Briefing note 4 March 2026
Managing the countryside in Epsom & Ewell - taking forward what works

1. The current reorganisation of Surrey local government creates both opportunities for and threats to the management of Surrey's countryside. This briefing note, written by two volunteers involved in countryside management tasks in the Epsom and Ewell area, highlights what works well currently… and could be continued into the future.

Current situation

2. Epsom and Ewell has a lot of high quality green space — both public open space and other green belt which in total comprise over 40% of the Epsom and Ewell area. Designated sites include: two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), five Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and thirteen Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). Most of the green space (designated or not) lies in Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, as described by Surrey Nature Partnership.

3. Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) manages three LNRs: Epsom Common (SSSI & SNCI), Hogsmill (SNCI) and Horton Country Park (SNCI). Together with Sutton Council, EEBC manages Nonsuch Park SNCI. It is also involved in the management of other sites, notably Epsom Downs Golf Course SNCI and Epsom Downs SNCI.

4. Surrey Wildlife Trust manages two SNCIs: Priest Hill and Howell Hill, the Woodland Trust manages Langley Vale Wood (SNCI), with assistance from Surrey Countryside Partnerships staff, and Warren Farm.

5. This large area of high quality nature sites takes much effort to maintain in favourable condition - and the opportunity exists to do more were sufficient resources available.

What makes it work?

6. Key ingredient to managing and maintaining the status of these many sites is a flexible network of countryside volunteering groups working in Epsom and Ewell — providing, in aggregate, about 8800 volunteer hours pa. (see table overleaf) with these volunteers being managed and supported by two local authority organisations:

- EEBC Countryside Team - Expert Countryside Officers (3 full time equivalents) set out long term plans, identify type/location/frequency of works required, secure funding, supervise tasks or enable self-supervision as needed. Formed in 2003.
- Lower Mole Partnership - Countryside professionals (2.82 FTEs) leading volunteer work tasks three days per week across north-east Surrey and Kingston, and providing specialist skills and advice (tree felling, pond excavation, sign fabrication, volunteer training, etc.) Formed in 1983.

Volunteers work significant hours, likely in excess of 1000 pa, for Surrey Wildlife Trust and other organisations.

7. The mix of volunteer and professional resources allows the sites to be maintained in a way that:

- Enhances biodiversity, as required by Environment Act 2021, nature conservation, and the attractiveness of the area as a place to live.
- Enables public access, thereby promoting public health benefits.
- Minimises cost, represents value for money and significantly assists the local authority in delivering its statutory duty to the condition of the SSSI in its ownership and its wider 'Biodiversity Duty'.

Going forward – opportunity

8. Establishment of East Surrey local authority, in shadow form from 2026 and 'live' from April 2027, provides an opportunity to:

- Retain the established countryside volunteering network.
- Keep EEBC Countryside Team & Surrey Countryside Partnership professional expertise, capabilities and task capacity.
- Maintain countryside management in the borough area at the high level already achieved.

9. These outcomes are possible if early decisions are taken to:

- Recognise the importance of the relatively low level of resources involved compared to the resulting benefits and action taken to secure these resources.
- Set up organisational structures that retain local knowledge of, and involvement in, countryside management activities, whilst recognising that some resources can work effectively across areas larger than existing boroughs - as exemplified by the Surrey Countryside Partnerships (comprising Lower Mole Partnership as well as the Downlands and Heathland Partnerships).

Going forward – key actions needed

10. To raise the profile of the countryside volunteering network in Epsom and Ewell area so that existing decision makers are aware of the areas maintained, the volunteers' roles and links to EEBC Countryside team and Lower Mole Partnership.

11. To ensure East Surrey local authority decision makers, once elected and appointed, are fully informed about the opportunities, resources required and available, and legal obligations applicable for the continuing success of efficient and effective countryside management in the Epsom & Ewell area.

Summary table of current countryside volunteering activities in Epsom and Ewell

Countryside volunteer group *(extent of EEBC Countryside Team in planning / supervision / liaison /funding varies by volunteer group.)*		**Estimated volunteer hours pa on countryside tasks**	**Volunteer sites in Epsom and Ewell** *(mix of sites varies by volunteer group)*
Volunteer groups with local authority funding and/or other input	EEBC Countryside volunteers - work each Thursday, 50 weeks a year & weekly species surveys in summer months	2475 pa for tasks (3 yr average) 671 pa for surveys (2 yr average)	Main sites: Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Horton Country Park LNR Hogsmill LNR Nonsuch Park Other sites : Epsom Downs (Juniper Hill) Stones Road SSSI Priest Hill Howell Hill Green Lanes and Bonesgate Streams Warren Farm Langley Vale Wood
	Epsom Common Association – EcoVols work 2 days per month Sep to May, summer daily cattle checking & wkly summer evening bracken pulling, & monthly charcoal making Feb to Nov	c.2200 pa (mix of 3 yr & 2 yr averages depending on work activity)	
	Lower Mole Partnership* - 3 days a week tasks across the year	1630 pa (2 yr average)	
	Nonsuch Voles *- ** 200 hrs on wider parkland tasks out of a total of 1798 hrs with remaining 1598 hrs on tasks in formal gardens*	1798 pa** (fig for 2025)	
Other groups with less or no local authority support	Other groups involving volunteer tasks in Epsom and Ewell area are: Surrey Wildlife Trust* *Hours shown relate to tasks on Priest Hill* South East Rivers Trust * Woodlands Trust * Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board Friends of Horton Country Park	762 pa *(fig for 2025)* SCP volunteers	
* These groups carry out work over a wider area than Epsom and Ewell borough eg Surrey wide or across South East			

Volunteer tasks carried out NB. list below not exhaustive and the mix of tasks varies by volunteer group:
scrub bashing, brush cutting, opening up glades, tree felling, scalloping woodland edges using bowsaws & chain saws, orchard management including fruit tree planting & pruning, electric & tenax fence management, excavating & fencing ponds, hazel planting & coppicing, Himalayan balsam & yellow ragwort pulling, hedge cutting, hedge planting & hedge laying, wood chip path laying, pole sawing, brash stacking & fire site management, woodland habitat pile creation, charcoal making, riverbank management, surveys of: butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles & amphibians, cattle checking, making and installing wooden sign posts & benches, water quality monitoring.

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