

**Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report July 2024 – compiled
18th June by Nicki Paton**

The team have been working hard across all sites, focussing on holly coppicing, path cutbacks, track repairs, tree inspections/management and wildlife/habitat surveys.

➤ 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

Replace dragon's teeth as required

Monitoring of culverts and ditch clearance as necessary

Maintenance of machinery carried out

Ongoing Ranger's depot maintenance and management carried out

Ongoing facilities management and H&S functions at the Ranger's depot

Infrastructure checks across sites

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

Additional works

Inspection and removal of numerous trees as part of the ongoing tree safety inspections (YC and all sites)

Tree inspections – ongoing inspections of High Risk Zones by surveyor

Removal of fly tipping

Boardwalk repairs

Infrastructure checks

Maintain social media pages

Staff training

Education sessions with badged groups and Samuel Cody school

Easter Trail

May Fayre

Track repairs and re-grading

Dragon's teeth replacement

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

➤ Conservation Management*Yateley Common*

Checked and removed Pennywort from Wyndham's (main) pond

Holly coppicing with staff and volunteers

Habitat and wildlife surveys

Mowing of firebreaks

Path cutbacks

Other sites

Monitoring of Exmoor pony herd and regular fence checks at Castle Bottom

Surveys and habitat assessments

Infrastructure checks (all sites)

Boardwalk replacement at Zebon Copse
Boardwalk replacement at Castle Bottom
Monthly fence line checks at Castle Bottom
Holly coppicing at Zebon Copse
Removal of fly-tipping
Fence and gate repairs at Herbert Plantation
Fixed-point photography at Broxhead Common
May Fayre (Shortheath Common)
Secrets of the Heath event (Shortheath Common)

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

➤ **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since March we have had 3 fly tip events (a further 4 fly-tips on other sites). We are refreshing all the fly-tipping signage this summer.

Dumped vehicles – Nothing to report.

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

Fires – There have been no fires reported since the last meeting.

Fly-grazing – There has been no fly grazing since the last meeting.

➤ **Tree Inspections**

Ad hoc tree inspections by staff are ongoing. The Service Tree team have been surveying our High Risk areas. Surveys are ongoing and we will action any works accordingly as a result of those surveys.

Staff are surveying Medium Risk areas (rights of way, walking routes) and updating our records following any remedial works.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

‘Ground nesting birds’ signs were put back up for the spring/summer period. Dogs are still required to be on a lead at Castle Bottom due to grazing livestock.

We are due to replace all the fly-tipping signs which have become faded this summer. This will hopefully address the slight increase in fly-tipping events we have seen recently. (Much of the fly-tipping at other sites is due to them being cut-throughs.)

➤ **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff have commenced the SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites. So far numbers of the SPA species seem to be good and comparable with previous years. We have also begun to carry out our rapid habitat assessments which help us monitor the condition of habitats and species across the area and adapt our management accordingly. Some surveys on other sites were conducted such as deadwood surveys in our woodlands and a heritage survey at Beacon Hill.

Volunteer reptile surveyors from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Group (HIWARG) will be conducting surveys for reptiles and amphibians and we continue to record any sightings.

➤ **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens are patrolling the heaths and can be seen across the site assisting with user engagement.

Staff have continued to update social media with information and news.

➤ **Rights of Way (RoW)**

The Rights of Way Diversion Order (west of Cricket Hill) was confirmed back in March and works have progressed opening up the routes. All the routes are now clear of vegetation, but there is some further work to be completed before the order can be certified; waymarking the routes and improving road crossing points. We are working with other HCS teams to complete the remaining works.

Paths have been cut back by hand over the past few months to cut back spring/summer vegetation and fire breaks around the site have been mown to maintain a reduction in fuel load along path edges.

➤ **Wyndham's Pool**

Closed season reopened on 15th June. Angling is available as a member with Hartley Wintney Angling Society or but day ticket from Yateley Angling.

➤ **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

We finally completed our scrub clearing for the autumn/winter, scaling back the extent of our scrub clearance works as we were let down by our initial contractor. Our new contractor did an excellent job to get as much of the work completed as possible in the short timeframe. Some of the tracks were very muddy, but since the rain (finally) stopped, they have since dried up.

We will be carrying out a small amount of bracken control this summer, but by hand, not spraying with herbicide. Alternative methods of treatment are not suitable for use on the open heaths where ground nesting birds may be breeding. We are awaiting further updates of new research for the ongoing treatment of bracken.

We are busy planning works for this coming winter which will mainly focus on clearing birch and gorse scrub from the open heath areas. Annual mowing of heather and Molinia grass will also be completed.

➤ **Track Maintenance**

Track repairs were carried out in early June with the work being carried out by HCC staff. Repairs were made to tracks at Wyndham's Pool, Brandy Bottom, Stroud Pond car park and Gravel Pit car park and the surrounding tracks.

➤ **Yateley Common Grazing Consultation**

Discussions are ongoing with other organisations in the area about the operational responsibilities and practicalities of grazing livestock on heathland sites.

Discussions with FE regarding additional grazing at Castle Bottom are ongoing.

➤ **Archaeology**

We are investigating a potential 're-wetting' of the heath project on the East End this winter. Surface water flooding near Reading Road is causing some issues locally and by removing some of the topsoil and creating a 'balancing pond' we hope to hold back some of the water and alleviate the issue. We are meeting with County Archaeologists to look at where and how we might sensitively carry out this project so as to maintain the important local archaeology.

➤ **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. HIWARG continue to monitor the site for amphibians and reptiles.

We thank all our volunteers for their continued support. It is very much appreciated.

Volunteer hours since the last meeting:

Month	YC Hours	Other Sites Hours	All Sites Hours
March	161	55	216
April	186	62	248
May	134	42	176
June	49	22	71
TOTAL	530 (635.75)	181 (269)	711 (904.75)

Note: Figures compiled 18th June 2024. Bold figures in brackets are for June 2023.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or know someone who might be, please get in touch with us via email at northern.sites@hants.gov.uk or telephone on 01252 870425.

➤ Education

Monthly sessions with Samuel Cody School are going very well. They are bringing about a dozen children out to the common once a month to run Forest School activities.

We have run many education sessions with the badged groups such as Cubs and Beavers in recent weeks and have several sessions booked in over the coming weeks.

➤ Events

We ran our Easter Trail on Bank Holiday Monday in April which was enjoyed by 73 children. We attended the Yateley May Fayre and despite the weather, spoke to many interested locals.

For other sites, we attended the Oakhanger May Fayre (Shortheath Common) and the Secrets of the Heath event (Shortheath Common), both great opportunities to engage with the local community. We also celebrated National Nature Reser Week (Castle Bottom) with daily posts featuring the special qualities of the site.

We will be celebrating Heath week 29th July-4th August with our Family Nature Day at Wyndham's Pool on Wednesday 31st July. More to follow on social media – booking will be essential.

➤ Website & Social Media

Facebook – 1597 (1580) follows

Due to new corporate branding, our Facebook page name has changed to 'Countryside - North Sites - Hampshire County Council'

We are no longer using X (was Twitter)

Instagram – 273 (274)

(last meetings figures in brackets)

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To circulate:

Countryside Team Manager (North) Report