

Annual Report

Lower Mole Countryside Trust

Report of the Board of the Lower Mole Countryside Trust
for the year ending 31st August 2023

Introduction

This is the twenty-first annual report produced by the Lower Mole Countryside Trust and covers the period 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023.

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee, company no 4454401 and is a registered charity, number 1095771.

The registered office is 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom KT19 8PL.

- 1) To advance the education of the public on matters connected with countryside management within and around the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Kingston upon Thames and the District of Mole Valley (north of Dorking) and such other areas as the charity may from time to time decide.
- (2) To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and promote the management of the countryside, wildlife habitats and characteristic landscapes by supporting, promoting and improving public access to the countryside, promoting the participation of the public in countryside management and supporting conservation projects and programmes within the area of benefit.

The Mission Statement is 'to support the provision of a high quality countryside management service for north Surrey and Kingston upon Thames for the benefit of landscape, wildlife and people'.

Activities and Achievements

This year the Trust celebrated the 20th year since it was established as a charity, since then it has raised £242,831.87 and supported over 148 different projects.

Board Meetings

Six board meetings have been held in the reporting period. These in the main have concentrated on the formal business normally associated with boards such as membership applications, considering grant applications, financial reports and forward planning.

Business Plan

At the last AGM, the objectives for the year were as follows:

- To review the various governance documents and in particular the policy relating to grants;
- To review the Trust's website to make it more appealing and informative;

- To find a new funding partner, enabling the Trust to offer more grants for local projects.

The policies of the Trust that have been reviewed are: the Funding Policy, Available Funding Policy, Reserves Policy and Financial Policy. The updating has taken account of, for example, changes in banking practice and the need to be clearer on the requirements for those receiving grants.

Modifications have been made to the content of the website where necessary and copies of the Mole Matters newsletter will now be available via the website.

As yet a new funding partner has not been found. The completion of a new introductory leaflet to the Trust will provide a better platform when approaching potential businesses. Approaching suitable partners will be a priority for the coming year.

Organisation

The Trust has seven Trustees and has been actively seeking new ones. Pamela Harwood is stepping down from the Board at the forthcoming AGM, after having served as acting treasurer and editor of Mole Matters. Pamela's contribution to the running of the Trust has been very significant and she will be greatly missed.

The Trust has been actively seeking new trustees and will continue to do so through various avenues. It was reported at the last AGM that the Trust has been seeking a treasurer for some time and the Board is pleased to announce that Martin Owen has agreed to join the Board as the new Treasurer subject to his election at the AGM. He comes with a background in finance and countryside volunteering.

Finance

This year the Trust raised a total of £7,566.87 for the general fund. The financial report is the subject of a separate report on the agenda.

Membership

The number of members at the end of this year was 44, including 22 individuals, 13 senior citizens, 3 families, 5 groups, 1 honorary member. Two newsletters, Mole Matters, were sent to members, one in September 2022 and one in May 2023.

Publicity and Activities

In June 2023 the Trust and Partnership attended Ashted Village Day. This was an opportunity to raise money for the Trust through the sale of house and garden signs using the routing machine and to raise the general profile of the Trust.

The Young Street Verge, between Leatherhead and Great Bookham, has been a hectare of chalk grassland restoration project undertaken by the Lower Mole Partnership for a number of years. The Trust paid for four visits to survey the flora on the site and demonstrate the effectiveness of the management work. Survey results show it is of SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Importance) standard, so it has now been put forward for consideration by the Local Sites Partnership as an SNCI.

Two editions of the Trust's Mole Matter newsletter were produced and included topics such as the Hogsmill River and butterflies. Future editions of Mole Matters will appear on the Trust's web site.

The design of both a new promotional leaflet and banner has resulted in successful collaboration between the Board, the Surrey Climate Commission and a local graphic design company. A grant of £878.93 was received from the Commission under their Community Grants for Sustainability scheme.

Firewood sales, utilizing timber arising from habitat management works, are now being managed by the Lower Mole Partnership, due to new tighter regulation of sales under Ready to Burn legislation, requiring vendors to be accredited.

Projects and Grants

The following projects were supported by the Board during the year:

Chainsaw refresher training

A grant was awarded to the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) to enable one of their volunteers to attend a refresher training course for using a chainsaw. Having volunteers on site who are qualified in the use of chainsaws assists staff and enables more work to be completed on site.

Moor Lane Allotments Coppicing Group

A grant was agreed for the provision of tools to allow members of the Moor Lane Allotments Coppicing Group to manage woodland adjacent to the Bonesgate Stream. This is important for biodiversity along the stream that flows into the Hogsmill River. Product from the coppicing is used in the adjacent allotments.



Rye Brook, Ashted Common NNR

In November 2022 the LMP completed the third and final year of work on the three-year work plan, carrying out improvements along the Rye Brook on Ashted Common. Work was completed in the wetland area close to the flow structure. This is supported by the City of London Corporation, via a grant made to the Lower Mole Countryside Trust.



Claygate Common

The Claygate Gardening Society very generously gave the Trust a donation to be used on work within the Claygate area. The money was used on a task carried out by LMP on Claygate Common to install or replace horse barriers to ensure scarce heathland vegetation thrived undisturbed while allowing continued public access. Members of the Society visited the site to see the work underway.



Chainsaw training for the Epsom Common Association

The Epsom Common Association's conservation volunteer arm, the EcoVols, undertake conservation tasks with volunteers on Epsom Common SSSI in consultation with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (the owners), LMP and Natural England. The common is approximately 450 acres and has a 100 year management plan. Part of the work involves scrub clearance and small tree felling. The EcoVols also make charcoal utilising all of the timber felled as part of the management plan. In order to carry out the work they need licensed chainsaw operators, as the council will only permit NPTC or equivalent qualification on the site. The grant paid for a volunteer to attend a certified course which was successfully completed and will allow for the continuation of this valuable work.

Policy for the Award of Grants to Individuals and Institutions

The Trust's policy for the award of grants has been amended this year. The new policy does not fundamentally change the approach to the award of grants but makes the policy clearer and more robust in order to ensure that the aims of the Trust are met.

The following requirements for the award of a grant are set out in the funding policy:

- Grant proposals should be in accordance with the aims of the Trust as set out in the Trust's website: www.lowermole.wordpress.com
- The resulting benefits should be to the community and not just to the organisation making the application.
- When proposals relate to the management or conservation of habitats and/or species, they should accord with relevant Habitat and Species Action Plans and subsequently to the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy when this is published.
- Proposals relating to work on public rights of way should not be detrimental to any conservation interests.

- Applicants are invited from local community groups. Community groups must be able to access a community organization bank account in order to receive and manage the funds. No funds will be granted to individuals, or to individual bank accounts.

Additional information requirements relate to the administration of grants by the Trust and requirements on the part of applicants if their grant is approved.

The Future

As stated in this report, the Boards priorities are:

- To increase the size of the Board by attracting new trustees;
- To increase the level of funding that can be offered for conservation projects and in particular to provide a level of more long term funding by entering into an agreement with a business partner.

The Board will also look at further ways to improve its administration.

Statement of Relationship

Relationship with organisations with which the Trust co-operates:

Lower Mole Partnership: The Lower Mole Partnership hosts the Trust by providing office space, meeting rooms and computing facilities. The time the staff who are employed by the Partnership spend on work for the Trust is donated by the Partnership.

Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons

Lower Mole Partnership, 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, KT19 8PL
Bankers - CafBank Ltd, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA

Charity Trustees

Chairman	Rodney Shaw
Company Secretary	Sarah Clayton
Treasurer/Membership Secretary	post vacant
Member of the Board	Pamela Harwood
Member of the Board	Patrick Oven
Member of the Board	Alan Sherren
Member of the Board	Helen Cocker
Member of the Board	Dawn Fielding