A Circular Walk
Exploring New Ash Green’s Orchard, Meadow and Woodlands
(approximately 3kms)

Just start from any point on the marked route and follow the arrows

Stout footwear is recommended in wet weather

There are steps on the path in Nine Horse Wood
1 **THE ORCHARD** was probably planted around 80 years ago and more than 80 of the original apple trees remain, mostly Bramley’s Seedling. In the 1970s the Orchard was used for picnics but it gradually became overgrown and impenetrable. In 2003 the Woodlands Group was formed to save the Orchard. It has been transformed and is once again a thriving traditional orchard providing a rich habitat for plants, lichens, insects and birds. New trees have been planted to fill gaps and increase diversity.

2 **THE MEADOW** is shown on the 1844 tithe map as two arable fields, called Caling Croft and Hogs Dean. It has been a wildflower meadow since at least the late 1960s and may have been used as grazing pasture for many decades before then. It is one of our most important spaces, being chalk grassland – a threatened and declining habitat in the UK. A Kent Wildlife Trust survey in 2005 recorded a wide range of wild plants, including pyramidal orchid, common broomrape (rare in Kent), cowslip, yellow rattle, fairy flax, marjoram and agrimony. Common lizards and a large number of butterflies, including holly blue, small heath and gatekeeper were also recorded.

3 **NINE HORSE WOOD** is shown on the 1792 survey map. It is classified as ‘Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland’ which means that it has existed as a managed wood since at least 1600. Nine Horse Wood is protected by a Tree Preservation Order and its continuing management must be both sensitive and appropriate. With the help of grants from the Forestry Commission, Kent County Council and the Big Lottery Fund, the Village Association has drawn up a 5-year regeneration programme from 2004.

    Ash and hornbeam are the most common tree species. When felled, like many British native trees, they re-grow from the stump, producing several shoots, which develop into strong poles. Traditionally these would be cut every 10 years or so, depending on the size required. This is known as coppicing and can prolong the life of the tree indefinitely – which helps explain several gnarled and very interesting old stumps with very strong vibrant new growth. However, if discontinued the multiple stems can grow to 60 feet or more and can become unstable. Because this is community woodland, with two Public Rights of Way and other paths running through it, public safety is a key concern but we also want to improve the overall health of the woodland and the wildlife and plants that depend upon it. This is why we have reintroduced coppicing in parts of the wood.

There are also excellent specimens of oak, wild cherry, sweet chestnut, silver birch and a large group of yew trees. Highlights of spring are the carpets of bluebells and dog’s mercury (both indicators of ancient woodland) and wood anemone. There is a significant badger sett in the wood. Badgers and their setts are protected by law. Tawny and little owls are regularly heard and often seen, as are green and greater spotted woodpeckers.

The village owns most of the woodland, but the 50 metre wide strip on the eastern edge, beyond the public footpath, belongs to someone else. There isn’t a fence and as paths cross the unmarked boundary walkers should be aware that at times they may not be on V.A. land.

4 **SPRING CROFT WOOD** is also Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, with many of the same species found in Nine Horse Wood. On either side of the path that runs between the neighbourhoods of Westfield and Bowes Wood, you can see the extent of the re-growth since the sweet chestnut trees were coppiced; on the Westfield side in 1999 and on the Bowes Wood side in 2006.

The natural spring here prompted the Romans to settle and to dig three ponds, only one of which remains (see 5 on the map). Hence this area is known as Pond Wood. In 1914 remains of the Roman farmhouse were discovered, and further remains were discovered when the land was cleared for the building of Westfield in the mid-1970s. The pond is important for wildlife with large numbers of breeding frogs and newts. Greater spotted woodpeckers nest in the trees around the pond.

As well as some areas being coppiced, about 30% of trees in other areas of both woodlands will be felled to let in more light to the woodland floor. This selective thinning and the creation of some open glades will improve the diversity of the woodland and is beneficial to the remaining trees and other wildlife. We are also clearing small areas around some of the more established trees. These trees, known as standards, are very important and we want people to be able to see and appreciate them more.

**THE WOODLANDS GROUP** was formed to regenerate the Orchard but also helps deliver the village’s woodland management plans. We have a wide membership, with ages from 5-70. New members are always made very welcome. There are activities for all abilities, from helping with tree felling to catering or tools maintenance. Children under 16 need to be accompanied by an adult. Workdays are usually on the third Saturday of each month. For further information contact Jerry Ash on 01474 879897. For seasonal walks, led by the Parish Tree Wardens, please contact Carole on 01474 874976. Visit [www.nagwoodlands.btck.co.uk](http://www.nagwoodlands.btck.co.uk) for both.