



**Yateley Common Management Committee
HCC Managers Report March 2018 – compiled 23rd February
Nicki Paton**

Steve Ord has joined the team as Countryside Ranger for Castle Bottom and other sites. Recruitment has begun for another Assistant Ranger and a Commons/Community Engagement Officer.

➤ **Site Maintenance**

Regular works

There have been regular site checks and litter patrols across Yateley Common and all other sites.

Safety inspections of site infrastructure on-going

Ongoing site signage maintenance and replacement

Monitoring of culverts and ditch clearance has been carried out

Maintenance of machinery carried out

Ongoing depot maintenance and management carried out

Cutting back and mowing of bridleways and pathways

(On-going regular works on other sites within our remit)

Additional works

Removal of numerous trees as part of the ongoing tree safety inspections (all sites)

Removal of fly tipping

Replace/repair section of boardwalk at Stroud's Pond

Added new step 'grips' to steps and boardwalk at Castle Bottom

(On-going works on other sites within our remit)

➤ **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common

Much scrub management by staff and volunteers on Brandy Bottom heath by The Ely, near Heathland Cemetery and on Castle Bottom

Scrub management by contractors across Castle Bottom and Yateley Common

Heather/molinia (grass) mowing of small areas at Castle Bottom and Yateley Common

Stump grinding in areas where trees were previously felled (Castle Bottom and Yateley Common)

Other sites

Oversee ponies grazing at Castle Bottom.

'Scrapes' to create bare ground at Shortheath Common

Scrub clearance at Broxhead Common

Cleared mire of scrub at Zebon Copse

Scrub clearance at Shortheath Common

➤ **Illegal Activities**

Fly Tipping - There have been numerous fly tip events across the site over the past four months, including builders waste, household waste and hazardous waste. The hazardous waste was removed by specialist contractor. It is hoped the HCC Fly Tipping strategy continues to progress and that Yateley will be used as a pilot study for the scheme. A recent change in staff has temporarily stalled the project.

Two 'camps' were also removed.

Dumped vehicles - There have been no reports of abandoned vehicles since the last meeting.

Motorbikes – Please report any sightings to the Police on 101.

Fires – A couple of small fires were extinguished by Hampshire Fire Service.

Grazing – There has been no fly grazing since November's meeting.

➤ **Tree Inspections**

We are continuing to organise and carry out remedial works to trees identified as medium risk in the tree safety surveys. Further ad hoc tree inspections are ongoing.

Further meetings have taken place with Blackbushe Airport regarding trees on the common affecting the sight lines. Blackbushe are working with the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) about a potential future management plan which suits both landowners.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

The noticeboards have been kept up to date with news and information. The noticeboard at the Gravel Pit car park was vandalised, so once it has new 'legs' it will be re-sited. Maintenance and cleaning of all site signage is on-going as and when necessary.

'Ground nesting birds' signs have gone up (1st March to 31st July/15th September) asking dog walkers to keep dogs on leads during the bird nesting season.

As new branding has been adopted for the Countryside Service, new uniform has been ordered and will shortly be arriving for all staff and volunteers. Site signage around all HCC Countryside sites is scheduled for replacement over the next year. We are currently out to quote for the new signage and replacement of signs will most likely commence in April 2018.

➤ **Wildlife**

The SPA bird surveys are underway for this year and it is hoped that numbers continue to grow this season. Much habitat restoration work has taken place across the common and it is hoped that this will be advantageous to the birds and other wildlife inhabiting the site.

Reptile surveys will begin in April with several surveys being carried out across the summer months. Rapid Habitat Assessments are underway for key habitats; these help us assess the condition of the habitats across our sites and to make decisions about future management.

➤ **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens are about to take on another team of seasonal wardens to assist them with their work across the SPA. The team now keep a van at our depot base, which makes it easier for them to access our sites.

The TBH wardens 'pit stops' on sites across the SPA, including Yateley Common, are up and running again, educating all users of the SPA about the importance of the heaths and what makes them special.

We are in the process of recruiting a part time Community Engagement officer who will assist the team with educational bookings/sessions and will liaise with residents, community groups and volunteers about issues affecting the common. It is hoped that they will also work closely with partner organisations on projects to promote the value of our sites.

➤ **Rights of Way (RoW)**

The Rights of Way Diversion Order (west of Cricket Hill) is still currently being reviewed. The report produced by Highways regarding the crossing points was fairly inconclusive and a little vague, so we are looking again at how best we can progress this project. More details to follow.

➤ **Wyndham's Pool**

The angling lease with Hartley Wintney Angling Society is now overdue for renewal so we are liaising with our Estates colleagues and the club to establish any new terms. Their management of the ponds over the past five years have been good and we hope that a good working relationship can be maintained into the future.

➤ **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

Much work has been carried out over the autumn/winter months, continuing our heathland restoration programme. Scrub clearance has been carried out by staff and volunteers at both Yateley Common and Castle Bottom. The additional funding we were awarded from the Countryside Service has accelerated our scrub clearance programme across the heathland sites this winter. This work was carried out primarily by a local contractor. In total we have cleared nearly 16 hectares of scrub from Yateley Common and Castle Bottom, 2.44ha of this was cleared by volunteers.

Contractors also carried out some mowing on the East and West Ends to target areas of purple moor grass and mature heath. Previously felled areas had the stumps ground out; this levels the ground allowing us to carry out future management with machinery. Some outstanding felling works was also carried out near Wyndhams, although the ground conditions were not conducive during the early part of the winter and so final works will be required this autumn.

➤ **Track Maintenance**

The condition of Stroud Lane is deteriorating and we are in discussions with the license holder who laid the trial surface regarding any remedial works, however, it is likely that the trial webbing will be removed. We will liaise with residents about future management of the track in due course, but this is likely to be carried out in much the same way as it is around the rest of the common with residents contributing to the costs of the work.

We will carry out repairs to tracks leading to public car parks in the warmer months and will liaise with residents around other parts of the common about any other works leading to properties.

➤ **Yateley Common Grazing Consultation**

No further developments from HCC in this area of work at this time.

➤ **The Ranger's House**

It is understood that HCC's Estates team are working on an application to the Planning Inspectorate, which is due to be submitted within the next couple of months. This will involve the exchange of land at The Rangers House for land near The Cricketers pub.

➤ **Archaeology**

Nothing to report at this time.

➤ **Volunteers**

We continue to receive much needed support from our dedicated team of volunteers. This is primarily from the Yateley Society Conservation Volunteers (YSCV) and our regular 'Thursday' volunteers, of whom we regularly have 6.

We also receive help from our dedicated volunteer pony lookers who help us keep an eye on the ponies at Castle Bottom throughout the week. We also now have help from a volunteer who assists with admin/office tasks every Friday.

We were joined by a group of corporate volunteers at Zebon Copse in November and by a team of Natural England employees clearing scrub on Yateley Common in December. We also hosted a session with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in November cutting scrub at Castle Bottom.

Volunteer hours since the last meeting:

Month	YC Hours	Other Sites Hours	All Sites Hours
November	33	188.5	221.5
December	312	97	409
January	134	59.75	193.75
February	116.5	38.5	155
TOTAL	595.5 (240.75)	383.75 (239.91)	979.25 (480.66)

Note: Figures compiled 23rd February. Bold figures in brackets are for March 2017

This shows the huge commitment to volunteering across the north area for which we are so very grateful. Special thanks to all volunteers old and new, we truly appreciate all your help. We will publicise this great achievement in the next few weeks.

➤ **Education**

We have already started taking bookings for our education sessions which usually take place during the summer term with both school and Girl Guide/Scout groups alike.

➤ **Events**

Our Christmas Trees for Conservation event was very popular again this year with 96 people attending. In return for their Christmas tree, volunteers helped clear birch and gorse scrub from the heath near The Ely.

We are holding the annual 'Big Spring Clean' again this year on Saturday 3rd March 10am-1pm, as this proves a popular event with the community and in particular the Girl Guide and Scout groups.

Places on our upcoming Easter Trail are now available. This year the event is being held on Good Friday 30th March 11am–1pm.

(Visit the **Hantsweb Online Shop** for booking:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/shop/product.php?productid=51194&cat=356&page=1>

Places are limited)

➤ **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 728 (710) likes

Twitter – 1182 (1143) followers

(last meetings figures in brackets)

The Hantsweb Shop is used for booking events and renewing 'Friends' membership. Places on the 'Easter Trail' event can be booked through the online shop (see link above).

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To circulate:

Team Managers Report