

The Lower Mole Partnership

The Partnership (formerly Project) was set up in 1983 and now covers an area of 264 square kilometres. The aim of the Partnership is to carry out countryside improvements for the benefit of people and wildlife, by:

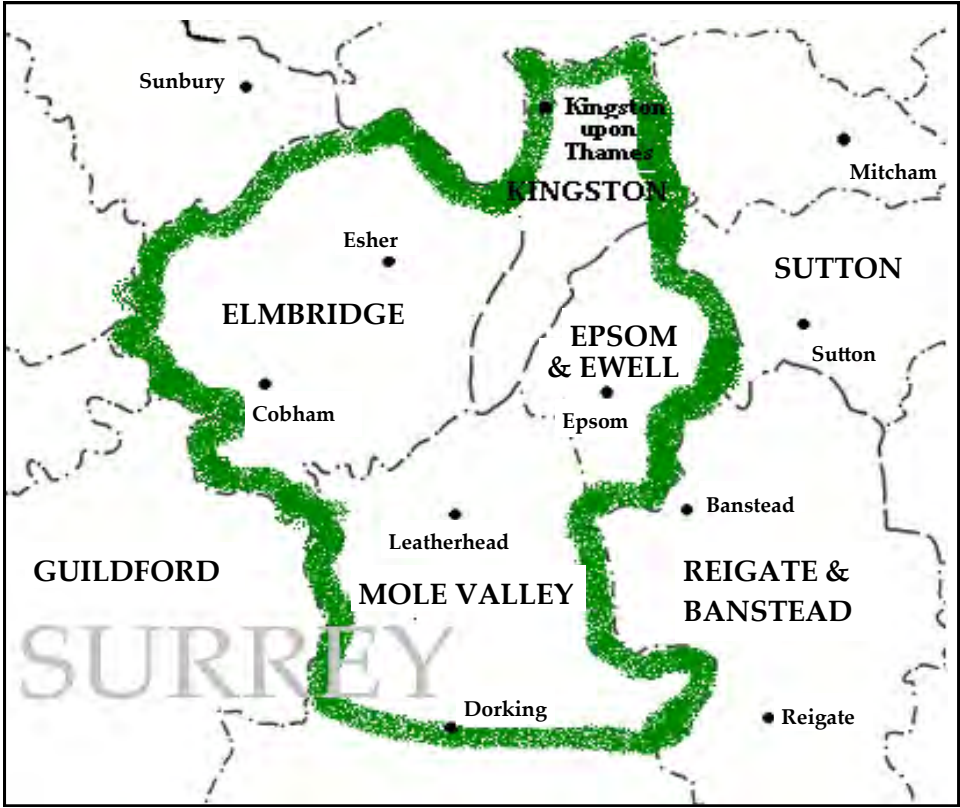
- Improving public access to the countryside for informal recreation.
- Conserving landscape features and enhancing the natural beauty of the countryside.
- Increasing public knowledge and understanding of the countryside.
- Encouraging greater community involvement in the countryside.

Partnership Staff

Helen Cocker - Operations Manager
Debbie Hescott -Partnership Development Officer
Freya Prince - Senior Countryside Partnership Officer
Louise Wilford - Partnership Officer
John Armitage - Partnership Officer

Trust Directors

Rod Shaw- Chairman
Sarah Clayton - Company Secretary
Martin Owen - Treasurer
Alan Sherren - Director
Dawn Fielding - Director
Helen Cocker - Director



The Lower Mole Countryside Trust

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust supports the provision of a high quality countryside management service for north Surrey and Kingston upon Thames for the benefit of landscape, wildlife and people.

The Trust supports the work of the Lower Mole Partnership and other community groups and organisations.

The Lower Mole area covers the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell and northern Mole Valley District in Surrey and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

The Aims of the Trust are to:

Educate – to help the public learn about the countryside and its management through talks, walks, leaflets and on-site information.

Conserve – to promote the conservation, restoration and the management of the countryside, wildlife habitats and characteristic landscapes.

Involve – to encourage the participation of the public in practical countryside management work.

Access – to improve public access to the countryside for informal recreation through publicising walking, riding and cycling routes and by promoting the establishment of new routes.

If you would like to become a member and/or a volunteer please contact us at the address below.

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust is a limited company. Registered Charity No. 1095771

Registered in Cardiff. Company No. 4454401. Registered office as below.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Directors of the Trust.

For further information on the work of the Trust or Partnership contact us on:

01372 743783

or write to: The Lower Mole Countryside Trust

2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 8PL

or visit the Partnership website: www.lowermoleproject.org.uk

Or the Trust website: www.lowermolecountrysideustrust.org.uk

or e-mail the Trust at LowerMoleTrust@outlook.com

or e-mail the Partnership at mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk

MOLE MATTERS



*Promoting
Countryside
Management*



Autumn 2024

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Restoration of Bramble Pond, Epsom Common

Pamela Harwood

Habitat loss remains one of the main reasons we see our wildlife disappearing. Ponds and wetlands teem with biodiversity, supporting two thirds of all freshwater species, including some of those most endangered. However many ponds have been lost due to draining to provide land for housing, industry and agriculture.

The important role of ponds in alleviating flooding is now also widely recognised. Having just experienced the wettest September recorded in the UK and the increasing unpredictability of our climate, their creation or maintenance has never been more important.

This summer Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, as owners of Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, along with Epsom Common Association (ECA) and the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) started the first phase of work to restore one of the ponds on Epsom Common. Provisionally named “Bramble Pond,” it is shown on maps indicating that it is over 160 years old and was probably a clay pit for the nearby brickworks. The photo from 1910 shows various ponds, as well as fewer trees on that part of the Common. The project does not aim to open up views as seen in the old photograph but will leave a fringe of vegetation along Bramble Walk that will help ensure that wildlife can flourish with minimal disturbance.

Against the odds and despite some later filling with rubbish and clinker, the pond still remains. It is now heavily shaded, particularly by several large willows growing from its bed. The shade inhibits the growth of aquatic vegetation, while the trees quickly suck up water, causing the pond to dry out quite soon after filling in winter.

Despite these problems, a small area of a grass called Glyceria remains, and in 2024 eggs of Great Crested Newts were found attached to the grass. However it is believed that the pond dries out too quickly for the newts to complete their life cycle. Given that newts, as well as frogs, dragonflies, and other aquatic animals, already breed in a nearby pond, the opportunity to restore Bramble Pond and increase the available habitat seems too good to miss.



Newts found in a survey on another pond on Epsom Common

The project is funded from a legacy to the ECA in memory of a former volunteer, Dave Berry. Some of the legacy was used previously to create “Berry Pond” on Rye Meadow in 2022. The project has received approval from Natural England for staged restoration and work commenced during September 2024. LMP and ECA volunteers (EcoVols) spent several days taking out smaller trees and scrub from the vicinity of the pond to aid access for the removal of the large willows. The following week a contractor felled some of the willows rooted in the bed of the pond. Access for another contractor to treat a large patch of



How the pond looked in 1910



Berry Pond on Rye Meadow

Japanese Knotweed near the pond was made possible by further clearance by the EcoVols.

Phase 2 will be carried out in 2025, including removal of silt and tree roots from the bed, to try to ensure that the pond remains wet long enough for amphibians to develop to the stage where they leave the water and move on to land. The pond will be monitored to assess the effects of the work carried out and it is hoped that the resulting habitat will add to the already existing valuable diversity of life within Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve.

For further information on Epsom Common Association go to <https://epsomcommon.org.uk>

Rye Meadows Wetlands

Rod Shaw

The term ‘Rye Meadows Wetlands’ Local Nature Reserve refers to a narrow belt of open green space on the northern edge of Ashted village through which flows The Rye Brook. This small stream flows east to west and joins the River Mole at Fetcham. For about 14 years the ten fields comprising the Rye Meadows Wetlands Reserve have been managed by a group of volunteers, the Friends of Ashted Rye Meadows Wetlands on behalf the landowner, Daphne Burnett.

This 14 acres of land between Links Road and Ashted Woods Road in north west Ashted has a particular, strategic importance. It forms a link in a chain of wildlife sites from Epsom Common and Ashted Common in the east to Teazel Wood, Fetcham Splash and Bookham Common in the west. These sites, including the Rye Meadows, are all managed positively for nature conservation to create a rich corridor for wildlife.

The Rye Brook is the backbone to the reserve and has great wildlife potential. The Brook drains much of the surface water from Ashted village. The meadows either side of the Brook hold water during times of flood, thus protecting adjacent properties from floodwater. Historically the poor draining heavy clay in the part of Ashted was referred to as ‘The Great Marsh’.

The Lower Mole Partnership first became involved in 2011 when Daphne was in discussions with the Woodland Trust about tree planting near the Rye Brook. Previously, the LMP had made many improvements in the area, from way-marking to stiles to path surfacing and had carried out hedgerow surveys.

Together, Daphne, LMP manager Helen Cocker, the Woodland Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust, and landscape architect Stephanie Weinmann came up with a plan to make major changes to the river and the meadows which would lead to huge gains in biodiversity and public access. The scheme developed from planting some trees, to restoring the river and with support from the Environment Agency, creating a whole new wetland environment, while developing a lovely tranquil area where local people could visit and just enjoy nature.

The LMP got behind the scheme and over the next couple of years their volunteers contributed over 250 hours and helped to plant 1700 trees around the meadows, including protective tubes and stakes and installed fence posts for the electric fencing.

Scrapes, shallow depressions, and a large pond, have been created adjacent to the river. These provide habitat for a variety of invertebrates in particular. Vegetation along the banks of the Rye Brook has been thinned to allow more light into the river. Additional copses have been planted consisting of a mix of native tree species.

A feature of the floodplain either side of the Rye Brook are the meadows. There is great potential to improve the diversity of plants within the sward. Adopting a regime of cutting and removing the grass clippings reduces fertility, allowing wildflowers to compete with more aggressive grasses. Yellow Rattle, a parasitic plant that weakens the grasses, was sown successfully, opening the sward and allowing

wild flowers to self-seed.

Within “Centenary Field” public access is encouraged, and in 2017 the LMP volunteers constructed a 100m long boardwalk to improve access. The field is dedicated to local people who lost their lives in the Great War. It is a lovely part of the Reserve with seating, also installed by volunteers.

Managing the Rye Meadows Wetlands is a constant learning experience both for the volunteers and others such as Duke of Edinburgh award students and geography students from St Andrew’s school.

The future looks bright for the Rye Meadows Local Nature Reserve. After years of hard work to get the reserve and volunteer group established, Daphne Burnett has now passed the ownership to Surrey Wildlife Trust. SWT has provided the Friends of Ashted Rye Meadows Wetlands with a comprehensive management plan and the volunteers will be supported with additional expertise and equipment to continue the work of enhancing this important piece of natural heritage.



Centenary Field

Welcome...

to the Autumn 2024 edition of Mole Matters.

In this issue we catch up on what has been happening at Ashtead Rye Meadows and look back at the history of Bramble Pond on Epsom Common.

In addition you will find the usual items to keep you up to date with the work of the Partnership and its volunteers, as well as an update on the grants the Trust has awarded.

Front cover shows LMP volunteer Lucien in our typically autumnal weather



The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is a new spatial strategy to improve nature in Surrey aiming to:

- Reconnect as much of the local habitat as possible to create larger, better managed, and more joined up areas for nature.
- Ensure improved management of existing designated sites to provide better habitat for key species.
- Where possible ensure these areas also provide other environmental benefits such as: flood alleviation, water storage, carbon sequestration (soaking up carbon from the atmosphere), shelter, pollution filters
- To better engage the community with nature rich spaces for health and wellbeing.

Surrey County Council have been appointed as the Responsible Authority, working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the LNRS is produced, formally adopted, and reviewed. The consultation stage has now finished but if you would like to find out more visit the link below

[Have Your Say Today - Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Commonplace](#)

News in Brief

Hedgehog and wildlife survey

This is a part of the Zoological Society of London's (ZSL's) London HogWatch Project. The aim is to gain a better understanding of wild mammal distributions in your neighbourhoods.

Please answer this survey, even if you haven't seen any of these mammals in your neighbourhood. Collecting absence data is also extremely useful

Here is the link to the Historical knowledge survey: <https://tinyurl.com/ysxezjw4>, it only takes a couple of minutes to fill in.

Lower Mole Scheme

Have your say on the Lower Mole Flood Alleviation Scheme. The original Lower Mole FAS was designed to reduce the risk of flooding in the lower reaches of the River Mole catchment, following a significant flood event in September 1968. The River Mole has a history of flooding, though the September 1968 event is still considered to be the largest and most severe recorded flood event along the River Mole. It has been estimated that several thousand properties in the lower reaches of the River Mole were flooded during that event.

The scheme is now reaching the end of its design life and needs to be refurbished to maintain its standard of flood protection and to ensure it is the best scheme for the environment, people and wildlife.

There are six main water level control structures, sluice gates, and we need to make decisions on their future. The online consultation is open until midnight on 6th November at <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk/engagement/hq.com/hub-page/lower-mole-flood-alleviation-scheme>

Firewood Update

The Lower Mole Partnership has had an audit of our processes by Woodsure and has been approved again to sell firewood. This follows on from a successful first year of selling firewood under the Ready to Burn scheme. The income generated from the sale of this by product will go back to supporting the LMP to carry out local conservation work.

Young Street Verge

Young Street Verge has been approved by the Surrey Local Sites Partnership as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), and the final steps to formally designate it are now being implemented.

SNCI's are identified at a local level for their conservation value. Many SNCI's can be just as bio-diverse as sites with higher levels of protection, however they do not have statutory status and their protection relies on local government policy.

SNCI's may support locally or nationally threatened wildlife and play a critical role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage. They provide essential wildlife refuges, as well as acting as stepping stones, corridors and buffer zones to link other natural spaces in urban and rural areas.

This designation is due to the hard work of the Moles over the years, and the survey that LMCT funded was used as evidence of its value.



Lower Mole Partnership Volunteer Task Update

Freya Prince

The Moles have had another busy spring and summer. It's been filled with more step building, path surfacing, balsam pulling, more step building, a brand-new task, lots of time in the workshop and yet more steps. The volunteers have worked tirelessly putting in around 3000 hours of amazing work, as we start heading in to winter, we would like to say thank you and look forward to a busy scrub clearing season.

April started out with some much-needed time in the workshops, this was a mix of sorting the workshop ready for the summer as well as fixing and replacing some signage in Horton Country Park and Castle hill. Middle of the month brought the yearly trip to Epsom common to go the grazing preparations. John and some brave volunteers also transported the old charcoal kiln to 60-acre wood for a local coppicer. We also had workshop tasks through the summer season where we made way markers for Ashtead common, location signs for Epsom Common, produced and moved a ton of firewood, made some dormouse boxes to go up at Brockham limeworks plus many more essential tasks to help the partnership function.

May saw our first step building task at Molesey Heath where we had been asked to repair and replace 4 sets of steps across the site. The rest of May was then filled with step building at the Ledges which was a community infrastructure heavy project funded by Elmbridge council, 48 steps were built and filled. As we ended May we returned to Molesey heath and continued this into June. By our 3rd week there we had replaced all 4 sets and replaced 51 steps in total!

The Rest of June saw the volunteer's pulling balsam at Cowey sale at Fetcham splash, where we were joined by St Georges school on their commu-

nity service week as well as a group from Surreys continuing care team. We finished the month surfacing 200m of path at Ashtead Park.

Up until June the task programme had been the victim of the incredibly wet weather we had received. July brought a nice change with some dry weather. Just in time for ragwort pulling at Non-such Park and Headly Warren (where there was hardly any, and we cleared small scrub instead). Non-such park saw the volunteers and a couple of corporate groups clear ragwort from 8.1ha of grassland. There was also a trip out to Brooklands community park where we surfaced 40m of path.

August saw the introduction of a brand-new task Chestnut splitting! The team travelled out to Norbury park for 2 weeks where they learned how to split chestnut logs into post and rail elements. They made 200 rails and 100 posts using wedges, sledgehammers and axes, with the occasional chainsaw. The second week the materials made were used to build a brand-new fence along the path near the coffee hut. We are hoping to go back there next year and make some more.

We finished of the summer season with another new site to the Moles, Pixham Meadows, a private site owned by Mole Valley, where we did a meadow cut to improve the



New steps at The Ledges

wildflowers. It also saw the start of the bramble walk pond project for Epsom and Ewell and the Eco vols of Epsom Common. This year's job was to clear the scrub and the larger trees in preparation for re digging the pond next year. The final weeks saw us carry out a task that had been planned for May (moved due to the rain, but we still didn't avoid it) which was to fence around the pond that the team dug last Summer, Hollymoor Pond in Horton Country Park. It was great to fully finish the pond and protect it from dog use. We want to say a huge thank you to the volunteers for their hard work over the last 6 months.



Dormouse boxes produced in our workshops

Path surfacing in Ashtead Park

Protecting our woodland heritage

Surrey County Council Countryside Estate recognise the huge importance of woodland heritage and the biodiversity, health, wellbeing and climate change benefits that it provides for all residents. However, significant challenges threaten the health and viability of much of the woodlands and trees in Surrey and nationally. The most diverse woodland in Surrey is the ancient broadleaved and mixed woodland, which played an essential role in providing timber for local areas, harvested on a regular rotational basis. Since the decline in demand for home grown wood in the last 100 or so years, many wooded areas have not always been managed as woodlands and lack of management has led to a decline in biodiversity, and in some cases extinction of local species for example some woodland butterflies. The rise in the deer population and diseases such as ash dieback and oak processionary moth have all led to a worsening of the problem. Climate change is making the situation worse with the impact of hotter, drier summers and more severe storms. Such unprecedented circumstances require a much more positive and active approach to how we manage our woodland and trees if we are to maintain Surrey's status as the most wooded county in England.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Woodlands Restoration Plans have been written to strengthen SCCs approach to managing protected woodlands, with the aim of bringing their condition to favourable. The existing ten year woodland management plans were updated in 2023 to reflect current challenging situations in relation to new diseases and climate change as well as the developing Nature Recovery Strategy. For more information visit: surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/countryside/management/woodlands#sssi



Moles do the splits

This summer the LMP team had a go at a brand-new task, Chestnut splitting! This was arranged with Surrey Countryside estates as they have started to focus more on their woodland management and crafts. We were asked if we would want to make some traditional post and rail fencing and then install some of what we made at Norbury Park.

So, John, Louise and the volunteers armed with some wedges and sledgehammers descended upon Norbury Park for 2 weeks this August. They had a fantastic time learning a new skill helped by Tom Hawkins SCCs woodland crafts officer who showed them the ropes. Over the course of the week, they made 100 posts and 200 rails. The 2nd week was spent installing their freshly made fencing next to the coffee shop within Norbury Park. Hopefully we can make this a regular summer task.



Big Chalk Project

The Big Chalk Partnership is developing and delivering projects that contribute to a vision of nature-rich chalk and limestone landscapes that benefit all of us.

Growing from an initial partnership of Protected Landscapes, the Big Chalk Partnership comprises more than 150 organisations with a common vision of creating thriving chalk and limestone landscapes across southern England. At its heart are 13 National Landscapes, the South Downs National Park and eight National Trails, including the iconic Ridgeway.

Big Chalk performs a vital role in nature's recovery, connecting national targets and plans with participatory modes of delivery, including regional and local partnerships and farm clusters.

Since the Surrey based Countryside Management Projects were set up, they have looked across borders and land ownerships to make links between habitats.

We are excited to announce that the Surrey Countryside Partnership has recently been accepted as a Big Chalk Project. They have a small staff team and a large volunteer team supporting us, contributing more than 23,000 volunteer hours last year.

The Big Chalk vision matches our ambition and gives us the opportunity to share our experience and raise the profile of our work. For more information visit www.big-chalk.org

GRANTS GRANTS GRANTS

New tools for the LMP

The LMCT recently awarded a grant of £439 to the Lower Mole Partnership for the purchase of new tools.

This will enable them to purchase a new router and jigsaw for their workshops tasks, some saws for site work and a second splitting axe for volunteers to use to process firewood.



Hedge planting

In September the LMCT also agreed to cover the volunteer task running cost for a Lower Mole Partnership hedge planting task at Rushett Farm. This project is also supported by a grant from CPRE London Hedgerow Heroes for the cost of the hedge plants, guards and stakes for 300m of new hedge.



Fire break created on Ashtead Common last year

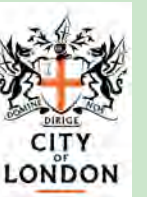
Emergency First Aid Training

The LMCT awarded a grant to the Lower Mole Partnership for some of their volunteers to attend a one day Emergency First Aid + F training day.

This course builds on the required skills, knowledge and understanding from Emergency First Aid at Work to give you the critical breadth and depth you need in the Forestry industry.

The Downlands Trust also funded some places for some of the Downlands Partnership volunteers to attend.

Ashtead Common Climate Resilience



In October, the LMP are due to complete the second year of work on their two year work plan, carrying out improvements on the common to widen fire-breaks making it more protected during the predicted hotter summers. Work will be a continuation of where we worked last year, along the edge of the common close to Ashtead Gap. Ashtead Common is a National Nature Reserve, and the work is supported by the City of London Corporation, via a grant made to the Lower Mole Countryside Trust.