

Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report March 2026 – compiled
18th February by Nicki Paton

The team have been working hard across all sites during the autumn and winter months, focussing on scrub cutting, flailing, mowing, path cutbacks and tree inspections/management.

Assistant Ranger Charlie left the team in October 2025, so we have been operating with a reduced workforce since then but continue to cover all works streams and sites. We have recruited a new Assistant Ranger, Liz, who we hope will be joining the team in early March.

➤ **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, particularly during the heavy rain events

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)

Checked High Risk Red Zones for storm damaged trees

Clear up storm damage (or arrange contractors)

Removal of fly tipping

Maintain social media pages

Staff training

ROW and path cutbacks

Boardwalk repairs

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

➤ **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common

Checked Pennywort at Wyndham's (main) pond

Scrub clearance (inc. Joint Working with other Countryside Service staff) (Surrey Choices)

Flail rights of way

Flailing of firebreaks, fire sites and paths

Path cutbacks

Heather mowing

Mowing firebreaks

Other sites work

Monitoring of Exmoor pony herd and monthly fence line checks at Castle Bottom
Scrub cutting in mire at Castle Bottom
Erosion control on the stream at Castle Bottom
Bracken mowing at Castle Bottom
Birch pulling at Castle Bottom
Holly coppicing at Zebon Copse
Scrub cutting in the mire at Zebon Copse
Footpath clearance at Peak Copse
Glade and ride management at Herbert Plantation
Hazardous tree management across all sites
Installed site signage at Hollywater Meadows SANG
Amenity grass cutting at Hollywater Meadows SANG
Scrub clearance on mire/mowing at Shortheath Common
Bare ground scrapes at Shortheath Common
Fixed point photography at Broxhead Common
Scrub clearance/mowing at Broxhead Common (inc. joint working with SDNPA and ARC)
Vegetation cutbacks at Rye Common (with residents)
Joint Working with other Countryside Service staff (scrub cutting)

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

➤ **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since November 2025 we have had 3 fly tip events – 2 of them on Yateley Common. We are looking to re-install the fly-tipping cameras in the spring.

Dumped vehicles – We have not had any abandoned vehicles left on the common since the last meeting.

Motorbikes – Please report any sightings to the Police using the Hampshire Constabulary website - [Home | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary](#) – or on 101.

Fires – We have not had any wildfires since the last meeting.

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

Encroachments – Boundary encroachments at Tudor Drive have been dealt with by our Estates Team.

➤ **Tree Inspections**

Ad hoc tree inspections by staff are ongoing. The Service Tree Team continue with surveying our High Risk areas. Surveys are ongoing and we action any works accordingly because of those surveys. Multiple groups of trees have been dealt with by either staff or contractor.

All Ash trees have been identified in High Risk areas. Due to Ash Dieback some of these trees are vulnerable and likely to need reducing/removing. A contractor has been dealing with any Ash trees due to their fragile state and only a few remaining trees need attention.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

'Ground nesting birds' signs have been put back up for the bird nesting season. Dogs are still required to be on a lead at Castle Bottom due to grazing livestock.

➤ **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff will be commencing the SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites (Woodlark have already been heard singing over Castle Bottom and Shortheath Common). We are awaiting the results from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) of the national Heathland Bird Survey for Dartford warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark. This survey was designed to cover the current known distribution of these three birds and to pick up on range expansion or contraction. The results from 2025 will be compared with data held from nearly 20 years ago. Staff and volunteers contributed to this survey.

We will also begin to complete 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 seasonal Wardens have been recruited and will be starting at the beginning of March.

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

HCC Countryside (Sites) will be providing a response to the Firgrove Heath planning application with relation to the Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI and SPA.

➤ **Rights of Way (RoW)**

Over the past few months, paths have been cut back by hand by staff and volunteers to cut back end of summer/autumn vegetation and more recently, paths have been mechanically flailed with the tractor and flail. Fire breaks around the site have been flailed/mown to maintain a reduction in fuel load along path edges.

➤ **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.

➤ **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 Brandy Bottom (behind Wyndham's Pool). It was great to see everyone working together and giving those new to practical conservation work the chance to get involved. Over five days, nearly 200 hours were racked up with everyone clearing 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 Elvetham Heath in return for their help to clear gorse from the heath at Yateley Common.

We have also teamed up with the Rangers from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership who came over to Yateley to help us clear scrub from the heath.

Much other practical habitat management works have taken place across our other heathland sites this winter.

The Countryside Service purchased a Rytec cut & collect mower last autumn which was due to be used to mow areas of heather to help create a diversity in age structure. Unfortunately, it broke down and needs replacement parts from Italy which won't arrive before we have to cease habitat management works. It will be booked in again for winter 2026 with the plan to mow areas of heather and using the cuttings to spread over recently burnt areas in the hope of establishing heather growth in these areas more quickly.

➤ **Track Maintenance**

No further track repairs have been completed since the last meeting. Track works have already been scheduled for the spring. Some work may be required to the Wyndham's Pool access track due to the relentless rain. These will take place in early March (weather dependant).

➤ **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. This will hopefully go ahead this winter as the timber crop harvesting has been scheduled for 2026, and HCC are awaiting an invitation to apply for a new Countryside Stewardship agreement to fund the works.

➤ **Archaeology**

A local archaeologist has shown interest in the Mesolithic history of Yateley Common. We met with them last autumn supplying them with information with a view to them carrying out some further research and community engagement later this year.

➤ **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 also have several volunteers who regularly litter pick.

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	209.5	50	259.5
December	345	108	453
January	226	101.5	327.5
February	33	20	53
TOTAL	813.5 (826)	279.5 (212.5)	1093 (1038.5)

Note: Figures compiled 18th February 2026. Bold figures in brackets are for February 2025.

The rainy weather has played a huge part in our volunteer numbers this season with much fewer volunteers attending most sessions. Although overall volunteer numbers are similar to this time last year, this is largely due to the addition of Surrey Choices joining us (see below). General volunteer hours are down even though we have had several new volunteers sign-up.

Surrey Choices Growth Team has been assisting with scrub clearance this winter. The group offers work experience in countryside management to supported volunteers. They have been clearing an area of scrub on the East End of the common and it is hoped they will be able to assist us with further tasks around the site in the months ahead.

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**

No events or education sessions have been run since the last meeting. We hope to host a number of badged groups over the spring/summer terms.

➤ **Events**

We are running our Easter Trail again this Good Friday 3rd April (more info due on social media soon) and plan to attend the Yateley May Fayre on 4th May.

➤ **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 1655 (1646) follows
Instagram – 294 (290) followers
(last meetings figures in brackets)

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To circulate: Countryside Team Manager (North) Report