

Epsom & Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan



Progress Report For 2011

Introduction

During 2011 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 2011 under the plans seven objectives.

Progress during 2011

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

-An active membership was maintained with the Surrey Biodiversity Partnership, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) were invited to talk at the annual conference in September on 'Developing Green Infrastructure Policy'.

- EEBC continues to strongly support groups actively involved in conserving and enhancing biodiversity within the Borough. For example, the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project and Epsom Common Association. During 2011 there were positive signs regarding new volunteer groups setting up for Nonsuch Park and Epsom Downs.

-The implementation of the LBAP has been recognised by the Epsom & Ewell Local Strategic Partnership Environment & Sustainability Sub Group as a performance measure and is now referred to in the Sustainable Community Strategy for Epsom & Ewell.

-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*

-Supported by members of the 'Working Group' the Surrey Ancient Woodland Survey was published in June 2011 which revealed a very significant increase in both the number and area of 'Ancient Woodland' within Epsom & Ewell. The original 1988 survey identified just two woods Pond Wood and Great Wood on Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The 2009-11 survey has identified fourteen across the Borough with a total of six at Horton Country Park LNR. 'Ancient Woodland' is known to be the most species rich of all our native habitats.

-2011 saw the completion of work that began in the early 1990's to re-introduce grazing to Epsom Common LNR, with the second half of Rye Meadow grazed for the first time. There are now three grazed areas (High & Low Meadows, Horton Heath and Rye Meadow) with a total of 35 cattle supplied by a local farmer (Laurence Matthews). 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.

- Work to restore and protect veteran trees on Epsom Common commenced during 2011 with survey work and the programming of work due to take place in 2012, all using funds secured through the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme

- An approach in late 2011 from the 'Oaks Trust' via United Racecourses at Epsom Downs has created 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 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.

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

- 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.

-The Planning Policy Team commenced work to identify the Borough's Green Infrastructure with the LBAP playing a key role in guiding the process.

-Epsom & Ewell continues to be the highest scoring Surrey district under NI197 (2010 figures, 92% for Epsom & Ewell, average for Surrey 41%) and this is likely to continue under the new 'Single Data Set' for 2011. The score is calculated by determining what percentage of a district's 'Sites of Nature Conservation Importance are in positive conservation management.

-Work to produce management plans for Stones Road Site of Special Interest (SSSI) and woodland at Nonsuch Park was commenced during 2011. 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.

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

-In 2011 articles in the Borough Magazine 'Insight' on volunteering, Ancient Woodland and the Epsom Common Green Flag Award were published, all helping to raise awareness of the value of our biodiversity and the opportunities to get actively involved.

-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 success during 2011 involved the restoration of Shadbolt Park Pond which involved the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project, Surrey Wildlife Trust, The Ranger Service and the Friends of Shadbolt Park.

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

-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. Epsom Common is a very important site for Adder's and through a combination of volunteer and staff time, twenty six sites across the common were monitored once per fortnight over summer 2011, with the results fed in to the SARG website. Initial results have shown a very widespread distribution of Grass Snakes and an indication that grazing is benefiting the reptile population.

-Carried out by the Council's Senior Countryside Officer, work to review the extent of the Borough's Sites of Nature Conservation Importance commenced

during 2011 and if funds permit a new survey of the Borough will be carried out during 2012.

-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.

-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 so that from 2012 all three Local Nature Reserves will have butterfly monitoring in place.

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

-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. £8000 from the European Single Farm Payments Scheme.

-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.

-During 2011 progress has been made in setting up Woodland Grant schemes on both Epsom Downs and at Nonsuch Park which will hopefully

secure enough funding to allow for the improved management of woodlands via the 'Living Woodlands' Project.

-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.

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

-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.

A decline in springtime wildflowers on our open spaces is concerning and the UK Ecosystem Assessment highlights the additional wider environmental impacts and costs that such a decline can have. For example, the loss of a spectacular show of bluebells in spring from a wood on Horton Country Park is likely to result in extra car journeys as people seek out new bluebell woods

to visit, adding more pollution, using more resources and ultimately having the same disastrous impact on local biodiversity elsewhere. 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 and 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.