



## **Annual Report**

Report of the Board of the Lower Mole Countryside Trust for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014.

### **Introduction**

This is the eleventh annual report produced by the Lower Mole Countryside Trust and covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014.

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee, company number 4454401 and is a registered charity, number 1095771.

The registered office is 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, KT19 8PL.

The objects of the charity are:

- (1) To advance the education of the public on matters connected with countryside management within and around the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Kingston upon Thames and the District of Mole Valley (north of Dorking) and such other areas as the charity may from time to time decide.
- (2) To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and promote the management of the countryside, wildlife habitats and characteristic landscapes by supporting, promoting and improving public access to the countryside, promoting the participation of the public in countryside management and supporting conservation projects and programmes within the area of benefit.

The Mission Statement is 'to support the provision of a high quality countryside management service for north Surrey and Kingston upon Thames for the benefit of landscape, wildlife and people'.

### **Activities and achievements**

#### **Board Meetings**

Six board meetings have been held in the reporting period, which in the main have concentrated on the formal business normally associated with boards such as membership applications, financial reports and forward planning. In addition the Board agreed to fund sixteen projects, of which nine have now been completed and seven are in progress.

#### **Business Plan**

The format of the Trusts annual action plan is to assign roles to a named trustee. The roles include; management of meetings, statutory duties, accounts, events, publicity, membership admin

## **Organisation**

The number of trustees was eight during this year. Mike Richardson is Chairman. Bryan Muddle is treasurer and membership secretary. Sarah Clayton is company secretary. At the AGM in March 2014, Bryan Muddle and Alan Sherren stood down and offered themselves for re-election, both were re-elected.

## **Finance**

This year the Trust raised a total of £8702.56 for the general fund and £4966.00 that was restricted to specified projects. The main sources of income have been from charitable sales, donations and subscriptions. By-products of conservation work carried out by the Lower Mole Project resulted in sales of woodcrafts, logs and charcoal etc., which brought in £4534.50.

## **Membership**

The number of members at the end of this year was 66, including 31 individuals, 25 senior citizens, 3 families, 3 groups, 3 honorary members and 1 Local Authority. Two newsletters were sent to members, one in September 2013 and one in March 2014. One evening talk for members and volunteers was held, after the AGM in March 2014 entitled "Small Blue and other Butterflies" by Sarah Meredith of Butterfly Conservation

## **Publicity and Activities**

The Trust had a presence at seven public events over the year. One of which was Epsom Common Day where the Trust sold refreshments.

The Trust has its own website on [www.lowermolecountrysidetrust.org.uk](http://www.lowermolecountrysidetrust.org.uk) and has continued its presence on the web on a free site within the surrey community info pages, giving background information, news and forthcoming events and is also listed on [www.charityportal.org.uk](http://www.charityportal.org.uk) and on [www.guidestar.org.uk](http://www.guidestar.org.uk).

In the period September 2013 to the end of August 2014, 262.5 volunteer hours working for the Trust were recorded.

## **Projects and Grants**

The Trust agreed a one off contribution to the Lower Mole Project towards the future running costs of the Living Woodlands Land Rover.

The Trust continued to part fund the annual costs, and agreed a further year's funding of the Heritage Skills Trainees for the Lower Mole Project, as part of the Skills for the Future scheme.

A grant was made to the Friends of Rye Meadows Wetlands for training and certification of two of their volunteers in the use of brushcutters plus the purchase of appropriate safety equipment

New gate and deer fencing installed at Watercut Copse and Polyapes was funded by a grant from the Living Woodlands fund.

The cost of brushcutter training to enable an individual to clear scrub on an island in the River Mole was paid for by a grant from the Trust.

Project volunteers erected a fence along the boundary at Jubilee Wood Local Nature Reserve to replace the existing derelict one, this was funded by the Trust from a Neighbourhood grant received last year from the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

Following a Neighbourhood grant received from the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames last year, access improvements were made at Coombe Hill Wood for the benefit of local residents and site users.

A mobile sawmill was hired by the Lower Mole Project, paid for by a grant from the Trust. This allowed a number of large oak butts to be sawn up to produce timber used by them in the construction of signposts, benches etc.

A grant was made to the Lower Mole Project to cover the cost of purchasing a petrol powered pole saw. This will allow a quicker and safer method of pruning high branches by a member of Project staff.

200 hazel trees were purchased and planted at Castle Hill Local Nature Reserve by the Lower Mole Project with a grant from the Trust. These will benefit the local environment by improving the habitat for wildlife.

A Joint application between the Downlands and Lower Mole Projects was made to SITA for funds to restore chalk grassland at five sites including Epsom Downs. This required an 11% contribution from the applicants prior to the application being agreed. The Trust covered the Lower Mole Project's contribution.

11 people became temporary Great Crested Newt accredited agents as a result of attending a training course, organised by the Lower Mole Project and paid for by the Trust. These licences will enable the holders to check local ponds in the area for the presence of Great Crested Newts.

The Trust has continued to be involved in the charcoal production on Epsom Common. Volunteers from the Epsom Common Volunteers (Ecovols) carry out regular charcoal burns using wood produced as a by-product of conservation management and the Trust handles the sales of these, taking a small percentage. A total of 140 bags of charcoal and 6 bags of fines have been sold, with the proceeds split between the Trust and the Ecovols.

Last year the Trust successfully raised funds on behalf of Epsom & Ewell's Countryside Team for the restoration of the Lamberts Orchard Pond by the Lower Mole Project. Donations were received from Surrey County Council Members Allocations and also from the Friends of Horton Country Park. This work has now been completed and the clearing of vegetation around the pond and silt from within it allowed more light in to improve the water quality for dragonflies and damselflies, as well as the general public.

Following an application by the Lower Mole Project last year a grant was made to cover the cost of a portable generator and also a new router. The generator is lightweight and can be easily lifted as opposed to the existing one, which strained the backs of the two people lifting it.

The Trust has agreed a number of grants for work or purchases to be carried out during the 2014/2015 period. These include tree felling at Polyapes Scout Camp, the purchase of asphalt rakes, a gazebo and a planer/thicknesser by the Lower Mole Project. A hedgerow survey training course for volunteers from the Kingston Environment Centre.

A grant has been received from Elmbridge Borough Council for restoration work to be carried out by the Lower Mole Project on West End Common. The work was done in August 2014.

## **Policy for the selection of individuals and institutions who are to receive grants**

The Board will determine which projects to support based on the following:

- It must be in accordance with the aims of the Trust
- It should be visible to the public and/or of benefit to the public
- If the proposal relates to conservation interest it must be in line with the relevant Habitat Action Plan or Species Action Plan
- If the proposal improves public access it must not be detrimental to any conservation interest
- It should be supported by the local community.

The Board will consider applications for up to £500 submitted on the application form outlining the project and any other funding sources. Larger applications can be considered but the budget available is small. Forms are issued to all grant recipients to enable awards to be monitored. The total grant fund available each year is based on the total income of the Trust minus predicted annual running costs for the next two years.

## **The Future**

The Trust has been established as a charity for just over eleven and a half years and has raised £177,167 (up to 31 August 2014) and supported 59 different projects so far. The Trust will continue to support the Living Woodlands initiative which is likely to continue expanding with new woods coming into management, many of which will require improvements to infrastructure before economical sustainable management can start, this is where the Trust can assist with funds for secure gateways, surfaced storage areas and access tracks.

Following the review and restructure of the Countryside Management Projects in Surrey, a Countryside Partnerships Board has been established to steer the work of the Surrey Countryside Partnership team. The Lower Mole Countryside Trust has been invited to have a seat on the Board and the chairman has been appointed.

## **Statement of relationships**

Relationship with organisations with which the Trust co-operates

Lower Mole Countryside Management Project: The Lower Mole Project hosts the Trust by providing office space, meeting rooms and computing facilities. The time the staff who are employed by the Project spend on work for the Trust is donated by the Project.

Epsom Common Association: The Trust works with the volunteer arm of the ECA, the Ecovols, on the charcoal project, with proceeds from sales split between the Trust and Ecovols.

## **Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons**

Lower Mole Countryside Management Project, 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, KT19 8PL  
Bankers – CafBank Ltd, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA

## **Charity Trustees**

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Chairman                       | Mike Richardson |
| Company Secretary              | Sarah Clayton   |
| Treasurer/Membership Secretary | Bryan Muddle    |
| Member of the Board            | Helen Cocker    |
| Member of the Board            | Pamela Harwood  |
| Member of the Board            | Alan Sherren    |
| Member of the Board            | David Wall      |
| Member of the Board            | Phil Greenwood  |