partnership with St. Albans City and District Council (SADC) produced a Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) for the site in 2014 and since June 2015, have carried out a range of site improvements.

An area of the woodland dominated by sycamore trees was thinned in February, with resulting wood contributing to the local firewood market. Following felling operations the area has been planted by CMS volunteers with a mix of native trees and shrubs, with seed of local provenance and grown in the UK. This work will improve the structure of the woodland for wildlife.

Several old Hornbeam pollards which sit on an ancient wood bank have been re-pollarded to perpetuate them to a veteran stage.

An interpretation panel has been installed to enable visitors to learn about the wildlife and management of the Spinney. Entrance signs have been installed to welcome visitors to the site. Site access has been improved with some additional surfacing and the construction of a flight of steps.

The project has been made possible through a grant from Tarmac Landfill Communities Fund, along with contributions from Sandridge Parish Council and County Councillor Geoff Churchard.

<http://ow.ly/4mOaxy>



## Broxbourne Woods round-up

The past winter has been somewhat of a moist affair, whilst experts tell us that rainfall in this part of the UK has been below the seasonal average, it certainly hasn't felt that way. It may be that the pattern of rainfall, after several wet years with resultant saturated ground and high water table have together created some of the worst forestry conditions of the past two decades.

Our ongoing SSSI restoration programme has continued despite these diabolical meteorological challenges. We have worked hard with our contractors to ensure that this programme stays on schedule, however damage to woodland tracks has forced us to beat a retreat. We have been careful to ensure that the work area has been left in such a way that we can return later in the year to complete this 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the project without affecting the important resident species. We appreciate that for our visitors this has been a trying time and we will be putting in place measures to try and avoid any future reoccurrence.

We've written much in recent years about how woodland produce is sold to help support the management of such popular sites. We have previously produced and marketed everything from saw logs

to firewood and biomass chip to horse bedding. This year we've taken a leaf out of our own book and recycled some Douglas Fir trees into attractive new signage. Work has been carried out by local craftsmen within a stone's throw of the woods, saving on unnecessary transport and associated environmental impact.

Despite the rain and seemingly never ending gloom, our insatiable volunteers continue to get stuck-in with good humour. Without their dedication and undoubted skills many of our aspirations for the woodlands would simply not be achievable and we thank them wholeheartedly.





**Left:** Thinning carried out at Bishop's Wood  
**Inset:** Ancient woodland boundary banks

## Bishop's Wood project update

Restoration work at Bishop's Wood Country Park continues to move forwards, as CMS work in partnership with its owners, Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), on the long term management plan.

At the heart of the plan is the progressive thinning of large areas of the woodland, focusing on the conifers planted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also including some of the native hardwood trees. This work helps the stronger trees which remain, giving them space to grow, and allows light to reach the woodland floor, helping to reinvigorate what was once a rich and varied ground flora.

During the winter, thinning was carried out in the northern part of the woodland. If you take the opportunity to visit Bishop's Wood this spring you will see what a big difference it has made, as the woodland floor comes to life.

Making your visit easier and more rewarding are a new leaflet and set of interpretation panels, designed as part of the same project. A map shows walking routes around the wood, including an easy access trail for those less mobile and a picnic area close to the car park, as well as links to the London Outer Orbital Path (LOOP).



Other panels, which you will find along the newly surfaced paths, will help you learn more about the woodland. They cover a diverse range of topics, including history and archaeology, woodland management, wildlife and heathland.

Through these panels, Bishop's Wood has plenty to reveal. Woodbanks and ditches mark ancient woodland boundaries, while surviving patches of heathland are evidence of the cattle that once grazed here. Newly restored rides support plants like common spotted orchid and devil's-bit scabious and you can see special woodland butterflies like silver-washed fritillary and white admiral.

The work is being jointly funded by TRDC and the Forestry Commission, through an English Woodland Grant Scheme agreement. Visit the CMS website to find out more, or to download a copy of the new leaflet: <http://www.hertslink.org/cms/getactive/placestovisit/bishopswood/>



### Weston Hills

A new management plan is in place for Weston Hills, Baldock. This lovely wildlife site on the east side of the town is home to an array of wildlife. Especially worth a visit is an area of chalk downland where orchids and specialist plants thrive on the slopes. June is usually the best time to see the orchids but the grassland is in flower right through the summer and also attracts many different types of butterfly. In autumn the beech trees cast a golden glow through the woods and the colourful fruits of the spindle bush and wayfaring tree punctuate the scrub.

The new plan continues restoration of the various habitats at Weston Hills and also looks at ways to mitigate the impact of Ash dieback which is likely to have significant effects on the woodland.



### Join the Mass Health Walk on 16 May

Want to be part of something BIG? We're attempting to set a record for the greatest number of Health Walkers out walking on the morning on Monday May 16<sup>th</sup> - what better time to set this challenge than during Hertfordshire's Walking Festival.

Between 9am and midday there will be over 15 Health Walks taking place, so if you're a seasoned Health Walker or fancy trying something new there are plenty of opportunities to get involved. Introduce a friend, bring a neighbour or rally the family to help make this our biggest Health Walk ever!

All regular Monday Health Walks will go ahead, plus some of our fabulous leaders have organised additional one-off Health Walks to help get more feet pounding the ground on this day.

We'll post the walks schedule on our website [www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival](http://www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival) on our Facebook page – [facebook.com/hertfordshirehealthwalks](https://www.facebook.com/hertfordshirehealthwalks) -and Twitter @hertshealthwalk.



# Hertfordshire Walking Festival

May 2016

## Hertfordshire Walking Festival

**If it isn't already in your diary for May, then get it in there – Hertfordshire Walking Festival 1st to 31st May 2016!**

Hertfordshire is taking on walking in a big way this May in a festival, the exciting culmination to our Year of Walking campaign. You can take your pick from more than 74 events that will take place across the county.

All the Festival events are FREE and cater for all audiences; there will be day long rambles, to family friendly bug hunts and everything in between. Most walks finish near some wonderful local cafes and pubs where walkers can refresh themselves and support local businesses. Many of the walks start near local train stations or bus stop so that walkers can use public transport when they attend.

Festivals walks will provide a great introduction to Hertfordshire's outdoors; the walks all follow routes that are open all year round and will give participants the confidence to come back and do their own walk.

They will provide opportunities for residents to explore their county whilst walk leaders share their knowledge. Walkers might discover how to recognise certain bird song, identify trees or make the most of natural light with their camera-phone.

The festival coincides with the National Month of Walking and the long standing Stevenage Walking Festival (7th-15th May 2016).

The Walking Festival booklet is now available online at: [www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival](http://www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival)

This booklet lists all the events taking place. Some of the events are 'bookable' as they have limited capacity – so don't miss out!



### **Welwyn Hatfield Health Walks update**

Since CMS received funding from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and NHS East & North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in April 2015, Welwyn & Hatfield Health Walks have gone from strength to strength. Welwyn & Hatfield now boast an impressive 7 weekly walks, 1 fortnightly walk and 1 monthly walk!

We have walks in a wide selection of different locations ranging from leafy Brookmans Park to wheelchair-friendly Hatfield Town Centre. Health Walks provide something for everyone from gently paced, 20 minute 'First Step' Walks to brisk hour-long walks on more challenging terrain. With a good choice of walks on offer, Welwyn & Hatfield have attracted over 1600 attendances in less than one year. An incredible feat for such a new scheme!

Of course, this success is largely due to our wonderful Volunteer Walk Leaders, of which we have over 25 regularly and selflessly dedicating their time to enable others to reap the benefits of walking.

For more information on Welwyn & Hatfield Health Walks please visit <http://www.hertslink.org/cms/healthwalks/wh>

## *Hertfordshire Health Walks*

Since the addition of the Welwyn Hatfield scheme, Hertfordshire Health Walks attendances have exploded! We still have registers being added by our volunteers, but at the time of going to print the total number of attendances on Health Walks between April 2015 and March 2016, stands at nearly 48,000! This inflation on the previous year's total (41,111) can also be accredited to the Year of Walking and the hard work Rukia and the team has been doing to promote walking in all its guises across the county.

The HHW team and volunteers' efforts were recognised when the CMS received The Dr Joan Crawley Award for Excellence in Public Health in December 2015 (pictured right). The Public Health Excellence Awards aim to identify and publically recognise those who have made an outstanding contribution to improving the health of Hertfordshire residents, through leadership, achievement, innovation, and the example of their own lives. The premier award is given in memory of Dr Joan Crawley, the first female Medical Officer of Health in the UK and who worked in public health in

Hertford. Nominations for the awards came from residents, partners and colleagues. There were five winners announced at the county's annual Public Health Conference and delegates named Hertfordshire Health Walks as the overall winner on the day. Matthew Green and Tony Bradford were presented with the award by Dr Joan Crawley's daughter, Jane.

We continue to work closely with our Public Health colleagues here at the County Council and intend to support the new 'One You' health campaign launched by Public Health England throughout the summer. Take the One You healthy lifestyle assessment online at [nhs.uk/oneyou](http://nhs.uk/oneyou), and start making small changes to improve your health today. Perhaps you could go on a short Health Walk! Our May-August Summer programmes are available online now at [www.hertfordshirehealthwalks.org](http://www.hertfordshirehealthwalks.org).



# Walks & More

We've picked out some highlights from the Hertfordshire Walking Festival throughout May to give you a taste of what's on offer.

## Shenleybury Trail, Borehamwood Monday 9th May, 11am.

Take a bus ride and a leisurely walk back, whilst learning about 6 centuries of local history.

## Southern Country Park, Bishop Stortford Tuesday 17th May, 10am.

A short walk to discover the Country Park, Northern Parkland and Thorley Wedge.

## Photography Walk around Hemel Old Town and Gadebridge Park – Wednesday 18th May, 6.30pm.

Gain expert guidance on framing and focusing your shots beautifully.

## Panshanger Estate Ramble – Monday 30th May, 10am.

An 8 mile ramble on the disused railway line towards Welwyn Garden City looping around the estate on public rights of way through woodland, countryside and parkland.

Don't miss out, some of the events have limited availability so:

visit [www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival](http://www.hertsdirect.org/walkingfestival)

email: [walking@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:walking@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

or call 01992 588433 to find out more.



## Scene Change at Studio Way

Hertsmeare Borough Council has received £62,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an exciting new enhancement project at Studio Way, in Borehamwood. Thanks to National Lottery players, plans to bring the fascinating history of Studio Way back to life have been drawn up, in consultation with local residents.

Work is already underway, with CMS delivering the project in partnership with park owners Hertsmeare Borough Council (HBC), who are contributing an additional £32,000 to the project. Scene Change at Studio Way aims to improve access, restore wildlife habitats and interpret the area's long history of film making.

Improvements due to take place over the coming 18 months include:

- Improving access by opening up and resurfacing footpaths and linking routes around the site.

- Restoring wildlife habitats by carrying out: woodland management, restoration of old hedgerows, planting of native Oak trees and removal of invasive species, most to be carried out by CMS practical volunteers.
- Creating welcoming and accessible entrances to the park with welcome signs and a main entrance feature.
- Installing interpretative information around the site highlighting its wildlife and heritage.
- Engaging the local community on practical tasks and guided walks.

We will be busy throughout 2016 and beyond, delivering this wide range of activity. Keep an eye out and if you're local, why not get involved and play a part in improving the standard and amenity value of this important local greenspace.

*Read more about the Heritage Lottery Fund at [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk) or follow @heritagelottery and @HLFEoE*

## Explore Southern Country Park and Beyond

Come and explore the south west corner of Bishop's Stortford this summer by following the 'Parks and Beyond' circular walks. The waymarked (green and orange) traffic free routes take you along grassy footpaths, bridleways and tarmaced paths, as they link together five East Herts Council managed open spaces.

Bishop's Park and The Firs. The walks take you through a range of habitats including woodland, grassland, wetland and residential areas.

A new leaflet showing the circular walks has been created to help you explore the area and each site has its own interpretation panel with information about what you might see on your visit.

*If you would like to learn more please visit- [www.hertslink.org/cms/getactive/placetovisit/scpl](http://www.hertslink.org/cms/getactive/placetovisit/scpl)*

From the green flag award winning Southern Country Park, you can visit Northern Parkland, Thorley Wedge,