



Epsom & Ewell

Biodiversity Action Plan



Progress report for 2012

Introduction

During 2012 the Epsom & Ewell Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Working Group oversaw significant progress in implementing the plan which can be viewed here:

<http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/EEBC/Environment/Biodiversity.htm>

The importance of Biodiversity:

Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered.

The intricate network of ecosystems, habitats and species comprising biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It provides many of the essentials of life, our oxygen, water, food, clothing, health and relaxation. Consequently, humanity must adopt sustainable ways of living that ensure the protection of biodiversity.

Today we live in a world where the economic activities of an ever increasing human population threaten biodiversity which is being lost at an ever increasing rate. Britain alone is known to have lost 100 species during the twentieth century.

There is a broad consensus around the world that we need to act now, or risk handing our children a world we would not recognise as planet Earth!

The 'Working Group' currently comprises the following individuals:

Mark Berry: Head of Planning, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Stewart Cocker: Countryside Manager, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Sarah Clift: Senior Countryside Officer, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Jeremy Young: Tree Officer, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

John Edwards: County Ecologist, Surrey County Council

Alastair Kirk: Surrey Biological Record Centre Manager, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Conor Morrow: Project Officer, Lower Mole Countryside Management Project

Kevin Morgan: Locally based ecologist and environmental consultant

The plan agreed in 2010 contains 7 objectives, comprising 23 targets with 45 actions. It should be noted that the 'Working Group' has no set budget to directly assist in implementing the plan and consequently is restricted to a coordinating/prioritising role with the plan as an essential guide and tool. That said, all members of the 'Working Group' continue to be able to contribute to the implementation of the plan through the course of their normal duties

The plan does have suggested dates for the achievement of actions which assists in prioritisation but does not at this very early stage provide a measure of success or failure, especially given the current time and resource constraints on those working to implement the plan.

This report summarises progress made during 2012 under the plans seven objectives.

Progress during 2012

Objective 1: *Develop partnerships to ensure that the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Epsom and Ewell is maintained in the long term.*

-Update:- An active membership was maintained with the Surrey Biodiversity Partnership, resulting in Mark Berry becoming a board member on the Surrey Local Nature Partnership. In addition a service level agreement has been proposed between the Surrey Biological Records Centre and EEBC which aims to improve knowledge and information exchange regarding all species but in particular European protected species with respect to planning applications, Surrey BAP habitat mapping and invasive exotic species.

-Update:- EEBC continues to strongly support groups actively involved in conserving and enhancing biodiversity within the Borough. For example, the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project (LMCMP) and Epsom Common Association. During 2011 a review of the LMCMP was commenced and is due to report by April 2013. The Nonsuch Voles mentioned in last year's report have formed and now carry out regular conservation tasks under guidance from the LMCMP. The EEBC Countryside Team has continued with a weekly task held on Thursdays during 2012. 1986 volunteer hours were recorded carrying out practical conservation work closely aligned to the LBAP which has a value of approximately £20,000 using the Heritage Lottery valuation of unskilled volunteer work at £55 per day per volunteer (Please note some work is classed as skilled and valued higher)



Epsom & Ashted Commons Joint
Volunteer Task 2012



Countryside Team Volunteers on Epsom
Common (Castle Heath) October 2012

-Update:- As reported last year the LBAP through links via the 'Working Group' members has prompted Surrey County Council to ask EEBC to partner with them in work to pilot the forthcoming 'Community Infrastructure Levy' in regard to Green Infrastructure. This will hopefully lead to successfully securing future funds for Green Infrastructure from new developments.

Objective 2: *Ensure the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species, as specified nationally and in the Surrey Habitat Action Plans*

-Update:- Grazing on Epsom Common took place again during 2012 with 35 cattle from early May to early September. Volunteers played an increased role in daily checking which proved extremely helpful as the staff available at weekends fell from three to two during 2012. Volunteers also continue to play a crucial role in maintaining the grazing area which is the Borough's flagship habitat conservation and enhancement initiative. The nature conservation benefits of grazing continue to surprise and delight all those involved. Of particular note are the significant increases in butterfly populations and flowering plant species and strong indications that grazing is benefiting the reptile population.



Epsom Common LNR Cattle arrive
2nd May 2012



Epsom Common LNR Big Challenge
Day 30th September 2012

- Update:- Work to restore and protect veteran trees on Epsom Common LNR and Horton Country Park LNR took place during winter 2011/2012 with the completion of a veteran tree survey and halo release work carried out around veteran trees on Epsom Common. 2012/2013 will see further work carried out on Epsom Common, all using funds secured through the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme.



Epsom Common LNR Halo Release
near West Heath February 2012

-Woodland management at Horton Country Park LNR under the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme increased significantly in scale during 2011/2012 with volunteers playing a vital role in making the initial trial years financially viable. Whilst enough funds are available within the scheme to pay a contractor to fell trees with costs offset by the value of the timber, the funds do not allow for the follow up work involving last year the planting of over 1000 hazel trees and erection of deer fencing all of which was carried out by volunteers.



Horton Country Park LNR Contractor creating new coppice Hollymoor Grove Winter 2012



Horton Country Park LNR Contractor restoring coppice in Pond Wood Winter 2012



Horton Country Park LNR Bentley Day Centre Volunteers erecting deer fencing Hollymoor Grove Winter 2012



Horton Country Park LNR planting Hazel trees in Hollymoor Grove Winter 2012

- Update:- In late 2011 the 'Oaks Trust' via United Racecourses at Epsom Downs became interested in the possibility of a new woodland being planted within the Borough to help celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee. If successful the LBAP will have played a crucial role in guiding the proposed location of the wood. Following the submission of a detailed plan in early 2012 to the 'Oaks Trust' unfortunately nothing further has been heard.

-Update:- Following on from the 2010 start-up of our in house Grounds Maintenance Team, 2011 saw the trial of a new grass cutting regime on the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, designed to both reduce workloads and enhance biodiversity by leaving uncut headlands along scrub edge. The aim in future will be to cut on an irregular rotational basis rather than every fortnight during the growing season. 2012 saw the new regime implemented on the Hogsmill LNR.

-Work to conserve and enhance rough grassland has been taking place since 2008 using a rotational approach which prevents the grassland disappearing under encroaching scrub. 2012 saw the continuation of this vital habitat maintenance work carried out by both volunteers in the most sensitive areas (Ant Hills) and by an EEBC tractor using a hired flail collector.



Epsom Common Stamford Green
conservation meadow Autumn 2012



Hogsmill LNR grassland management at
Riverview Copse summer 2012

-To celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee and in association with the Friends of Gibraltar park, EEBC and the local Tree Advisory Board arranged for volunteers to plant four hundred trees in a new copse at Gibraltar Park on the 1st December 2012.



Objective 3: *Ensure opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource in Epsom and Ewell are identified considered and acted upon*

-Following on from the recent survey of 'Ancient Woodland' efforts have now turned to re-surveying the Borough's existing Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and surveying for new SNCI. During 2012 potential SNCI were mapped with 2013 identified as the year in which re-surveying of existing sites will take place. The governments new 'Single Data Set' uses the measure of SNCI in active conservation management to monitor the current condition of the nation's biodiversity the Borough currently has twelve SNCI with eleven currently under active conservation management giving Epsom & Ewell the highest score in Surrey 92% (Average 41%).

- Update:- In a joint project between the Planning Policy and Countryside Teams, 2011 saw the completion of a draft document called 'Biodiversity & Planning in Epsom & Ewell'. The purpose of the document is to assist the council, developers and residents in ensuring that the Borough's biodiversity is both protected and enhanced when new developments take place. During 2012 the document was made available on the Council's website

<http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FBAFB433-C70B-4B61-939E-868F3BE3FF0E/0/BiodiversityandPlanninginEpsom7February2012.pdf>

-Update:- In 2011 the Planning Policy Team commenced work to identify the Borough's Green Infrastructure with the LBAP playing a key role in guiding the process. During 2012 work has continued with a focus on how the GI policy can incorporate the needs of the new National Planning Policy Framework and Ecosystem Services.

-Update:- Work to produce management plans for Stones Road Site of Special Interest (SSSI) and woodland at Nonsuch Park was completed during 2011 with work to implement the plans commencing during 2012. Existing management plans continue to be implemented and continue to secure external funding. For example, £110,000 in 2011 for the Hogsmill

Local Nature Reserve, from the national cycling charity Sustrans for the improvement of the ThamesDowns Link footpath and the construction of a new footbridge. Improving access plays a key role in protecting fragile habitats on our well used open spaces.



Hogsmill LNR new footbridge across the Bonesgate Stream January 2012



Hogsmill LNR restored path alongside Bonesgate Stream November 2011

Objective 4: *Raise awareness, appreciation and involvement in the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Epsom and Ewell*

-TV presenter and naturalist **Chris Packham** is a wildlife expert, photographer and author with a passionate concern for conservation and the environment. In 2012 Chris agreed to write the foreword for the Epsom & Ewell Local Biodiversity Action Plan.



When you are a kid size matters and thus the magnificent male Stag Beetles emergence was an eagerly anticipated annual event. A nearby street had some monstrous oaks and a diversion from the normal route to school would pay dividends and fill my jam jars. To be fair these creatures have lost none of their allure over the years but now it's not just their size that matters, it's their importance as a flagship species - they along with the Oaks which nourish their peculiar larvae. So I'm not surprised that you have chosen them as your

local heroes to champion the Biodiversity Action Plan - and you have impressive numbers of these giants too!

In simple terms any communities' biodiversity is a measure of its health and stability. The more niches that are filled the better the natural machine will function and prosper. Thus nationally, regionally and locally we have constructed plans which aim to protect and enhance the richness of life at these respective levels. All have their roles but local strategies are tremendously important because they are implicitly governed by those who live, work and influence that community - these are formulated, enacted and enjoyed by those 'on the ground' . They are about 'personal wildlife conservation'!

In these days where doom and gloom are a constant temptation I remain optimistic about our abilities to make a difference because we have such a well-stocked armory of abilities to effectively conserve life. We have studied it, tested it, we know what we need to do. The introduction of grazing on Epsom Common has seen superb revivals in butterfly and



plant diversity and even established a future for a population of the charismatic Yellowhammer. This has only been achieved by many years of tireless volunteer endeavor - an essential component of contemporary conservation.

And ultimately this success is good for us to. We uniquely have a conscience so we have to try to do what we know is right, but also we can enjoy a better quality of life as a result, the sight of a Stag Beetle whirring across the dusk sky or the charming song of the Yellowhammer with its 'little bit of bread but no cheese' can make your day. And that's the real key here; it will make your day and not mine, because the borough of Epsom and Ewell is yours. You mend it, restore it and protect it and you can revel, be proud of and enjoy it! Superb!

Chris Packham 2012

-Update:- During 2012 articles in the Borough Magazine 'Insight' on the Chris Packham foreword for the Biodiversity Action Plan, the annual Epsom & Ashted Commons Joint Volunteer Task, Nonsuch Volunteers (Nonsuch Voles), The Bonesgate Footbridge, Round the Borough Walk (which links our five largest open spaces), the Green Flag Award and the history of Epsom Common were published, all helping to raise awareness of the value of our biodiversity and the opportunities to get actively involved.



Epsom Common Green Flag raising 5th
December 2012

-Update:-EEBC continues to raise awareness and encourage active participation in site management. This is achieved through walks, talks, leaflets, the web site, regular weekly conservation tasks, through working with 'Friends Groups' and support for the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project. A notable successes during 2012 involved the formation of Nonsuch Park volunteers (The Voles) and the Horton Country Park Local nature Reserve 'Living Woodlands Day' both assisted and organised by the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.



Round The Borough Walk 12th May 2012



Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve
'Living Woodlands Day 21st October 2012

Objective 5: *Provide on-going monitoring of biodiversity in Epsom and Ewell*

-Epsom Common is a nationally important site for invertebrates associated with veteran trees and during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 2012 a survey was carried out to monitor the existing population. Initial results have already passed the threshold score for international importance! The final report and confirmation is expected in early 2013.



Installation of Vane Traps Epsom Common
LNR April 2012

Update:- A project to monitor reptiles on Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve was set up between the Countryside Team and the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) during 2011. During 2012 monitoring continued over what turned out to be a very poor summer! Through a combination of volunteer and staff time, twenty six sites across the common were monitored with the results fed in to the SARG website. Results again confirm that Epsom Common is a very important site for Adders and there is a very widespread distribution of Grass Snakes.



Adder on Epsom Common LNR summer
2012



Grass Snake on Epsom Common LNR
summer 2012

-Update:- Work to review the extent of the Borough's Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) commenced in 2011 and continued during 2012. During Spring and summer of 2013 it is hoped that both the re-surveying of the existing SNCI and surveying of potential new SNCI will commence.

-Update:- Through work associated with the 'Planning & Biodiversity in Epsom & Ewell' document and via the 'Working Group' EEBC and Surrey Wildlife Trust are working to produce both priority habitats and species maps for the Borough. Some progress was made in 2012 and the Boroughs Green Infrastructure Policy due in 2013 will benefit from this work.

-Update:- The Countryside Team and volunteers continued to monitor butterflies on a weekly basis over the summer using agreed transects

and submitting records to the national database. During 2011 a new Transect was agreed for the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve and a volunteer recorder found meaning that during 2012 for the first time (despite the weather!) all three Local Nature Reserves had butterfly monitoring taking place.



Purple Emperor on Epsom Common LNR



Silver Washed Fritillary on Epsom Common LNR

-The Countryside Team is continuing to develop and improve its monitoring role within the Boroughs three local nature reserves with a view in future to covering the Borough more widely with the assistance of volunteers. During 2012 work with Surrey Wildlife Trust saw the installation of 30 Dormouse boxes on Epsom Common following a chance discovery of a Dormouse by volunteers (ECOVOLS) in February 2012. During 2013 a further 20 boxes will be placed on site so that Epsom Common can become a part of the national Dormouse monitoring programme.



Dormouse found on Epsom Common LNR
February 2012

In addition during 2012 two small mammal surveys were carried out on Epsom Common LNR in conjunction with Surrey Wildlife Trust both indicating a diverse and healthy population.



Small mammal survey Epsom Common LNR
September 2012

- During Spring and summer 2012 after the planned three year gap the next two year cycle of breeding bird surveys commenced on Epsom and

Ashted Commons funded by the Epsom Common and Horton Country Park LNR's Environmental Stewardship Higher level Scheme agreement with Natural England grant. The following excerpt is taken from the first paragraph of the 2012 Epsom & Ashted Commons Breeding Bird Survey, carried out by Kevin Morgan.

'During the 2012 bird survey of Epsom and Ashted Commons the number of species that were observed during the survey or confirmed by other observers was 79. This is higher than previously (best count was 75) and the increase in the numbers of birds of prey, especially Buzzards, were of particular interest. At least 58 species breed on site or close by (including 7 red list and 13 amber list species). This is the same number as in 2009 but with some variation in the actual species and probably there is an overall increase. Clearance work on neglected habitats and the low level grazing is having a positive impact as the habitats start to become established, creating a good habitat mosaic from grassland to diverse scrub, and wood pasture to woodland.'

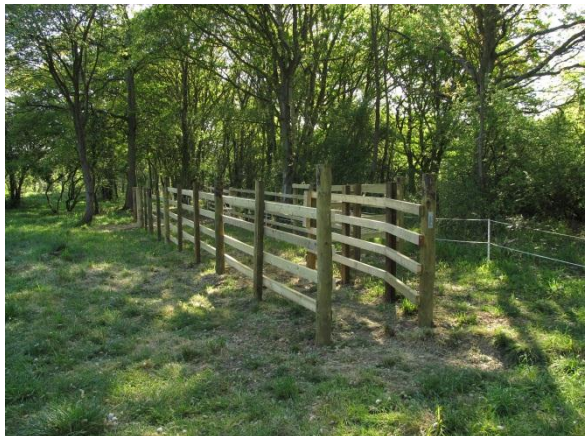


Fledgling Sparrow Hawk Epsom Common LNR
June 2012

Objective 6: *Seek to increase the funding available for the long term conservation, enhancement and monitoring of biodiversity in Epsom and Ewell*

-Update:- Currently funding for biodiversity management is in place for both Epsom Common and Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserves until 2020. The key source is the 2010-2020 Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme which secures approx. £27,000 per year with the possibility of additional capital projects money being available. In addition both sites also receive approx. £10,000 from the European Single Farm Payments Scheme.

For example, during summer 2012 the EEBC Countryside Team organised an NVC vegetation survey (Carried out every 10 years) across both Epsom & Ashted Commons. The £7684 cost was shared with the City of London who own and manage Ashted Common with the EEBC share of £3842 paid for using the European Single Farm Payments Scheme funds.



Lower Mole Countryside Management Project volunteers constructing the Rye Meadow cattle pen on Epsom Common LNR, Spring 2011. Cost £1000 paid for by Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme Grant

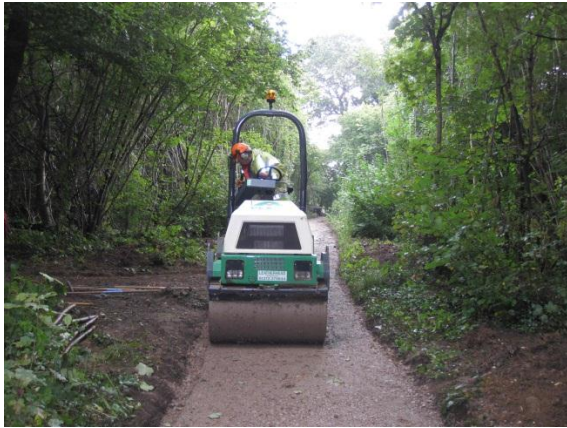
-Update:- In late 2011 the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project successfully secured £45,000 from the Heritage Lottery to enable the creation of a 'Living Woodlands Officer' post for one year which is aimed at promoting the 'Living Woodlands' concept where local woodland is brought back in to active management to benefit both biodiversity and the local economy. Epsom & Ewell already has successful involvement

on Epsom Downs, Nonsuch Park, Horton Country Park LNR and Epsom Common LNR and it is hoped that the post will help to fully establish this new approach. A 'Living Woodlands Officer' was appointed in February 2012.



Living Woodlands Day 21st October 2012 held at Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

-Update:- During 2011 progress was made in setting up Woodland Grant schemes on both Epsom Downs at the Warren Woods and woodland within Nonsuch Park (both Ancient Woodland) which will hopefully secure enough funding to allow for the improved management of woodlands via the 'Living Woodlands' Project. Both schemes were successfully set up during 2012.



Lower Mole Countryside Management Project volunteers constructing a new path at Warren Wood and installing a charcoal kiln



Lower Mole Countryside Management Project volunteers working to restore woodland at Nonsuch Park and constructing a new on site wood store.

-Update:- Surrey County Council allocated £10,000 to the Stones Road Project to make the Stones Road SSSI more resilient and to improve the security of the adjacent allotment and this will enable work to commence in the first quarter of 2012. During 2012 this project experienced serious delays due to problems with both water and gas services running across the site. Some work has taken place however with the planting of a hedge following on from previous work to construct a Newt hibernaculum. It is hoped that during 2013 the major part of the project that involves the digging of a new pond in the allotment will take place.



Lower Mole Countryside Management Project volunteers constructing the Newt hibernaculum and planting a hedge at Stones Road Allotment.

Objective 7: *Seek to identify the wider benefits to the community of improving biodiversity*

-Update:- This objective presents a considerable challenge to the Working Group however; during 2011 the government published a watershed document the 'UK Ecosystem Assessment' which shows very clearly how we undervalue our natural resources. The result of under valuing our natural resources is ultimately an unsustainable future. Addressing this issue demands a long term approach that recognises the delicate balance of the ecosystems that provide us with vital ecosystem services such as clean air, fresh water and fertile soils. This concept is as applicable to Epsom & Ewell as anywhere else on the planet and the Working Group is committed to exploring the concept during 2012 with a view to identifying effective means to address this matter locally.

It is undoubtedly a big and complex subject however it is possible to identify local issues to illustrate the challenge we are facing. For example, biodiversity on our local open spaces provides a range of vital ecosystem services and in particular a cultural ecosystem service providing residents with well recognised and significant psychological and health benefits.

Some of our open spaces in Epsom & Ewell are showing signs of strain due to high visitor numbers with woodland wildflowers and aquatic life in ponds under pressure from constant daily disturbance.



Erosion damage to the dam of Great Pond on Epsom Common LNR caused by dogs. Autumn 2012 repairs cost £18500

The UK Ecosystem Assessment shows clearly that sustainable management of our open spaces today not only helps protect their biodiversity but also ensures that wider and in some cases very costly environmental impacts are avoided.

2011 saw EEBC adopting a clear commitment to biodiversity in its new Key Priorities. Making our residents aware of the vital importance of the ecosystem services that biodiversity provides to them, even on a local basis is a key aim of the LBAP.

During 2012 members of the Working Group have attended a number of seminars and key note presentations in an effort to monitor progress nationally about how the concept is being applied. It has become clear that Ecosystem Services are very relevant to the development of the Epsom & Ewell Green Infrastructure Policy due to be published during 2013 and the implementation of the 'Community Infrastructure Levy' due to replace Section 106 funding for new development.

Conclusion:

2012 has seen good progress on many fronts. 2013 looks set to be a landmark year for the Borough's biodiversity with EEBC due to set out its policy for Green Infrastructure. **A BIG THANK YOU from the Working Group to all the volunteers who have helped progress the plan during 2012!**

If you have any questions or you would like to find out more about the implementation of the Epsom & Ewell Local Biodiversity Action Plan please call 01372 732000 and ask to speak to the Countryside Team or email countryside@epsom-Ewell.gov.uk