

**COMMUNITY'S TRIUMPH:** Recognition for village volunteers for rejuvenating ancient green heritage

# Award for restored woodland

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BREDHURST'S efforts to conserve an area of ancient woodland has won it a prize in the Kent Village of the Year competition.

People living in the community have been working tirelessly since May 2005 to protect and preserve Bredhurst Hurst and Monkdown Wood which, despite being designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest, had been damaged by fly-tippers and off-road drivers.

The village formed the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group (BWAG), and since it began four years ago, membership has grown from six to 300.

### Rubble

In the last three years the group has secured around £70,000 of funding, which has been used to clear rubbish, erect fences and restore bridleways and 400-year-old pathways.

The whole community has come together to hold clean-up days, clearing hundreds of tonnes of industrial-scale fly-tipping from the forest, including tyres, burned out cars and builders' rubble.

Villagers have also pitched in to help build the fences and organise fund-raising events. Last year



■ From left, Dr Hilary Newport from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Will Roffey, assistant editor for BBC Radio Kent, and Vanessa Jones, chairman of Bredhurst parish council

the group was helped by soldiers from the Royal School of Military Engineering at Brompton Barracks, who spent two months reinstating several hundred metres of pathways which had been ruined by quad bikes and 4x4 vehicles.

Judges from the Kent Village competition paid a visit to Bredhurst and were given a tour of the 600-acre woodland to see the improvements for themselves. They named the village as best in the environment category.

Vanessa Jones, chairman of Bredhurst parish council, said: "We are absolutely thrilled with the award which is all thanks

to the hard work and tremendous support of our members. "The judges comments came as a surprise, and what they said about the project was marvellous. It will give all the volunteers a boost."

She added: "Since the project has started, every day you go into the woodland you always meet new people who have never been to the area before, but say they have read about the conservation work in the paper or seen us on television.

"As a result, the fly-tipping and use of off-road vehicles has stopped because people know there are legitimate walkers and

### 'NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT'

The annual Kent Village competition, sponsored by Calor Gas, provides rural communities with a platform to tell others of their village successes, such as inspirational people, local business initiatives or innovative communication methods.

Judges said the BWAG project was "not only important locally but was also nationally significant and demonstrates what can be achieved when a community works together."

The village, which also won a Kent Volunteer award in 2006, has been awarded £250, which will be put towards more path restoration in the woodland.

horse riders in the woods now, so they go elsewhere."

The overall winner of the Kent Village of the Year title went to Burham, as reported in Friday's Medway Messenger.



■ Volunteers who are cleaning up the Bredhurst woodlands, with some of the old tyres they have collected so far

Picture by Jim Rantell pd996750

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