



The Common

The newsletter from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

Volume 3 Issue 1

Summer 2006

Chairman's Statement

1) The issue that has dominated Society time and attention this past year or so is Heather Farm. There has been a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding about proceedings to date and criticism of the Society has been rife as well as unnecessary. As I am again a Trustee and now Chairman I would like to try to put the record straight insofar as I am able. There are numerous facets to managing the common and we must not lose sight of these as a result of our attention being concentrated on Heather Farm, as important as that is.

2) I'll start with this very simple declaration and where there are any doubts in your mind once you have read my full statement, please revert to it... **"The Society's position is that use of the Horsell Common-owned access to Heather Farm will not willingly be sold or given to anyone who causes or is likely to cause substantive damage to the environment insofar as it would affect the Common"**.

3) Next I shall try and put right some errors highlighted within oral and written statements received from HCPS members and members of the public and contained in news reports;

(a) Heather Farm in planning terms was not a farm but a factory for growing mushrooms - a so called "Sui Generis" designation.

b) The current application is mainly for warehousing with a minor area for light industrial use.

c) The current planning application and control of the access track are two completely separate matters. We have control over the access track to a point, but not the planning. That is in the sole control of Woking Borough Council.

d) The current application has no relevance to any potential application by WBC for a waste plant.

e) HCPS did not positively support the current application, nor did it object; it was a consultee and achieved a number of amendments to the application (see below) to reflect the Society's requirements for protection of the Common.

f) There never was an agreement between Blue Prince and HCPS as to the number of vehicles that were allowed to use the track; therefore we had nothing to police. Woking BC had the benefit of a Section 52 agreement attached to the planning permission of 1984 governing numbers, which they could have enforced if they had chosen to.

Potential Woking Borough Council Proposal for Waste Disposal and Generating Energy

4) HCPS fully understands the concerns of members and the public in relation to the potential WBC waste plant proposal. The Society awaits any proposals from WBC with interest but also with a large measure of anxiety about any technology which has not been fully tested in practice in any place (to our knowledge) that is as sensitive as Horsell Common. That said we still believe that it would be wrong to say "No" to a proposal which has not yet seen the light of day; conversely we will not be saying "Yes" without full and thorough information that is not opposed by English Nature and we certainly have not had that!

Application for B1-B8 use

5) You may know that an Environmental Impact Assessment formed part of the present application. Because Blue Prince, or anyone else for that matter, has the legal right to submit a planning application for that or any other property with or without the consent of HCPS, HCPS contributed to the EIA's cost on condition that the Trustees would have input and a degree of control over the resulting application. Changes made as a result include:

a) Restrictions to operating hours

b) Restrictions on the Use Classes permitted

c) Changes to reduce the amount of B1 (light industry), and increase the amount of B8 (warehousing), to dramatically reduce theoretical traffic numbers as B8 is one of the lowest traffic generators. E.g. if the site had been all B1, theoretical movements would have been 2000 a day.

d) Commensurate reductions in car parking - the original plan had over 500 car parking spaces, there are now 145.

e) Landscaping to mask the buildings from the Bourne footpath

f) Minimising of external lighting.

6) The other reason for contributing to the cost of the Assessment was so that we would be entitled to our own copy. From this we are told that on the face of it the EIA has not thrown up any significant potential environmental issues for the common; however **the Assessment will be audited** by acknowledged experts

including an independent consultant employed by Woking Borough Council. Additionally, because of the sensitivity of the site, a copy is currently with English Nature for their review as statutory consultee. **In other words, under EU law, English Nature's review of this document has to be considered by the Council as part and parcel of their determination of the application because of the sensitivity of the SSSI and SPA.**

7) From the English Nature review HCPS hopes to gain an understanding of whether or not the EIA is an accurate document, and to discern whether the damage that some people say will take place to the Common and its wildlife is a realistic threat or just the stuff of nightmares - imagined, not real. HCPS Trustees do not claim to be experts on environmental pollution so are reliant on expert advice in that area; however **English Nature ARE the acknowledged experts or at least have access to them and we shall put great store** in what they have to say.

Traffic

8) One issue that has been mentioned time and again is that of traffic. Expert evidence so far indicates that the overall impact of traffic generated by the proposed development would be insignificant by reference to the traffic levels already in the area. Some Trustees carried out a survey of traffic along Chobham Road in order to satisfy themselves that this was an accurate assessment of the situation; as a result we can confirm that the difference between the proposed vehicle movements and the current level, which is zero because the premises are empty, would be negligible. Had Blue Prince been operational, then the proposed difference in traffic movements would have been even less significant. In just 20 minutes there were 330 traffic movements counted along Chobham Road. We are advised that the EIA would likely have been in opposition to an increase in traffic along the track had there been, for instance, a large quiet area such as a field between the main road and the track in question. However, the fact that the track and common abut the main road means that the area in question is already subject to a significant number of vehicle movements.

English Nature - Expertise and Clout.

9) **If it transpires for any reason, including traffic, that English Nature or independent consultants believe the present application has the potential to create significant environmental issues then it is the Trustees' belief that it would be extremely difficult against this background for Woking to pass the application;** more likely they would impose limitations upon the proposed use and HCPS would support that.

10) Given English Nature's undoubted independence (from this issue), and clout, (this year their implementation of EU policy has delayed/stopped in their tracks a number of residential developments from taking place within a FIVE km radius of the common), they would to my mind be the most likely candidate to call foul if in their expert opinion they believe there to be

any potential danger(s) to this SSSI/SPA emanating from the current or subsequent applications.

If, however, English Nature has no such concerns then it would appear that there might not be the environmental grounds upon which to reject the application, in which case, and only if there are no substantive negative environmental issues, the HCPS Trustees would prefer to see the site occupied rather than allowed to become derelict, which could lead to the possible consequence that the site would become a risk to the Common and to the public. NFT Distribution is one example of what can go wrong if premises such as these are left to become derelict - "... the old warehouse, out of operation since the 1990s, increasingly became a magnet for vandals and travellers and its gradual degradation culminated in a major fire in 2002." *Chobham News and Mail*

HCPS - Policing Future Use of the Track if Consent is Approved

10) HCPS will, if the application is approved and if the necessity is there, subsequently take the further precaution of commissioning its own expert in the field to advise the Society and also to benchmark the air quality surrounding the Common over a long period, possibly for up to a year. This will give the Society reference data that is not currently available from anywhere else and which would prove invaluable in the event of suspicion that any operational standards, (as required under restrictive covenants with HCPS), are not being adhered to.

HCPS Potential Income in the Event of the Sale of Access Rights

11) On the subject of the amount of money that HCPS would receive in the event that a planning application succeeds and a sale of Heather Farm results, any current estimates of the value of the site are speculative since nobody can value the site until they know what use will be permitted there. If a sale does ensue and Trustees grant an access easement, then as a charity we have to receive a proper value for that right. Trustees are advised that 30% of any sale value is a fair figure bearing in mind the principles of the various valuation cases including *Stokes v Cambridge*. We cannot proceed at any concessionary level without clearance from the Charity Commissioners. In any case we would hope that members would not want the Society simply to give access rights away to a commercial developer or other commercial enterprise.

In Conclusion - for now

12) I hope you will see from this that the Trustees are not deaf to the concerns that have been expressed. You should also know that HCPS is and always has been very much in the business of protecting and preserving the Common; **nothing has changed.** Nevertheless, as stated by Geoffrey Cuttle the immediate past Chairman, HCPS is unwilling to pre-judge anything without the full facts being available to it. HCPS believes it would be foolhardy to simply say that it does not want there to be

a development of the Heather Farm site, especially without having proof that there are substantive potential negative environmental issues that would justify that position; **HCPS might, after all, find itself having to resist a compulsory purchase order, in which case it**

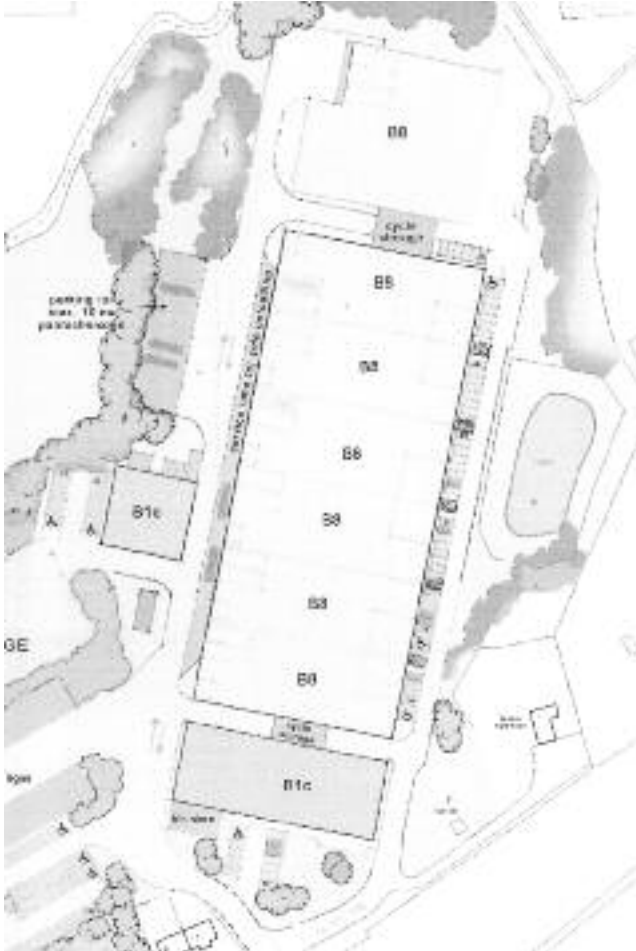


Illustration showing the amount of B1 Light Industrial and B8 Warehousing proposed at Heather Farm

Useful Information

<http://www.go-se.gov.uk/gose/planning/planningCasework/cpo/> for information on CPOs.
<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/> for information about English Nature and what they do.

may need to demonstrate that it had followed a process and was not simply against the proposal for the sake of being against it. There is also the logical view that any compulsory purchase would become that much easier and cheaper for a local authority to achieve where the land is derelict and low in value because it has no alternative viable use; especially against the background of regional and national policy on waste disposal and the pressures Government is putting on local authorities to develop waste disposal plants rather than use landfill!!!

13) We have not closed our minds to other ideas like the setting up of some form of nature reserve but we are sceptical about the prospect of there being sufficient funding for any such project. If residents/members/members of the public wish to seek their own advice from specialists in the field of lottery (other) funding then we would be very pleased to hear the outcome. We are aware of various groups and individuals who have mentioned this and hope that someone does follow up the idea.

14) As and when we have news of important developments we will advise members accordingly and will also publish on our website.

15) If any members are still concerned I will be glad to correspond with them and they are welcome to write to me; **however, before doing so please look again at the second paragraph of this statement.** I have set up a temporary email address at horsellcmn@aol.com specifically for your use and it will come direct to me. Please periodically look at the website horsellcommon.co.uk for further contact information in the event that I should not retain the AOL account for some reason, as might be the case from June/July onwards when I intend to change my ISP.

16) Non-members who wish to join HCPS and to receive future newsletters will find the forms on the website. Please bear in mind however, that as at this moment in time you know as much as we do.

John Durrant
 Chairman Horsell Common Preservation Society
 8th May 2006

Update on the Chairman's Statement - Heather Farm

The above statement was published on the Society's Internet site on Friday 12th May, ahead of publication of The Common; we knew Members to be concerned about the planning application for Heather Farm and we were aware that certain Members check the site for news on a regular basis. It was hoped that the Society's reassurance that easements over the access track would not be sold to anyone with the potential to harm the common would put minds at rest.

An article by English Nature for publication in *The Common*, was received from them on the 15th of May and this included a passage in which they said that they have recommended Woking to refuse, on environmental grounds, the Heather Farm change of use application.

From the Society's perspective, protection of the common's (SSSI/SPA) environment is our absolute responsibility and we are therefore bound to take heed of English Nature's concerns. From the outset we knew that English Nature might take against the application but we could not be certain of this given the nature of the buildings that have been in use there for so many years. The main building at Heather Farm on its own extends to nearly 2.5 acres - altogether there are around 4 acres under cover and for decades significant production activities were generated within them; this fact taken together with the transport needed to shift its product apparently went without comment or complaint from anyone including residents, environmentalists or Woking Borough Council who had the ability to control traffic movements but did not do so.

We therefore had to follow a logical process to reach the point at which we find ourselves today. In broad terms English Nature could not object to an application until it had been made; HCPS therefore could not know the position that English Nature would take until English Nature had audited the application. We now know that English Nature has recommended refusal and we will be looking closely at the reasons. Unless or until English Nature's key requirements are satisfied we will not be disposing of an easement over the track; neither can I think of any circumstances whereby the Trustees would ever have granted an easement without reference to English Nature. We have always said that English Nature's views are central to the future of Heather Farm and hopefully now, as the process plays out, Members and others will begin to have a better understanding

of the complexities involved and our reasoning. It is now for Blue Prince to engage with English Nature and establish a way forward for the site that is acceptable to them. We are still anxious for the future of the site; we do not want an NFT situation, neither do we want the site or the track to be the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order, which as was pointed out in the Chairman's Statement, could actually be achieved more easily by a local authority where a site is vacant and falls into disrepair!

With these issues in mind it would appear that Heather Farm is likely to be at the top of the Society's Agenda for quite some time to come.

John Durrant, Chairman HCPS

17th May 2006

Working with our partners

English Nature

Louise Bardsley *Conservation Officer*

Who we are and what we do

In 1992 English Nature was formed from the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) to champion the conservation of wildlife, their habitats and the natural geology of England. English Nature has a headquarters in Peterborough, with local area teams throughout England.

We have five main aims - the first of which is to establish and manage National Nature Reserves. There are 215 NNRs in England, and these are some of the finest examples of wildlife areas in the country. The two nearest to Horsell are Chobam Common, which is located on the M3 near Chobham, and Thursley Common which is just off the A3. Visitors are welcome on these NNRs - and guided walks can be arranged if you contact the site wardens. We often use our nature reserves for our second aim, which is to promote research into nature conservation. In turn this helps us to achieve our third aim which is to provide guidance and advice on nature conservation. English Nature has a huge array of publications; many of which are available free of charge from our website at www.english-nature.org.uk. Our publications vary from detailed scientific studies to a recent set of leaflets on wildlife in your garden.

Our fourth aim is to advise Government departments, Local Planning Authorities and a huge range of other public bodies on what are the best policies to conserve wildlife. English Nature's fifth aim is to notify and safeguard Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These are the country's very best wildlife and geological sites - one of which is Horsell Common. We work with local authorities, businesses and non statutory organisations, like the Horsell Common Preservation Society, to enable others to manage land for conservation.

Horsell Common

Horsell Common is home to a huge variety of wildlife. Nightjars, stonechats and even snipe frequent the

Common - and woodland birds such as sparrowhawk, woodcock, tawny owl and even spotted flycatcher can be seen in the woodland areas around the edges of the Common.

The Common became an SSSI in 1975 because of its host of special birds, insects and plants. The common is home to silver studded blue butterfly, rare beetles, bees, wasps and ants which are often linked with the heathland habitat.

Thames Basin Heaths & Housing Applications

Horsell Common is just one of 13 SSSIs across the Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire Counties that make up the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). The SPA was created specifically to protect three rare bird species: woodlark, nightjar and the Dartford warbler, which are rare across Europe. These ground nesting birds rely on the fast disappearing heathland of lowland England. They are also particularly sensitive to disturbance from people, and their dogs - and there is sound evidence that the breeding success of these birds can be affected by visitor pressure. If the number of visitors goes up - the number of birds goes down - and fewer birds breed successfully.

Horsell Common is not immune to recreational pressure. A recent visitor survey showed people driving from other Boroughs and across Woking to visit the Common. Nightjars now breed mainly away from the car parks, and away from the most visited parts of the Common. New housing developments around the Thames Basin Heaths will bring more people to the area. New residents will need to find places to walk and enjoy the outdoors. If visitor numbers continue to rise on Horsell Common, the birdlife will suffer.

Concerns over visitor pressure has led English Nature to propose that all additional housing should contribute to protecting the Common's wildlife. New houses within 5km of Horsell Common must pay towards improving or opening up new green spaces which are accessible to the public for recreation, such as walking

or dog walking. For houses very close to the SSSI (within 400m) English Nature does not believe it is possible to sufficiently reduce their impacts upon the birds and other wildlife of the Common. For this reason, English Nature is objecting to all additional new housing within 400m of the Common. This should help take the pressure off Horsell Common and its wildlife, allowing visitors to enjoy its peace, beauty and wildlife.

What can you do to help?

Every visitor can do something to help the Common's wildlife by following these simple guidelines and encouraging others to follow them:

Something positive - join the Preservation Society/ working parties.

- * Please keep your dog on a lead or under close control on the paths from February to August.
- * Clear up after your dog and please put the waste in the dog bins provided.
- * If on horseback stick to bridleways to avoid trampling nests from February to August.
- * If you smoke on the Common take a metal tin or other container for the stub and ash; cigarettes are still the most frequent cause of accidental fires on Heathland in Surrey.

Applications and advice

It is in our role as advisor that most frequently brings English Nature to the attention of local residents and visitors to the Common. Woking Borough Council in its role as the planning authority must consult English Nature on any proposal close to the SSSI or any which could potentially affect the wildlife which lives there.

In Brief

Digital mapping

Over the last fourteen months Estates Managements have been working with the Rural Land Registry to digitally map the Common. Ninety-five percent of the work has been completed; this will form the basis of a site environment plan which will be used to support our claim for Higher Level Stewardship.

New Otter Holt

During January 2006 a group of McLaren Conservation Volunteers constructed a block and pipe otter holt on the river Bourne near the McLaren Park public access land (see photo opposite). The Otters and Rivers Project Officer for SWT provided construction plans and assisted in choosing a site. The volunteers improved on the design supplied by SWT by building below ground level and completed the task in a single day.

There are already strong indications that the holt has been visited by an otter, with paw print and other indications at the river exit.

Sustainability

The clearance around the Warren Ponds produced 225.43 tonnes of wood chips and the work in Exchange/

If we are concerned that an application or proposal will affect the special wildlife of the Common, English Nature must object to the planning application in order to engage the planning system. Recently English Nature objected to the proposals to change the use of Heather Farm to a distribution and light industrial site and to more distant plans in the County waste plan to turn Heather Farm into a waste site. English Nature's objection will be maintained until further assessments or modifications to the proposals can show these applications will not adversely affect the Common's wildlife.

The Future

In October 2006 English Nature will unite with the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency's Landscape, Access and Recreation division to become a new body called Natural England. Natural England will combine all English Nature's roles with new roles for protection of landscapes, promotion of countryside access and provision of advice and services to the farming community. Natural England, with its wider remit, will be better able to champion the interests of wildlife alongside access and landscape enhancement. We hope that the move to Natural England will help us to help our partners at Horsell Common Preservation Society to protect Horsell Common and its wildlife for the enjoyment of this generation and the next.

Thursley National Nature Reserve, English Nature: 01252 790115 - Chobham Common, Surrey Wildlife Trust Countryside Service: 01483 401880

Heather Farm - English Nature's audit of the Environmental Impact Assessment can be viewed at horsellcommon.org.uk

Orchid Field produced 37.78 tonnes. All of this material was taken to a wood-burning power station in Slough. Previously the material would have been burnt on site and the heat/energy wasted.

Muslim Burial Ground

A new information board has been designed and will soon be erected at the Muslim Burial Ground. The information has been supplied by The Lightbox and WBC has made a contribution towards the cost. It will



include the names of all the Muslim soldiers, from both world wars, who were buried there.

The site will be open again this year on the 9th to 11th September as part of the Heritage Open Days programme.

Ground nesting birds

As reported in *The Common* last year Horsell Common has been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Birds Directive because it supports nesting pairs of nightjars, Dartford warblers and woodlark. These birds nest either on or near the ground, making them particularly susceptible to disturbance by people and dogs moving through the heather.

This is why we are asking that during the bird nesting season (April to the end of August) dog walkers do not exercise their animals on the heathland without a lead. Dogs off the lead are still allowed on the non heathland sections of the Common, except in meadows that are being grazed by cattle. Please help us to protect these very special birds.

Geograph project

This came to us via the Horsell Common website.

I visited Horsell Common (and enjoying a very pleasant walk) to take photos for the Geograph project www.geograph.org.uk

The Geograph project has over 1000 contributors who aim to take photos in every 1km grid square of Britain and Ireland. There are some un-photographed squares in the area north of Woking, so my trip to Horsell Common was to fill these in. I was glad of the excellent maintenance, car parks, signs, and website of your Society.

Visit grid ref. TQ0259 for Pyrford Common, TQ0159, TQ0159, SU9860 and SU9555 for Horsell Common. Ed.

Easy Access

As part of our recent disabled access review two new seats have been added to the easy access path. There are now seats every 200m. along the path. The seats were designed by Lee Slatter and made from local oak by Norbury Park Wood Products, the commercial arm of



Surrey Wildlife Trust. Consideration is also being given to creating two disabled parking bays in the Six-cross-roads Car Park.

Membership Profile Survey

Some 400 questionnaires were sent out, and 200 returned, which was an excellent response rate. However we do not have a complete picture of the membership, for instance the number of horse riders replying was very small.

The largest age group was 45-65, followed by the over 65s and then the 25-45s.

About half the members lived in the Horsell post code area, while only 10% were from outside the GU area. About a quarter visited the common every day, similar numbers once a week, once a month, and less frequently. Half the members walked to the common, rather fewer went by car, and a some cycled. 20% said they would be encouraged to cycle if secure bike stands were provided leaving them free to pursue other activities such as bird watching. We are investigating the installation of bike stands following this finding.

Walking was the favourite activity, followed by dog walking. Enjoyment of the peace of the common was mentioned by nearly everyone. A particular interest in birds was mentioned in almost half the replies, with plants, mammals, insects and fungi all having their fans.

The numbers offering support to HCPS was very encouraging and will make a valuable resource bank. Some 50 members are interested in joining a Common Watch which would mean keeping a regular eye on their "patch" and reporting anything unusual such as damage or excess litter. We will be planning out the areas and making a scheme soon. About 60 members indicated that they might join the winter working parties, which was most encouraging. See the working party dates on page 8.

Many thanks to all those who ticked the boxes.

Roadside trees

Some members will have noticed the increase in the number of roadside trees that have been felled. This has no doubt has been welcomed by the holders of wood licences. HCPS has now implemented a new annual roadside tree inspection, as a result of the inspection we have dealt with 176 trees on near highways and 150 on access tracks. Work has stopped during the bird nesting season but will resume in late summer when a further inspection will take place before the autumn leaf fall.



AGM

The AGM of the Society took place on 11th April. It was well attended, with 91 members present. A lot of new faces and many of our regular supporters were missing, due we suspect, to Horsell Residents Association holding their AGM on the same evening. You will remember that our date was announced in the December issue of *The Common*. Next year we will liaise with HRA to ensure that our dates don't clash.

The motion for incorporation circulated with the AGM papers was passed with a minor amendment.

Discussion on Heather Farm dominated the proceedings;

after the meeting several long-standing members commented that it was a shame that the more positive aspects of the work on the Common were overlooked.

With the retirement of Geoffrey Cuttle there were four places up for election. John Durrant, David Robbins, Andrew Halstead and Carol Jux were elected.

Draft minutes of the meeting are available on the website horsellcommon.org.uk

After the formal business Dr. Rob McGibbon gave a talk on "Lowland Heath", illustrated with historic maps and photographs. Those who had to leave early missed a very interesting presentation.

Warren Ponds at Horsell Birch

Last winter 7 acres of trees and scrub were cleared from around the Warren Ponds on Horsell Birch. The project was jointly funded by HCPS and Plantlife International with the intention of providing suitable habitat for the rare Three-lobed Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus Tripartitus*).

The Three-lobed Water Crowfoot is a member of the buttercup family and grows in shallow heathland pools that dry out in the summer. The plant has disappeared from its previous Surrey sites and was last identified on Horsell Birch in 1999. It can survive for many years as dormant seed in the mud.

During the summer the top 3 inches of silt will be removed to expose the seed, which hopefully will germinate in the spring of next year.

Andy Byfield, Heathland Conservation Manager with Plantlife International, said: "We are hoping the plant will come back from its buried state. The seeds are waiting there and it important the plant is reintroduced into the area. The Three-lobed Water Crowfoot used to occur in 30 sites in Surrey but a lack of landscape management has led to it disappearing. This is the last colony we know of in the county and we want to return the area to how it was half a century ago".



Photographs before, during and after work on the Warren Ponds



HCPS Volunteer Work Programme for 2006-7

Except for the first two dates the meeting place this season is the Sandy Track Car Park. OS Grid Ref. TQ 002 603, along the Western Perimeter Track off the A245 Shores Road at the junction with Kettlewell Hill. Working parties take place on the second Sunday of the month.

Sunday 10th September 2006. 10-1pm (*meet Monument Road car park by Monument Bridge*)

Sunday 8th October 2006. 10-1pm (*meet Monument Road car park by Monument Bridge*)

Sunday 12th November 2006. 10-1pm Sunday 10th December 2006. 10-1pm

Sunday 14th January 2007. 10-1pm Sunday 11th February 2007. 10-1pm

Sunday 11th March 2007 10-1pm.

For new joiners come along and remove scrub, mainly small birch and pine, from areas of heathland. Tools - bow saws and loppers will be provided. Sturdy waterproof clothing and footwear with good grips and a pair leather gardening gloves or similar should be worn.

The group leader is Keith Bowden 01483 750237. If the weather is bad telephone him before 9.30 on the day.

Summer Walks Programme

The series of Summer Walks organised last year as part of our bicentenary celebration were so well received that we have decided to repeat them again this year.

Friday 16th June 8.30pm Sandy Track Car Park "Nightjars and heathland birds" with Bill Pugh and Simon Lumsden (*cover up well long sleeves and trousers plus a hat*) and apply insect repellent.

Sunday 2nd July 2.00pm outside The Cricketers "Butterflies and moths" with Lee Slatter.

Sunday 23rd July 4.00pm Six Crossroads Car Park "Undiscovered Horsell Common East" with Paul Rimmer

Sunday 6th August 2.00pm outside The Cricketers "Undiscovered Horsell Common West" with Andrew Heggie.

Sunday 13th August 2.00pm Sandy Track Car Park "Insects" with Andrew Halstead.

HCPS Purchases Pyrford Common

Horsell Common Preservation Society is very pleased to announce that contracts have now been exchanged for the purchase of Pyrford Common from the Poor Allotment Charity. This charity was set up under a scheme of the Charity Commissioners in 1909 but the land was originally designated for the benefit of local people by an Enclosure Award in the time of George III. Pyrford Common's Trustees found their resources were stretched and approached HCPS to take on board the Common's care and management, believing this to be sensible and logical as the HCPS already manages a large proportion of Woking's open space.

HCPS sees Pyrford Common as vital open space for the residents of Pyrford and is strategically important as it takes some of the pressure off the Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Area that is a part of Horsell Common; so that people may, for example, walk with their dogs on Pyrford Common without disturbing the creatures such as ground nesting birds that live in the SPA.

With this in mind it is essential that Pyrford Common remains open. As the Common was never registered as common land, it is possible that another owner might have enclosed it. It is now too late to register the area as common land however it is the Society's intention hopefully to register it as a Village Green, which will give it similar protection. Other important objectives

include that it must be maintained well and that consideration is given to ways of encouraging walkers to use the area more and to use Horsell Common less, particularly during the months of April through to August so that Horsell's ground-nesting birds and the like are disturbed as little as possible. Horsell Common Preservation Society has the resources and the will to do all of these things and hopes to enjoy success in these objectives.

We are also very keen for people who live near Pyrford Common to be involved with the Common. Involvement can take the form of anything from simple membership - (£10 a year, which gives you and another family member the right to elect Trustees at the AGM and to stand for Trusteeship yourself if you like) - to being involved with working parties and/or participating in Common Watch, letting us know if there is something amiss with the Common. Commons around the country are abused by fly-tippers, garden waste dumpers, quad-bikers and they are also vulnerable to arson attacks. We want to know when you spot these things happening. HCPS now owns and manages the Horsell and Pyrford Commons; however the Horsell Common Preservation Society has accepted this undertaking for the animals and plants that live there and for your enjoyment of it. In that sense, it's your Common, so please help us look after it.