



# Annual Report

## Lower Mole Countryside Trust

Report of the Board of the Lower Mole Countryside Trust for the year ending 31st August 2024

### Introduction

This is the twenty-second annual report produced by the Lower Mole Countryside Trust and covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024.

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 22<sup>nd</sup> year since it was established as a charity, since then it has raised £253,899.87 and supported over 150 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 increase the size of the Board by attracting new trustees.
- To increase the level of funding that can be offered for conservation projects and to provide a level of more long-term funding by entering into an agreement with a business partner.
- Look at further ways to improve its administration

During the year the Trust advertised for new trustees and has started developing a Trustee Recruitment Policy. We were pleased to confirm the appointment of Martin Owen to the position of Treasurer at the last AGM. Trustee Patrick Owen resigned during the year due to pressure of work. No further new trustees have yet been recruited.

Work is continuing to find a business partner to work with to provide more long-term funding. The new introductory leaflet and information banner for the Trust are proving useful.

Ensuring that the work of the Trust is compliant with current legislation is an important part of the work of the Trustees. Work has been completed to ensure that the Trust is GDPR compliant and Cloud access for trustees to governance documents has been set up. Work has started on an Investment Policy.

## **Organisation**

The Trust currently has six trustees and has been actively seeking new ones. We are pleased that Martin Owen took up the position of Treasurer last year. However, additional trustees would be welcome, particularly where they have experience in areas such as fund raising and web design for example. The Board is also seeking a Membership Secretary. The Board uses volunteer bureaux to advertise for new trustees, but personal approaches can be a more effective recruitment tool. Members of the Trust are encouraged to suggest people who might be suitable trustees.

## **Finance**

This year the Trust raised a total of £11,068 for the general fund. The financial report is the subject of a separate report on the agenda.

## **Current and Future Funding**

The Trustees are keen to increase our funding base. This has been a longstanding priority of the business plan, but the task of finding a suitable donor, or donors, that would provide us with a dependable source of funding for a period of 2 to 3 years or more, and would be a suitable fit with our ethos, is not easy.

A grant of £10,000 was secured from the City of London Corporation for work to be undertaken by the Lower Mole Partnership on Ashted Common. The work to be completed in autumn for two years from 2023, will contribute towards the future protection of the Ashted Common National Nature Reserve from the consequences of climate change by creating firebreaks.

The Trustees would like to acknowledge their thanks for a donation of £375 from Ringway. Ringway, one of Surrey County Council's highways contractors, are meeting their CSR targets by volunteering in Surrey, including with the Surrey Countryside Partnerships.

The Trustees continue to work on sources of grant funding. Project funding may be the way forward and ideas that might attract a commercial business include a schools' wildlife gardening initiative, an apprenticeship scheme and community outreach officer to encourage greater involvement in countryside volunteering, particularly from groups that do not traditionally get involved.

The Trustees consider that improvements to the Trust's website to provide a professional face to potential funders and the public is a priority. The cost of employing a web designer to undertake this work would be in the region of £1,500. The Trustees are considering if a third party could fund this project.

Consideration is also being given to the design of a simple legacies leaflet that could be distributed to, for example, solicitors' offices.

## **Membership**

The number of members at the end of this year was 42, including 21 individuals, 13 senior citizens, 3 families, 4 groups, 1 honorary member. Two newsletters, Mole Matters, were sent to members, one in October 2023 and one in May 2024.

## **Publicity and Activities**

Publically available information about the Trust and its work is important to maintain a positive public profile. Modifications have been made to the content of the website in the wake of the updated Trust leaflet and banner. The Trust's newsletter, 'Mole Matters', continues to be produced twice a year, for ease of distribution it is circulated to our updated membership list electronically and is available on the website. It contains information on projects undertaken by partners and supported by the Trust.

## Projects and Grants

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

### Reuse of a Charcoal Kiln

A charcoal kiln previously purchased by the Lower Mole Countryside Trust for use at The Warren, Langley Vale, but no longer used at that site, was donated to a coppice worker at Sixty Acre Wood. The Lower Mole Partnership did the moving of the kiln to the new site.



### Provision of tools

A grant was awarded to the Lower Mole Partnership for the provision of a range of tools, including bowsaws, loppers and tree poppers.

### Climate Resilience on Ashted Common NNR

In autumn 2023 the Lower Mole Partnership carried out the first years work to create fire breaks on Ashted Common National Nature Reserve, funded by a grant from the City of London Corporation to the Lower Mole Countryside Trust.



### River Mole River Watch

A grant was awarded for equipment to enable volunteers on the River Mole to undertake chemical analysis of water samples from the river and report their findings to the appropriate water company and the Environment Agency.

### Battery powered chainsaw

A grant was awarded to the Lower Mole Partnership to purchase a battery powered chainsaw.

### Dormouse Boxes at Brockham Limeworks

Funding was provided for the Lower Mole Partnership to make and install 12 dormouse boxes as part of a project to improve monitoring of local dormouse populations.



## **First Aid Training**

A grant was awarded to the Lower Mole Partnership and the Epsom Common Association for emergency first aid training.

## **The Future**

As stated in this report, the Board's 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.

## **Statement of Relationships**

Relationships 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 at 2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom KT19 8PL. 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:

Bankers: CafBank Ltd, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA;

## **Charity Trustees**

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Chairman                       | Rodney Shaw   |
| Company Secretary              | Sarah Clayton |
| Treasurer/Membership Secretary | Martin Owen   |
| Member of the Board            | Helen Cocker  |
| Member of the Board            | Dawn Fielding |
| Member of the Board            | Alan Sherren  |