



## Walk the walk, start the talk

**IN THE run-up to my year, what was foremost on my mind was how to make the most of the year ahead, even if Covid did reappear. I love gardens and gardening and am lucky enough to live surrounded by beautiful Bedfordshire countryside.**

Throughout the lockdowns, the green spaces, both private and public, became the guardian of our sanity and made me realise just how difficult it must be for those deprived of it living in built-up areas – without gardens, sometimes in high-rise buildings where the communal outside area is usually small and not always green. These conditions are, we are told, most likely to breed discontent, vandalism and other anti-social, often criminal, behaviour. The redemptive quality of simply being outside in green space was clear, so, alongside the shrieval remit, I made ‘Green Spaces’ my theme for the year. This tied in neatly with the initiative for The Queen’s Green Canopy.

To this end, and through much discussion with Susan Lousada (2020-21), soon to become our new Lord-Lieutenant, we came up with the idea of a five-day walk along all 40 miles of the Greensand Ridge. The Ridge is a geological feature peculiar to Bedfordshire, straddling the county diagonally, from Leighton Buzzard in the south-west to Gamlingay in the north-east, technically just Cambridgeshire. The idea was to make it an outdoor networking event that



**End of Green Spaces Day:** Jon Balaam (Ranger of Greensand Trust); Deborah Inskip OBE DL (2013-14), Helen Nellis (then Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire); Judith Lovely (School Improvement Manager Bedford Borough) and Caroline Maudlin (Vice Chair of Central Beds Council) in a field approaching Woburn Park



**Left:** Ribbon Cutting at Gamlingay: End of the final day, Lady Clifford cutting the ribbon with Jennifer Crompton, High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire, to inaugurate the new Greensand Ridge Walk bench at the Eco Hub Gamlingay. Walkers include: Sir Timothy Clifford and John Crompton, Rachel Newell (CSR from Kier), Cllr Farzana Kharawala (Mayor of Leighton-Linslade), Martin Pettit (Mayor of Sandy), Lin Rogers (Keech Hospice), and Caroline Maudlin and Ali Bradbury holding the ribbon (both from Greensand Trust)

would serve fourfold. First, to introduce myself to those I didn’t yet know in the county, having only lived here for 12 years, including the key people in charities involved in rehabilitation and mental health, the grant-giving bodies, the judiciary and magistracy, mayors, councillors, the wider Lieutenancy, religious leaders, heads of the emergency services, and finally those involved in improving education. Second, to introduce to one another charities doing similar but not identical things in the different areas of the county and in some cases to introduce the counterparts from the different councils. Third, it was to show how good you feel when you get out and explore the exquisite countryside around us, how freely conversation and positive ideas are generated. And finally, to promote the Greensand Ridge as a visitor destination like the Chilterns.

As we thought of guests, it became apparent that there were categories or themes evolving, so we allocated a different theme to each day: the first was Green Spaces, the second Rehabilitation, the third Youth, the fourth Heritage at Risk and we purposely left the fifth without a theme.

The walk itself took us through unspoilt countryside with stunning views from up on the Ridge. It was never gruelling and guests could peel off at a halfway point each day thanks to the bus service laid on by the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity.

What was extraordinary was the synergy between the guests each day – beyond our wildest expectations – and how enabling walking and talking



**Heritage at Risk Day at Clophill Church:** Participants included: Professor Gurch Randhawa DL, His Honour Judge Gill, Jane Malcolm (Heritage, Luton Council), Lila Begum (Senior Project Lead, Bedford Borough), Major Matt Brown (MOD Chicksands)

alongside someone, instead of face to face in a room, is so positive and non-confrontational. Consequently all sorts of collaborations were conceived and various important projects are now in the pipeline: training teachers how to engage children in local nature; hopefully, helping to rehouse a homeless charity in a heritage building that needs repurposing; proposed footbridges for the two dangerous road crossings along the Ridge Walk; and holding an all-faith Iftar in a forest to introduce inner-city folk to the woodlands and to celebrate with diverse ethnicities and religions. This evolved into what may well be a unique initiative!

◆ **Jane Clifford**  
*Lady Clifford, High Sheriff of Bedfordshire 2022-23*