

Welcome to an area of green and outstanding attractions

The kids can run around, you can walk the dog, catch a fish, get a good cuppa or a beer, spot a woodpecker or bring a picnic. If you are more active, you can walk, cycle, run and explore or you can just sit back, relax and contemplate nature's bounty.

This area of green and outstanding attractions, centred around Shorne, Cobham and Ashenbank, is within easy reach of Medway and Gravesham in north Kent. Five green sites have grouped together so their attractions cater for all ages and interests. They are:-

Shorne Woods Country Park, Cobham Park, Ashenbank Woods, Jeskyns Community Woodland and Ranscombe Farm.

For space, fun and fresh air there is the newly created **Jeskyns Community Woodland** with activity and animation for the kids and freedom to walk, run or ride in a safe environment.

Shorne Woods Country Park, with its innovative visitor centre, welcomes visitors 364 days a year. Activities and events are organised for all to entertain and inform throughout the year and there are two coarse fishing lakes for anglers.

Cobham Park is for lovers of history and landscape. Here you will see the recently restored Darnley Mausoleum and one of

Kent's finest Elizabethan mansions, Cobham Hall, set in spacious parkland designed by the famous Humphry Repton.

For birds, bugs and fungi go to **Ashenbank Woods**. The number of gnarled ancient trees with their associated, distinctive wood-eating bugs make it a very unusual Site of Special Scientific Interest.

For nature lovers, botanists and gardeners there is **Ranscombe Farm**, renowned for its rare plants and dazzling displays of corncockle in July. Ranscombe Farm boasts species which still grow in the same place as they did when spotted by botanists way back in 1699.

Newly created paths throughout this area connect with Kent's excellent public rights of way network, including the long distance national trail, the North Downs Way, which runs through Ranscombe Farm.

For variety, look no further. This leaflet is packed with facts about the area which lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This covers the eastern half of the North Downs, nearly a quarter of Kent.



Historic Cobham Park and the tomb with a view!



An extraordinary structure, topped with a pyramid, dominates the highest point of Cobham Park. The Darnley Mausoleum was completed in 1786 as the intended burial place of the Earls of Darnley.

Unusually the mausoleum was never used for burial; over several centuries it deteriorated, was severely vandalised and suffered a major fire in 1980. It was featured on the BBC Restoration programme and was eventually saved by a group of organisations including Gravesham Borough Council, the National Trust and English Heritage.

Now the building has been lovingly restored to the beauty of the original, designed in 1783 by the Georgian Neo-classical architect, James Wyatt.

The mausoleum sits in historic Cobham Wood, an important site for wildlife with many majestic trees and panoramic views from scenic walks. When the restoration is finished the National Trust will take over the running of this important place, and will open the mausoleum to the public from 2009. The wood is open all year round. For details of opening times of the mausoleum contact the National Trust.

Grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage are also being used to restore the historic landscapes and gardens of Cobham Park, designed by

Humphry Repton; at the heart of which is Cobham Hall (now an independent school).

In 1790 the Earl of Darnley instructed Repton, the top landscape gardener of his day, to redesign the park. He concentrated on the gardens and pleasure grounds around the hall where the family and their visitors could experience a new, fashionable landscape, with informal tree planting, wild flowers and views across the park. One of the best times to visit is the spring when the gardens and woods are a mass of daffodils, narcissi and a myriad of rare bulbs. In the autumn the trees lend a golden glow to the woodland and park.

Cobham Hall and its grounds are open to the public on certain days throughout the year; contact the hall for more details.

Most of Cobham Park is open to visitors all year round, but please remember that the Darnley Mausoleum and Cobham Hall and its grounds are only open on certain days. When crossing the golf course or the farmer's fields please keep to the public footpaths.



If you go down to Ashenbank Wood today



Ashenbank Wood once belonged to the Cobham Hall estate and has a rich and unique history. It is part ancient woodland and part wood pasture with fantastic shows of spring flowers such as bluebell and wood anemone. The ancient woodland has never been cleared or replanted, basically untouched for centuries apart from coppicing.

Wood pasture is different from other woodland as the trees grow in open, sunny pastureland. Today the wood is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust which provides public access throughout their wood and is also in the process of restoring the wood pasture habitat to improve conditions for wildlife.

Experts consider this a very valuable Site of Special Scientific Interest as it contains large numbers of insects and rare fungi which thrive on the decaying and dead wood. The insects, in turn, attract birds like the woodpeckers, nuthatch, tree creepers and nightingales so bird song and the drumming of woodpeckers are features of this woodland. Some 50 species of bird are thought to breed in the Cobham Park area and with the opening up of the wood pasture at Ashenbank, it is hoped to encourage more birds including the rare nightjar, which is so magnificently camouflaged it looks like a piece of wood.

You can see old pollarded trees around Ashenbank and some remarkable ancient, veteran trees, some at least 350 to 500 years old, some measuring 6 metres around the girth. Ancient trees are also good places for hole-nesting birds and the woodpeckers find it easy to drill holes in old, rotting wood.

Waymarked routes with interpretation panels are passable throughout the year with sensible footwear. Within the wood there are remains of a Second World War camp used as a billet for personnel operating the Gravesend airfield. The camp was built here to take advantage of the dense tree cover, hiding it from German fighter planes heading up the Thames. Four bunkers were left intact.

There is evidence that the area was inhabited in both the prehistoric and Roman periods. The most visible monument in the wood is a Bronze Age bowl barrow dating from between 2400 and 1500 BC.



Jeskyns Community Woodland



By way of contrast with the veteran trees at Ashenbank, all plantings at Jeskyns are new. Jeskyns is 360 acres of greenspace that has been specially created by the Forestry Commission near Cobham.

Land that was previously under intensive agriculture has been converted to a mixture of traditional habitats. Over time the key historic landscape features of north Kent will reappear. There will be traditional orchards of apples, cherries and cobnuts, open parkland, grass and wildflower meadows and native woodlands.

Almost seven kilometres of fully accessible hard trails and grass paths across the site have been created for pedestrians, wheelchair users, buggy pushers, cyclists and horse riders. Extensive circular trails take in all of the most interesting features on site. Children will enjoy the innovative natural play features that have been designed to stimulate the imagination including a fun tree house. A range of newly created habitats including four new ponds provide the opportunity for wildlife to flourish.

Key achievements at Jeskyns:

- ▶ Planted -130,000 trees and shrubs, 5000 of the trees planted by local residents, schools and clubs.
- ▶ Planted - 8 kilometres of new hedgerow.
- ▶ Created - almost 7 kilometres of hard surfaced easy access trails.
- ▶ Sown - almost 50 hectares of new wildflower meadow.
- ▶ Planted - over 850 traditional varieties of fruit trees (some varieties date back to the 16th century).
- ▶ Created - four new ponds.



The Thames Gateway and the Thames Gateway Parklands

The Thames Gateway is Europe's largest physical, economic and social regeneration programme. Covering 40 miles from Canary Wharf to the Isle of Sheppey, the government led Thames Gateway is set to create one of Europe's most exciting and pleasant places to live, work, learn and play.

A key part of the Gateway Programme is the promotion and delivery of environmental improvements under the banner of the Thames Gateway Parklands. Parklands will focus on improving the quality of the Gateway's environment with particular focus on access to waterfronts, heritage, town / city squares, landscapes and corridors.

Across north Kent, the Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway initiative will be working with local partners and government

to secure funds for continued improvements to north Kent's environment, as well as resident's and visitor's quality of life.

The work at Cobham, Shorne and Cuxton is seen as one of the first significant steps in realising Thames Gateway Parklands on the ground. Visit the area and enjoy the fruits of all the investment and hard work. If you would like to find out more about Parklands then please contact GSKM at www.gtgkm.org.uk.



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Ranscombe Farm – a botanical gem



Ranscombe Farm is a botanical gem, described by experts as 'a very unique place'. It is a square mile in total and it has been a favourite haunt of wild plant enthusiasts for hundreds of years.

The first UK record of two nationally rare species, hairy mallow and meadow clary, were at Ranscombe Farm, dating from 1699 and 1792 respectively. Both species still survive in the same spot.

Managed by the charity Plantlife International in partnership with the tenant farmer, Ranscombe is now a country park. It combines a place for quiet walks in attractive countryside with a fascinating flora on the slopes of the North Downs.

There are now ten kilometres of footpaths following the undulating Downs with superb views over the Medway Valley. The long distance national trail, the North Downs Way, also runs through the park.

Ranscombe is a working farm which has been continuously farmed for centuries. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book. Its landscape reflects its history - arable land, extensive ancient woodland and a typical feature of Kent, some small pockets of chalk grassland. At least six species of orchid can be found in the chalk grassland.

Ranscombe is considered one of the best sites in Britain for rare plants growing on

arable land. The western fields are vibrant every year with corncockle (once thought to be extinct in the UK) and blue pimpernel. There is also a diverse wildlife including farmland birds, rare insects, large mammals and dormice.

There is a five-year plan to restore coppicing, an ancient Kentish trade, to the woodland and to improve conditions for wildlife. These woodlands are best in spring with early-purple orchids and bluebells.

The excellent work begun by local volunteers in 2005, will be continued. Plantlife is organising volunteer workdays, talks, free guided walks and other events throughout the year.

What to see and when:-

April: bluebell, early-purple orchid

May: lady orchid, fly orchid, man orchid

June: corncockle, meadow clary, hairy mallow, ground pine, blue pimpernel, common milkwort, four species of poppy (common, rough, prickly and long-headed)

July: clustered bellflower



Shorne Woods Country Park - a great day out



Once part of the Cobham Hall estate, this large ancient woodland site is now Kent's most popular country park.

A variety of activities and events for young and old are listed in a leaflet and on the website. Children's activities include rambles and a monthly nature club where they can study mini beasts and dragonflies. In October there is a highly competitive conker championship.

As well as many waymarked paths, there is a permanent course for orienteering and the latest fun version of hide-and-seek, geocaching. Some paths are suitable for electric scooters and there is an easy access walk for prams, wheel chairs and people with limited mobility. For anglers, there are two well-stocked coarse fishing lakes. Each has disabled access.

There are guided walks, sponsored runs and a Trim Trail to test your fitness. In July the woodlands come alive with archers, cannons and combat in a medieval extravaganza. For the brave there is a scary night trail at Hallowe'en.

You can relax in the picnic area while the children let off steam in one of the two play areas - a challenging one for children up to 16 or a more traditional one for younger visitors.

Thanks to a major investment programme, you can enjoy high quality hot food and snacks in the licensed café within the eco-friendly visitor centre. Constructed of a revolutionary timber laminate using local sweet chestnut, it has a wind turbine and solar panels to generate energy. Rainwater is harvested and a woodchip boiler heats the building. Live displays show how energy and water are being generated and used.

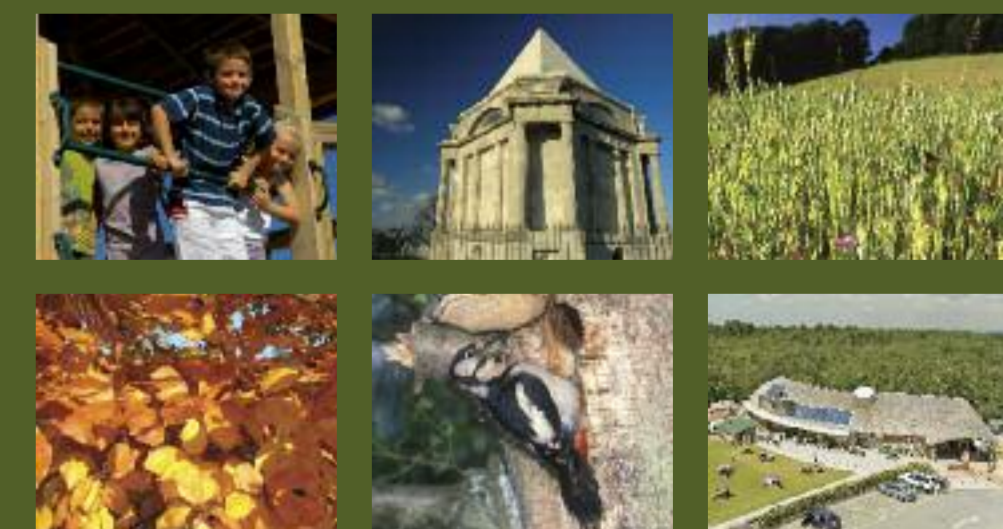
Shorne Woods is a mix of woodland, heathland and wetland. The ponds and lakes are rich with reeds, rush and willow. Colourful dragonflies are a common sight. Many enjoy the sensory garden where the Green Man lives. All around him, the planting and tactile sculptures provide colour, scent, texture, shape and sound.

Hidden in the woods is Randall Manor, the original seat of the de Cobhams. It is currently being excavated and budding archaeologists can join digs in July. The medieval manor had a series of ponds alongside, which may have provided fish for the high table.



Green and outstanding attractions

Shorne Woods Country Park
Ranscombe Farm
Cobham Park
Jeskyns Community Woodland
- north Kent and Medway



Ashenbank Wood



Ashenbank Wood is between Cobham Village and the A2 on the west side of Halfpence Lane where there is a car park. Public footpath NS178 between Cobham Village to Shorne Woods Country Park crosses the site.

For details visit www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or phone 01476 581111.

Jeskyns Community Woodland



Jeskyns is on the edge of Cobham Village, just off the A2 between Gravesend and Strood (A2 signposted Gravesend (east), Singlewell and Ifield).

Jeskyns Community Woodland, Henhurst Road, Cobham, DA12 3AN. Phone 01474 825118.

Visit www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns for a map.

Darnley Trail



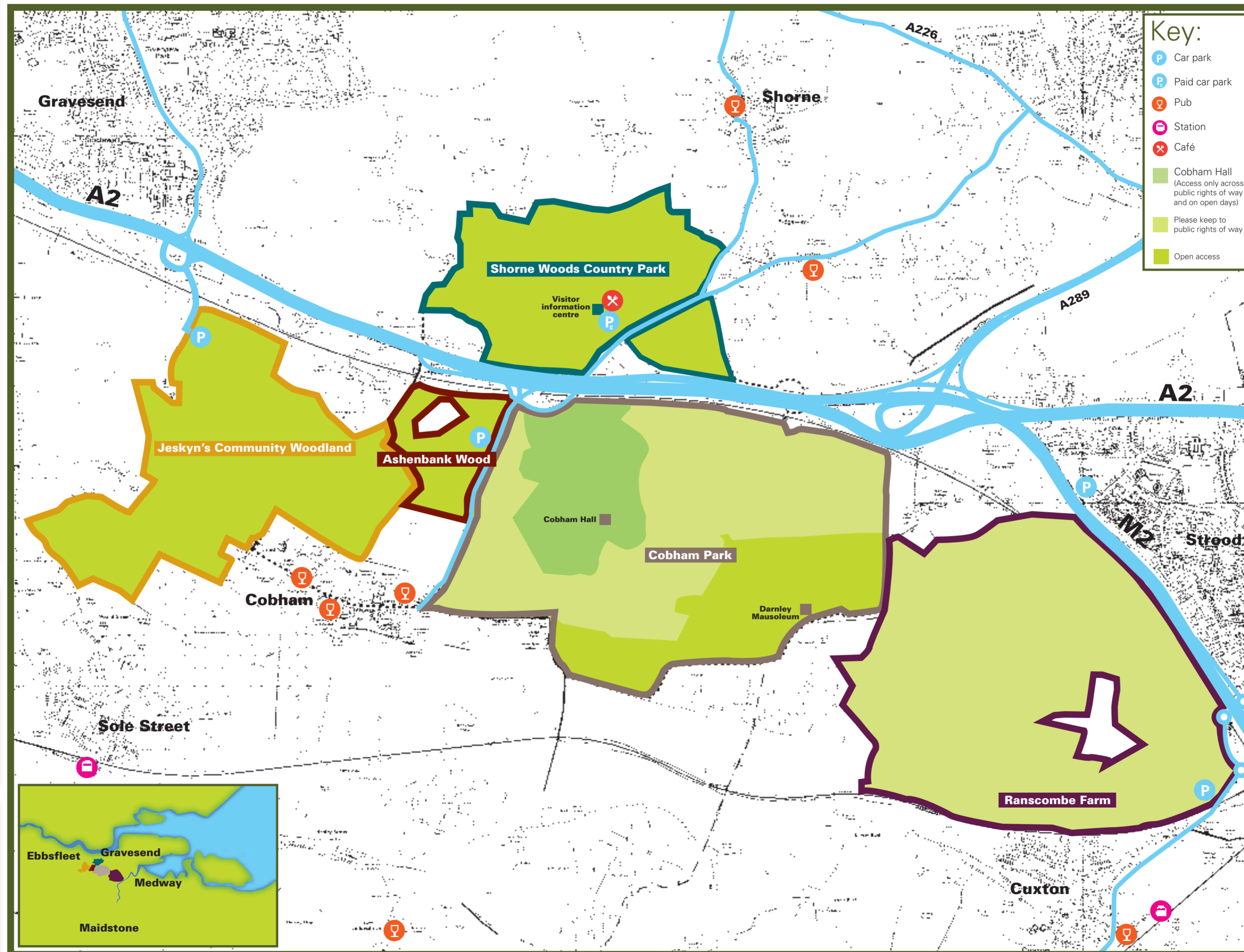
The Darnley Trail is a circular 'core' route for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians that links Shorne Woods Country Park with several key sites south of the A2 over a distance of approximately 10km. The Darnley Trail takes in Cobham Park, Ranscombe Farm Reserve, Ashenbank Wood and Jeskyns, with several entry points and various short cuts that make up a varied and interesting network. Horse box parking is available at Shorne Wood Country Park by arrangement, phone 01474 823800.

The Countryside Code

There are five sections of The Countryside Code dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.

- ▶ Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- ▶ Leave gates and property as you find them.
- ▶ Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- ▶ Keep dogs under close control.
- ▶ Consider other people.

Green and outstanding attractions



Shorne Woods Country Park



Shorne Woods Country Park is signposted at the A2 Shorne and Cobham turn off. Train stations are at Higham, Sole Street and Gravesend. All stations are served by the 416/417 RedRoute bus which stops outside the park entrance.

For details visit www.kent.gov.uk/countrysideaccess or phone 01474 823800.

Cobham Park



Cobham Park is south of the A2 (Shorne and Cobham turn off), east of Cobham Village. Cobham Hall and its grounds, and the Darnley Mausoleum are open on selected days. Cobham Wood is open all year, while other parts of the park can be accessed via footpaths.

Visit www.cobhampark.org.uk for more details

For opening times to Cobham Hall, phone 01474 823371

Darnley Mausoleum – for details visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk or phone 01372 453401

Ranscombe Farm



Ranscombe Farm is in Cuxton. There is a car park just off the roundabout on the junction of the A228 and M2.

Visit www.plantlife.org.uk for further details.