

Annual Report

Lower Mole Countryside Trust

Report of the Board of the Lower Mole Countryside Trust for the year ended 31st August 2022.

Introduction

This is the twentieth annual report produced by the Lower Mole Countryside Trust and covers the period 1st September 2021 to 31st August 2022.

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

Seven board meetings have been held in the reporting period, initially by Zoom because of the Covid pandemic. These in the main have concentrated on the formal business normally associated with boards such as membership applications, financial reports and forward planning.

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 and data protection.

Organisation

During this year there were seven trustees, including Chairman Rod Shaw and Company Secretary Sarah Clayton. The Treasurer position is still vacant and appeals have gone out via Surrey volunteer recruitment sites and online to Trust members and LMP volunteers but so far without success.

Finance

This year the Trust raised a total of £5875 for the general fund. There was a slight uptake in the sales of logs and firewood as working practices adjusted after the Covid pandemic. However there was still less of a presence in the LMP office and because of this it has been decided that sales of charcoal will no longer be viable and this is the last year in which this will be done. The Trust attended Ashted Village Day, the first since the pandemic, and sales of goods using recycled wood proved popular and were a welcome addition to the funds raised.

Membership

The number of members who paid subscriptions in this financial year was 44, including 25 individuals, 9 senior citizens, 4 families, 5 groups, 1 honorary member. This does not reflect the true number of members as no reminder letter was sent out to those who prefer to pay by means other than direct debit. A reminder letter for 2022/23 is being sent out with the notification for the AGM.

Two editions of Mole Matters, were sent to members, one for Autumn 2021 and one for Spring 2022.

Publicity and Activities

The Trust has its own website on www.lowermole.wordpress.com giving background information, news and forthcoming events.

Projects and Grants

The Trust has a special relationship with the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) supporting their volunteers with equipment, training and personal protective equipment to enable them to carry out their valuable work.

The Partnership works on countryside across north Surrey and Kingston upon Thames, undertaking a range of practical management tasks. Many of their volunteers are trained to use brushcutters and safety helmets complete with visors and ear defenders had reached their expiry date and a grant was given to replace them. One of the volunteers was funded to undertake a hedge trimmer course to ensure safety when using the equipment.

A number of LMP volunteers are trained to operate heavy plant, which enables LMP to take on larger scale projects, such as path resurfacing and pond excavation and a grant was given for them to undertake an in-house refresher training course prior to projects in the summer.

Over the last four years LMP volunteers have worked on Young Street road verge, Leatherhead, successfully restoring a broad area of chalk grassland to create the conditions for the return of wild flowers such as orchids. The Trust financed an annual hay cut and removal of scrub regrowth in the previously cleared areas.

A grant was given to fund a ragwort pulling task in Nonsuch Park. Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have a new programme to manage wildflower meadows and cut them for hay. Dead ragwort is

harmful to livestock in hay so needs to be cleared before hay is cut. The LMP volunteers were joined by extra volunteer teams from Surrey County Council

The LMP completed the second year of the habitat management work on the Rye Brook Restoration Project, funded by a grant to the Trust in Autumn 2020 from City of London Corporation. The volunteers managed bankside habitat, pollarding willows leaving a 50:50 mix of grassland and scrub to benefit biodiversity.

The Friends of Ashtead Rye Meadows applied to replace the tools originally bought with a grant from the Trust in 2011 to aid their start up and this was approved. The continued valuable work by the Friends ties in with the wider large scale work along the Rye Brook.

Policy for the award of grants to individuals and institutions

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 of up to £500 submitted on the application form outlining the project and any other funding sources. Larger applications can be considered but the budget is small. Forms are issued to all grant recipients to provide feedback on the outcome. 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 nineteen and a half years and has raised £235,265 and supported 143 different projects so far. In order to ensure the continued effectiveness of the Trust the trustees are reviewing several aspects of its organisation. These are:

- The grant policy, including the conditions attached to the Trust's grants in the interests of good governance and to ensure that a wide range of organisations can benefit from funds raised;
- A review of the Trust's website to make it more appealing and informative;

An exploration of a new funding partner from the private sector to provide new, additional funding for projects over a period of several years.

Statement of relationships

Relationship with organisations with which the Trust co-operates

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

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. This financial year is the last that this arrangement will continue, however there is still a lasting relationship between LMP, the Epsom Common Association and the Ecovols.

Following the formation of the Surrey Countryside Partnership Team by Surrey County Council, the Trust has a place on the Surrey Countryside Partnerships Board, and the chairman of the Lower Mole Countryside Trust is our representative. There were no meetings of the Surrey Countryside Partnership Board in the financial year in this report.

Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons

Lower Mole Partnership, 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	Rodney Shaw
Company Secretary	Sarah Clayton
Treasurer/Membership Secretary	post vacant
Member of the Board	Pamela Harwood
Member of the Board	Patrick Oven
Member of the Board	Alan Sherren
Member of the Board	Helen Cocker
Member of the Board	Dawn Fielding