

## Veolia give £100,000 boost to introduce “ecosystem engineers” to Kent woodland

2 years ago



Thanks to the generous support of the Veolia Environmental Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust has received funding to help them connect rural areas allowing “ecosystem engineers” to change the landscape.

West Blean and Thornden Woods in Canterbury are just over 400 hectares and home to the award-winning Wilder Blean project, initiated by the charities Kent Wildlife Trust and Wildwood Trust. This project aims to introduce ‘ecosystem engineers’, animals who shape the habitat around them, boosting biodiversity and making the landscape more climate resilient. They are a nature-based solution to woodland management and through their unique behaviours of debarking, dust-bathing and browsing they bring light to the forest floor and help wildlife to thrive.

Currently, the Blean bison herd has an area of 50 hectares to roam, however the grant of £100,000 to the Wilder Blean project will see that increase to 200 hectares. The grant will help pay for bespoke bison bridges granting the herd full access to the forest, allowing their natural traits of seed dispersal, habitat creation and disturbance effects to thrive across more of the landscape. The bespoke constructions will be fitted with solar panels, generating renewable energy, while also allowing animals and human visitors to coexist in the natural environment by maintaining the existing footpaths.

Over the past 25 years, the Veolia Environmental Trust has invested in local community and environmental projects from nature reserves to skateparks, working alongside partners such regional Wildlife Trusts and community groups. The money raised from the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) has transformed 910 community centres, 337 play areas, 368 nature reserves, 263 sports facilities, 183 parks, 15 woodlands and 40 community gardens to date.

Caroline Schwaller MBE, Chair of the Veolia Environmental Trust said: “This unique and innovative project was one the Veolia Environmental Trust was keen to be a part of due to its biodiversity and social importance. Our grant will help reduce the need for human intervention and management of this woodland, which lessens the need for heavy plant or machinery and the associated emissions. It will utilise renewable energy through solar panels and improve public walking routes, allowing both nature and people to flourish in unison.”

Talia Sherrin-Gates of Kent Wildlife Trust said: “The generous support from the Veolia Environmental Trust allows us to take another step closer to a wilder, more connected Blean landscape where bison are playing an important role in boosting biodiversity and making the landscape more resilient to climate change.

“Once completed, the bison will have free-roam of over 200 hectares of land allowing them to keep their wild behaviours that make such a difference to the landscape. It will also bring people closer to nature as they walk over the bridges and perhaps catch a sight of these magnificent ecosystem engineers as they go about their bison business.”