

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve



Welcome to the Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve Webpage

Access

Your Common needs you! Please help us to ensure the effective management of Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve. It's a very enjoyable experience to walk, cycle or ride across Epsom Common but you may also observe issues or see things that can be dealt with or help us in managing the common. To help give feedback we have produced a map that identifies the paths and tracks on the common making it much easier to locate your observations. This can be found in Appendix A at the bottom of this document.

To report any issues please either call us on 01372 732000 or email contactus@epsom-ewell.go.uk

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve is situated in the southern half of the borough. There are many access points to the site. By car, the main access point is the Stew Ponds car park off Christ Church Road (B280).

The site is accessible by pedestrians from the following locations:

- Wells Road near the crossroads
- Castle Road
- Wheelers Lane
- Churchside
- Bramble Walk
- Bracken Path
- Stamford Green Road
- Manor Park pedestrian crossing
- Christchurch Road horse crossing and entrance opposite Horton Lane
- Woodcock Corner (via Ashted Common); and
- Via the links from Ashted Common, near Ashted Common Pond.

The site can be accessed by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders from:

- Stew Ponds car park
- Christ Church Road opposite the bridleway running alongside West Park Hospital
- Wells Road near the crossroads
- Woodcock Corner (via Ashtead Common); and
- Via the link from Ashtead Common, near Ashtead Common Pond.

The reserve is open all year round. The paths and tracks on the site are for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists only. Please remember, when visiting the countryside, to act responsibly and show consideration for wildlife and other visitors. Dog walkers are welcome on the site but are reminded to keep their dogs under close control and that it is an offence to allow a dog to foul any open space. Please put all dog faeces in a bag and place it in a dog waste bin or litter bin. For more information about responsible access to the countryside, please look at the [The Countryside Code](#).

Public access is managed by maintaining a large network of paths and rides. The system is based on the circular hard surfaced All Weather Track that follows the perimeter of the main part of the Common (4.8 Km). Within this track there is a network of very wide grass - Summer Horse Rides - and many smaller paths. The Summer Horse Rides are closed during the winter to prevent them being cut up by horses' hooves.

If you are a cyclist or horse rider, please read our leaflet [Common Sense Horse Riding and Cycling leaflet for Epsom Common LNR](#).

How to get to Epsom Common LNR:

By train: From Epsom or West Ewell Stations.

By bus: There are regular bus services from Epsom to Christ Church Road and Wells Road.

Activities

Activities available on Epsom Common local nature reserve include:

- walking
- cycling
- running
- horse riding
- dog walking
- nature watching
- fishing (Stew Pond only)
- football (Webb's Folly only).

We also run [guided walks](#) and there is the [opportunity to volunteer](#), for more information telephone 01372 732000 and ask to speak to a member of the Countryside Team or email contactus@epsom-ewell.gov.uk for further details.

Please note that there is a risk of coming in to contact with ticks on Epsom Common and we recommend that you check yourself, children and pets after each visit, especially

over the spring and summer periods. Ticks can carry a disease called Lyme disease which requires medical treatment. For information on ticks, how to remove them and Lyme disease please visit the [NHS Direct website](#).

Facilities

The reserve is 176 hectare in size and is managed to allow good public access whilst maintaining and improving its biodiversity. The site has a range of distinctive habitats hosting an abundance of wildlife, some of national and international importance. For those wishing to explore on foot, by bicycle or by horse, Epsom Common is a wild and wonderful site.

History

The recorded history of Epsom Common goes back to Saxon times, when England was a feudal agricultural society. The people of a small village like Epsom were under the control of the Lord of the Manor. Epsom Common, like other commons, was the land belonging to the Lord of the Manor which was not under cultivation. The Lord and certain local people with commoners' rights made use of the Common or 'Waste' for a range of uses. The Lord would usually have exclusive rights for timber and to hunt and fish, whilst the Commoners would have rights to graze animals and collect fire wood.

At this time, Epsom Common was owned by the Abbey of Chertsey, making the Abbot of Chertsey the Lord of the Manor. Although long gone, the monks left their mark by constructing a huge fish pond which is still with us today and known as 'The Great Pond', shown below (please note, fishing is not permitted on this pond today).



As far as we know, very little of note happened to the Common during the medieval period. In the sixteenth century, the Abbey of Chertsey succumbed to Henry VIII and the dissolution of the monasteries, with the Common passing into the ownership of a new Lord of the Manor of Epsom.

At the start of the seventeenth century, a period of change started which brings us to the present day. In the drought of 1618, a local cowherd called Henry Wicker discovered a spring on the common from which his cows would not drink. On investigating, he found that the water was a strong aperient and the news soon travelled about the common's cure for constipation!



Epsom Well

So began a 100-year period where Epsom became one of the best-known Spa towns in England. There is much debate as to why Epsom lost its position as a leading Spa Town, however by the 1740s the bottling of water and making of salts had ceased and by the 1780s the buildings surrounding the well had been demolished and the site became 'Old Wells Farm' in 1812.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the rise of horseracing and the world famous Derby race in June led to the loss of Epsom Downs from the Common and the boundaries we have today.

During the nineteenth century, the Common was threatened by housing development and was saved by a public inquiry and the increasing popularity of the Common for picnicking made easier by the rise of the railways. This serves to show that local people have valued their Common for fresh air and exercise for a very long time!

In 1935 the then Epsom Urban District Council purchased the Common and the Council still owns the site today. During the twentieth century, the Common's landscape has seen a huge change as a consequence of the enormous change to local peoples' daily lives. The local people living around the Common no longer own cattle, goats or pigs and the Common has changed from a largely open grazed landscape into a largely wooded landscape.

Today we manage the Common for nature conservation whilst still allowing good public access. The nature conservation value of Epsom Common is recognised by Natural England, who designated the Common as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the 1950s and in 2001 the Common was also designated a Local Nature Reserve (the largest in Surrey). In recent years, cattle have been reintroduced to help control and manage scrub encroachment.

There is more information on our grazing project on our [website](#)



If you would like to learn more about the history of Epsom Common there are other excellent sources of information, the most comprehensive of which is a booklet produced by the Epsom Common Association. The booklet is called 'Epsom Common' (Local Guide No. 5), published by 'Living History Publications', and is available at local libraries, through local bookshops and via the Epsom Common Association.

We also provide an annual history walk taking you on a three hour walk around the site. To check the date of this walk, please view the [Local Nature Reserves web page](#).

Leaflets

There are currently three leaflets about Epsom Common local nature reserve. The leaflets are available from the Information Centre at Horton Country Park, the Town Hall and Bourne Hall Library.

- The general site leaflet Epsom Common local nature reserve, showing paths and giving information on the wildlife and history of the site
- A combined leaflet for both Epsom and Ashted Commons with a detailed map.
- Common sense horse riding and cycling, giving information about safely accessing the site.

Links

The Epsom Common Association also maintains a web site giving information on Epsom Common and can be accessed through the following link: www.epsomcommon.org.uk.

Management Plan

Nature conservation and public access on Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve are managed via a management plan which has been published in agreement with Natural England who guide our management of the site for nature conservation.

Our Common is a nationally important site for its wildlife and the main aim of the management plan is to manage and enhance the site for wildlife. At the same time the plan aims to seek public access improvements and work with the Epsom Common Association to interpret the site for visitors through walks, talks, events, signs, leaflets and web pages. To view the plan please click on the link below.

[Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve Management Plan 2016-2116](#)

The current plan takes a long term 100 year approach to managing Epsom Common local nature reserve reviewed every 10 years.

The vision for the new plan is to:

“Manage Epsom Common, to ensure the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the wildlife and heritage of Epsom Common whilst also ensuring good public access to a wonderful place!”

To achieve the vision the aim will be to focus on the key components in managing Epsom Common that are unlikely to change in the next one hundred years that are as follows:

- managing and maintaining the features of the Site of Special Scientific Interest in favourable condition
- ensuring the protection, maintenance, monitoring and enhancement of biodiversity and cultural heritage of Epsom Common
- ensuring good public access via a network of well-maintained and signed paths and bridleways
- encouraging and supporting the activities of the Epsom Common Association and volunteers
- interpreting Epsom Common to the public
- maintaining a close working relationship with the owners of Ashted Common (City of London) and other partners through the Epsom and Ashted Commons SSSI Forum
- maintaining Great Pond Dam under the terms of the Reservoirs Act.

A [Map](#) has been produced which summarises the draft 2016-2116 plan’s main proposals for the first ten year period. If you have any comments please do not hesitate to contact us and ask to be put in touch with the Countryside Team.

The previous plan (2005 - 2015) can be viewed by clicking on the link below.

[Epsom Common local nature reserve Management Plan 2005-2015](#)

The implementation of the 2005-2015 plan achieved a great deal, below is an extract from an article written for the Spring 2015 Epsom Common Association Newsletter summarising the achievements of the plan.

What did the 2005 - 2015 plan achieve? First and foremost it has built upon on the progress made during the late 1990s and early 2000s to re-introduce grazing on to Epsom Common as the key way of restoring a more diverse

range of habitats. Today there are three separately grazed areas, with currently 22ha of pasture woodland being grazed each summer by 30 cows. In addition over 3.3 km of woodland edge habitat have been created alongside the main hard surfaced rides and new glades created within the remaining woodland. There have been clear signs of significant improvement:-

- Butterflies:- Silver Washed Fritillary, White Admiral and Small Heath are being found in greater numbers within and along the edges of the grazing areas
- Breeding Bird surveys have indicated a rise in breeding bird species from 53 to 59
- Adders and Grass Snakes thriving within the grazed areas
- County and nationally scarce plants, Saw-wort, Adders Tongue Fern and Corky Fruited Water Dropwort spreading across grazed areas
- Common Spotted Orchids have returned to the grazed areas
- Yellow Hammers breeding in the grazed areas.

The plan also led to the creation of the Epsom & Ashted Commons SSSI Forum in 2005 to ensure coordinated management of the whole SSSI by the owners Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the City of London, working in partnership with the Epsom Common Association, Lower Mole Partnership and Natural England. Achievements have included, 4Km of restored hard surface path, a joint leaflet and information boards, emergency access maps, joint monitoring of breeding birds and veteran trees, joint volunteer tasks, advice and the loan of equipment. In 2007 Epsom Common was the Borough's first open space to gain the Green Flag Award that means that the common is managed to nationally recognised standard for open spaces.

The vast majority of the costs of implementing the plan have been secured through external grant aid for which a management plan has been a pre-requisite.

Projects

Epsom Common's grazing project has been the central focus of the site's management since 1997. Historically, local people exercised their Commoners' rights to graze animals on the Common and therefore the site was a much more open habitat than it has been in recent years. As woodland and scrub has encroached on the Common, much of the wildlife associated with open habitat, such as the skylark, has been lost. Since 1997, we have been successfully reversing this decline in diversity by clearing some of this encroaching vegetation and [reintroducing grazing](#) to help maintain a more open and botanically diverse landscape.

Volunteers and community groups

For many years, Epsom Common has benefited greatly from the efforts of local volunteers.

The Epsom Common Association was formed in 1974 by Mr T Dowman and other residents living on the Wells Estate next to the Common. The Association formed

because of a perception that the wild nature of the Common was threatened. The Association managed to persuade the Council to improve access by creating the all-weather circular horse ride and to protect verges. The shining achievement of the Association was the restoration in 1980 of the medieval 'Great Pond' which was drained over a century previously. The restoration of the 'Great Pond' is a great example of what local people can achieve.



Today the Association is still thriving. In recent years, a volunteer work party, the ECOVOLS, has been formed to carry out nature conservation tasks and the Association continues to work closely with the Council.

If you would like to find out more about the Epsom Common Association, please email chairperson@epsomcommon.org.uk or look at the website www.epsomcommon.org.uk.

Lower Mole Partnership

The Lower Mole Partnership has been working on Epsom Common since 1983 carrying out work to improve public access and for nature conservation. In recent years, the project has assisted in the reintroduction of grazing to help control scrub and encouraging the rejuvenation of the remaining heather areas. To find out more about the project and their work to reintroduce grazing, contact them on 01372 743783, email mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk or visit the [Lower Mole Partnership](http://www.lowermolepartnership.org.uk) website.

In 2007 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council set up its Countryside Team Volunteers who carry out a weekly nature conservation task on either Epsom Common, Horton Country Park or the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserves. To find out more call 01372 732000 and ask to speak to a member of the Countryside Team or visit our [volunteering page](#)

Wildlife

Epsom Common local nature reserve is a nationally and internationally important wildlife site and is designated as a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI). The Common's status as a SSSI is due to a range of rare insects associated with decaying wood and its importance as breeding bird habitat. In 2001, Epsom Common also became a local

nature reserve, adding to the Common's protection. The starting point for anyone wishing to study the Common's wildlife is to know its geology. Epsom Common lies on a very thick layer of London Clay, unlike the nearby chalk of Epsom and Walton Downs.

Today we manage the Common to allow good public access, whilst at the same time maintaining and improving the ecological diversity of the site. The Common has a range of distinctive habitats with mature ancient Oak woods, developing Birch and Oak woods, Hawthorn and Blackthorn Scrub, grazed open pasture woodland, remnant Heath and a wetland habitats including large ponds and fen areas.

There are many species of trees plants which provide habitats for a range of mammal, bird and insect species. The Common holds many wildlife treasures, such as Common Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids, Purple Emperor butterflies; the list is long and each time you visit you're sure to see something different. Look out for Roe deer in the meadows and Heron on 'Great Pond'.



By maintaining the varied nature of the habitats on Epsom Common it is hoped it will remain, as it always has, rich in wildlife and a peaceful place of relaxation for local residents.

Appendix A: Map showing paths on Epsom Common

