Hampshire County Council
Countryside

Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report November 2026 – compiled 27th October by Nicki Paton

The team have been working hard across all sites, focussing on wildlife & habitat surveying, infrastructure checks & repairs, invasive species control, tree inspections/management and more recently we have started our winter works programme.

We welcomed out new Assistant Ranger Liz to the team in July after some onboarding issues. Ash left the team back in August, so we are currently recruiting to his Assistant Ranger position. This means we have been working with a reduced workforce for nearly a year, but hopefully we will be back up to full strength by the new year.

- **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)
Ash Dieback surveys and works in High Risk Red Zones
Removal of fly tipping
Boardwalk repairs
Maintain social media pages
Staff training
Annual infrastructure checks
Ditch clearance and reinstatement
Events – Nightjar Walk, Heath Week - Family Nature Day and Secrets of the Heath, hosted Countryside Management Association conference field visits
Educational sessions – Bat Walk
(On-going works on other sites within our remit)

- **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common
Checked Pennywort at Wyndham's (main) pond by Environment Agency staff
Rapid assessment surveys (for habitats)
SPA bird surveys

Path cutbacks
Firebreak management – mowed path edges
Scrub clearance for winter works programme

Other sites work
Monitoring of Exmoor pony herd and regular fence checks at Castle Bottom
Surveys and habitat assessments
Infrastructure checks and sign replacement (all sites)
Site checks/works at Hollywater Meadows SANG
Monthly fence line checks at Castle Bottom
Boardwalk repairs at Zebon Copse
Mire clearance at Zebon Copse
Ride management at Herbert Plantation
Annual litter pick and den clearance at Peak Copse
Hazardous tree management
Removal of fly-tipping (Shortheath Common)
Strimming paths/summer veg and mowing on all sites

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

- **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since July 2026 we have not had any fly tip events on Yateley Common (1 fly-tip on other sites). Staff are now ladder trained but due to reduced staffing we don't currently have capacity to check the cameras.
Dumped vehicles – No vehicles abandoned on the common (A van has been moved on from Whitehill car park in Kingsclere).
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 had 3 fires since the last meeting all around 0.5ha in size. No known cause for any.
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 continuing with surveying our High Risk areas. Surveys are ongoing and we action any works accordingly as a result of those surveys.

- **Signage & Interpretation**

'Ground nesting birds' signs have been/will be taken down for the autumn/winter period. Dogs are still required to be on a lead at Castle Bottom due to grazing Livestock.

There have been increasing numbers of camper vans parking in our car parks, particularly at Wyndham's Pool car park. Whilst we appreciate 'van life' we also need to make sure that car parking is available for our daily visitors and site users so 'No overnight parking' signs will be erected in due course.

- **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff completed the spring/summer SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites.
We are still awaiting the final territory numbers from the consultants who oversee the surveys so final figures will be updated at the next meeting. Staff did report good numbers of all three SPA birds which is encouraging particularly as the 2025 national heathland birds surveys showed an increase in all three populations.

We have also been completing our rapid habitat assessments which helps us monitor the condition of habitats and species across the area and adapt our management accordingly. 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.

The Freshwater Habitats Trust has carried out eDNA sampling at ponds across Yateley Common (and Shortheath and Broxhead Commons) to establish if/where the populations are. We hope to have the result later this year. We are already aware of them in several ponds. We are still awaiting an update on these results.

- **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens have been patrolling the sites assisting with user engagement. The summer warden staff have now finished their season, but we still receive help from the permanent staff.

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

Following a heath fire on the common we hosted Meridian News to do a piece about the wildfires that have affected the site and to raise awareness.

We were pleased to see the planning permission for the Berkeley homes development at Firgrove Farm has been refused. We will engage with any future consultation for a future application.

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

- **Rights of Way (RoW)**

Path cutbacks were completed with staff and volunteers over the summer and autumn. Some resurfacing of paths tool place to reinforce our firebreaks by removing vegetation joining one side of the path to the other. This work will continue in the spring.

Our colleagues in the Access team assisted with resurfacing of a bridleway on Cricket Hill using a digger to flatten out the ruts. They also cleared a stretch of ditch alongside the bridleway behind SIMS.

- **Wyndham's Pool**

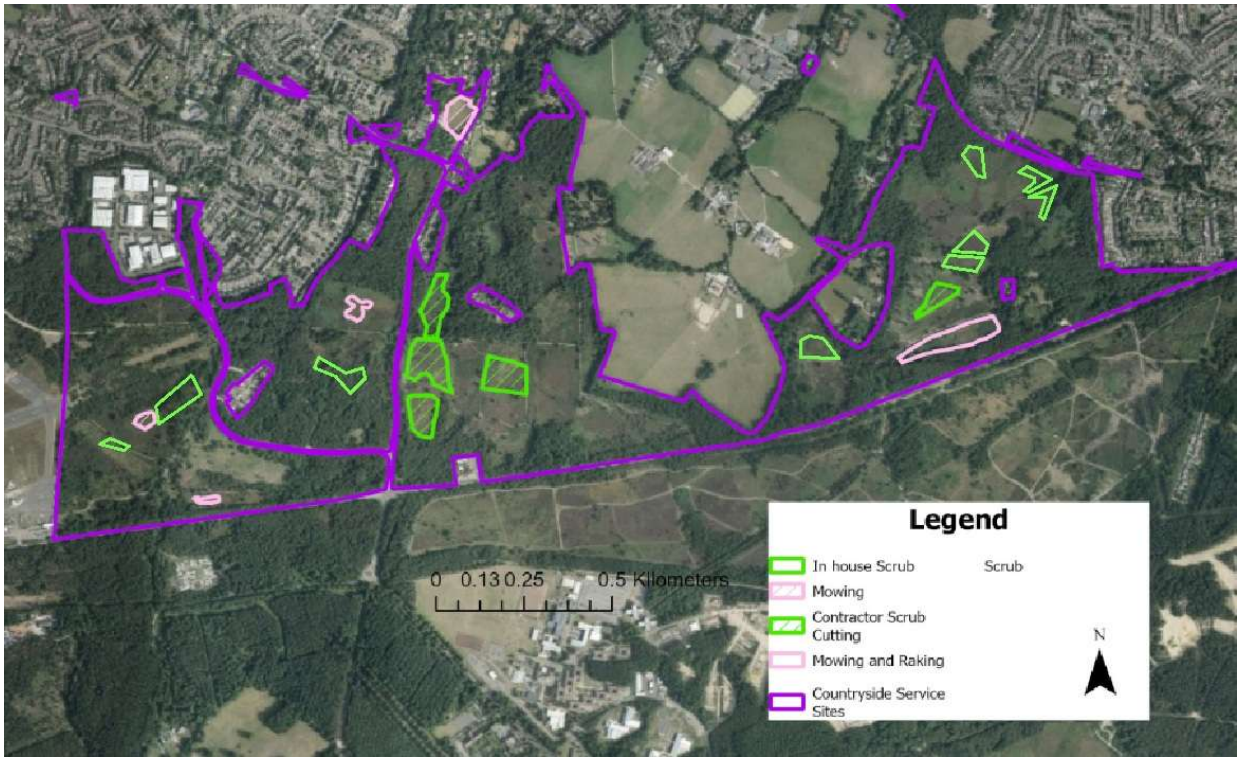
Angling is available as a member with Hartley Wintney Angling Society or by day ticket from Yateley Angling.

Vegetation was cleared along the northern end of the pond to clear the overflow culverts.

Thankfully with the prolonged hot, dry weather over the summer, we did not see any algal blooms on the pond nor issues with oxygen levels for the fish. Several Canada geese resided on the pond for a few days last month but moved on safely.

- **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

Scrub clearance works for the autumn/winter has now commenced, and contractors are due to carry out works in the coming months. Contractors will also be carrying out some mowing of heather and grass areas. The map below shows the areas where they, and staff and volunteers, will be working;



We also have the loan of a Rytec cut & collect mower which we will be using to mow areas of heather to help create a diversity in age structure. We will use some of the cuttings to spread over more 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. Some work may be required to the Wyndham's Pool access track in the spring (depending on the weather over winter).

- **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. We met with FE on site last month to talk about future works. This will hopefully go ahead this winter when the timber crop has been harvested, and a new Countryside Stewardship agreement can be put in place for funding works.

- **Archaeology**

We are in touch with an archaeology volunteer who is interested in revisiting Carol White's Mesolithic studies relating to the common. We have been in touch with Carol who has the original finds from her studies some 15-20 years ago and hope to get them back next month for use in public engagement sessions before being stored at the Winchester storage facilities.

- **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
July	102	101	203
August	139	77	216
September	74	146	220
October	149	41	190
TOTAL	**464 (450)**	**365 (140)**	**829 (590)**

Note: Figures compiled 27th October 2026. Bold figures in brackets are for October 2025.

We have had several new volunteers sign up over the past 6 months, so our logged volunteer hours are up significantly on this time last year.

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 have only run a couple of education sessions over the past few months, including a session for Squirrels at the Monteagle Scout Hut and a bat walk on the Common for Beavers.

- **Events**

We ran a Twilight Nightjar walk on Yateley Common in July. We also hosted our Family Nature Day at Wyndham's Pool for Heath Week and also attended the Secrets of Heath event.

Last month, Ranger staff hosted site visits for the Countryside Management Association Conference held in Petersfield this year. Delegates were shown around both Yateley Common and Castle Bottom where similar issues, best practice and ideas for future works were shared.

- **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 1722 (1703) follows
Instagram – 291 (292)
(last meetings figures in brackets)

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To circulate: Countryside Team Manager (North) Report