

Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report March 2025 – compiled
19th February by Nicki Paton

The team have been working hard across all sites, focussing on scrub clearance, tree inspections/management and managing firebreaks.

➤ **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

Clear up storm damage (or arrange contractors)

Removal of fly tipping

Boardwalk repairs

Maintain social media pages

Staff training

ROW bridleway clearance, surfacing, drainage and installation of bollards

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

➤ **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common

Checked Pennywort at Wyndham's (main) pond

Scrub clearance

Joint Working Week with Hampshire Countryside Service staff and volunteers – scrub clearance

Joint Working with Hart District Council Ranger Team

Flail rights of way

Path cutbacks

Fire break management (mowing)

Completion of heathland scrapes (re-wetting) on East End

Other sites work

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

Surveys and habitat assessments

Infrastructure checks (all sites)
Scrub clearance
Boardwalk installation at Shortheath Common
Scrapes at Shortheath and Broxhead Commons
Glade and ride management at Herbert Plantation
Completion of boardwalk replacement at Castle Bottom (volunteers)
Monthly fence line checks at Castle Bottom
Boardwalk repairs at Zebon Copse
Mire clearance at Zebon Copse
Holly coppicing at Herbert Plantation
Hazardous tree management
Removal of fly-tipping (Shortheath Common)

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

➤ **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since November 2024 we have had 2 fly tip events (a further 2 fly-tips on other sites). All the fly-tipping signage has been refreshed.

Dumped vehicles – Nothing to report.

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

Fires – There has been none 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 are progressing with surveying our High Risk areas. Surveys are ongoing and we action any works accordingly as a result of those surveys.

All surveys of Medium Risk areas (rights of way, walking routes) have now been completed and records updated. The follow-up remedial works are ongoing by staff and contractor.

Tree works have been carried out on the West End of the common adjacent to Blackbushe airport to clear trees encroaching the flight approach path. These works will be ongoing in future years to assist the airport in making pilots' approaches to the airfield as safe as possible.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

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

A new map board is being produced to replace the missing board at Gravel Pit.

New bridleway marker posts and finger posts have been installed by staff and volunteers across the west end of the site as part of the ROW Diversion Order.

➤ **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff will be commencing the SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites. (Woodlark have already been heard singing over Yateley Common and Broxhead Common). We will also begin to carry out our rapid habitat assessments which helps us monitor the condition of habitats and species across the area and adapt our management accordingly. Some surveys on other sites were conducted over the winter 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 carrying out surveys for reptiles and amphibians and we continue to record any ad-hoc sightings.

➤ **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens have been patrolling the sites assisting with user engagement. They will shortly be assisting with erecting their Ground Nesting Birds/Stick to the Paths signage (1st March – 15th September). The summer warden staff have just been recruited and will be joining the permanent staff March – September.

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 2024 and works are nearing completion. All routes bar one are now clear of vegetation and the local Ramblers group and two regular volunteers completed the waymarking. The final groundworks were completed by the Access Ranger Team using a small digger. We hope to have the order certified within the next couple of months.

Paths have been mechanically flailed with the tractor and flail over the past few months to cut back vegetation and maintain fire breaks around the site.

➤ **Wyndham's Pool**

Angling is available as a member with Hartley Wintney Angling Society or by day ticket from Yateley Angling.

Closed season will commence on 15th March for three months.

A swan was reported to us on the pond earlier this month. Staff have contacted The Swan Sanctuary and are being guided by them regarding its ongoing welfare. It is not currently in need of rescue.

➤ **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

Scrub clearing for the autumn/winter have now nearly finished (28th February), and a contractor is completing works in several areas across the site. Staff and volunteers have been working very hard to cut scrub, particularly as the weather has been less than favourable for the past four months.

Contractors have also carried out some mowing of heather and grass areas.

Staff ran a Joint Working Week with Hampshire Countryside Service staff and volunteers to clear scrub from heathland near The Ely pub (Brandy Bottom heath). It was great to see everyone working together and giving those new to practical conservation work the chance to get involved. Over the week, we racked up an impressive 200 hours over five days working hard to clear encroaching gorse, pine and birch scrub from off the heath.

Staff teamed up with Rangers from Hart DC to spend a day working with them at Odiham Common and in return they helped clear gorse from the heath at Yateley Common.

Other works have taken place across our other heathland sites.

➤ **Track Maintenance**

No track repairs have taken place this period. Track repairs works will be likely in the spring. The work will be carried out by HCC staff and volunteers.

➤ **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**

Nothing to report.

➤ **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
November	184	40	224
December	237	44	281
January	259	75	334
February	146	53.5	199.5
TOTAL	826 (708.5)	212.5 (219.5)	1038.5 (928)

Note: Figures compiled 19th February 2025. Bold figures in brackets are for February 2024.

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**

We plan to engage with other local schools and badge groups and be able to offer outdoor sessions again this spring/summer terms.

➤ **Events**

Our Big Spring Clean event will be running again on 1 March 2025, which is always very well attended by the local badged groups. More info on social media.

We plan to run our Easter Trail on Good Friday 18th April (more info due on social media soon) and attend the May Fayre on 5th May.

We will also be celebrating National Nature Reserve Week (Castle Bottom) in May and Heath Week 28th July – 3rd August.

➤ **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 1617 (1612) follows

Instagram – 279 (276)
(last meetings figures in brackets)

[END]

To circulate: Countryside Team Manager (North) Report