

Epping Forest Countrycare

22nd Annual Report
Summary
2007 – 2008



Introduction

Epping Forest Countryside is Epping Forest District Council's Countryside Management Service. Based within the Policy and Environment section of the Directorate of Planning and Economic Development, Countryside is fully funded by the District Council and is the key resource for advice, information and practical assistance on countryside and nature conservation issues.

Operating across the entire Epping Forest District, Countryside undertakes a wide variety of community-based activities and coordinates a regular programme of practical conservation work. The ability of Countryside to engage and involve the local community in "hands on" practical conservation work remains its key strength. As one of the Council's primary "enablers" Countryside involves people of all ages and abilities in every aspect of its work. The Service has five key objectives which are:

- To conserve and promote the biodiversity of the district and implement the goals of the Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan.
- To promote public access to the countryside and provide for informal recreation.
- To promote a greater understanding and respect for the countryside.
- To involve local communities in all aspects of the Service's work.
- To implement the goals of the Council's Community Plan.

Since its establishment in 1986, Countryside has developed a credible and proven track record for delivering quality projects. This in turn has developed strong community support and trust, which staff have been able to harness to good effect. The obvious public enthusiasm and desire of people to make a difference is reflected in Countryside's ability to recruit and keep a wide volunteer base.

Examples of Countryside's core activities over the last year include;

- Habitat management and creation – managing 30 sites across the District including ponds, grassland, woodland and hedgerows.
- Access improvements – Work on the public rights of way network and access improvement works to public green spaces.
- Educational activities – work with schools, coordinating the district Tree Warden Scheme, organising guided walks and events.

Through 2007/08, Countryside had 4 permanent staff complemented by volunteers, student work placements and temporary seasonal staff.

Personnel	Role	Dates
Paul Hewitt	Countryside Manager	
Andrew Vaughan	Assistant Countryside Manager	
Jordan Thomas	Assistant Countryside Manager	
Gareth Jones	Countryside Trainee	Left 14/06/07
David Roddick	Work Placement Student	16/04/07 to 18/05/07
David Roddick	Temporary Countryside Assistant	21/05/07 to 14/09/08
David Roddick	Countryside Assistant	17/09/07
Abigail Oldham	Veteran Tree Hunt Project Officer	08/01/2008

Principle Achievements for 2007/08

This is just a summary of the Service's work for the year. A full report giving details of all the Service's work is available to download from www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/countrycare.

The Service's principal achievements of 2007/08 can be summarised as follows:

- 1,023 volunteer days (6,138 hours) given on 110 practical tasks organised this year. Equates in £38,363 @ £6.25 per hour.
- Organised 54 walks and educational events,
- Work on the District's 9 Local Nature Reserves included 38 project days that involved 3,091 hours of staff and volunteer time.
- Work on access projects included 18 project days that involved 225 staff hours and 786 volunteer hours. Included a major access project completed at Gernon Bushes Nature Reserve.
- Generating a total income of £62,880 for the Council.
- Successfully completing "The 50 Favourite Trees of the Epping Forest District Project". Securing National recognition through BBC2's "The Trees That Made Britain" Series.
- Commencement of the Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt with the completion of surveys in 6 parishes within the district - recording 1,500 veteran trees.
- Production of a "Favourite Trees Book" promoting the Favourite Trees and the Veteran Tree Hunt.

Major projects in 2007/08

A core area of Service's time and effort remains the commitment to improving the district's biodiversity. This year management work were undertaken over 37 sites, the majority of which the District Council either owns or to which Countrycare has had a long-term commitment. In total 110 project days were organised involving nearly 7,500 hours of staff and volunteer time. This included work on 3 sites of special scientific interest, 17 Wildlife Sites and 9 Local Nature Reserves. For a second year, Chigwell Row Wood LNR was again been the major focus for the Services project work. With its population of 360 veteran trees, associated rare insects and heathland the is and will continue to be a biodiversity priority. In all 10 volunteer projects days were held on the LNR with 1,013 hours of staff and volunteer time given.

Working with the Community

Over the past 13 years (with the exception of the foot and mouth year of 2002) the Service has recruited volunteer help totalling over a 1,000 volunteer days for each of these years. Staff organised 110 practical days on 45 sites in 20 parishes across the District. In total 1,023 adult volunteer days were given and 787 children were involved in practical conservation work. By using a figure provided by English Nature, the Government's statutory agency for nature conservation, of £6.25 per hour, it is possible to put a financial value on the adult volunteers time of just under £33,362. This figure equates to around a quarter of Countrycare's net expenditure. As ever a massive thank you goes out to all the dedicated volunteers who have given so much of their time.

Working with young people

This year the Service worked with a range of youth groups and 8 schools from across the District. Nearly a thousand young people were involved in practical conservation work or a Countrycare event.

Guided walks, talks and events.

This year staff organised a total of 54 walks, talks and events aimed at increasing people's knowledge and understanding of the countryside. A total audience of 962 people attended.

Projects for 2008/09

Key objectives include:

Projects	Comments/Objectives
Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt	In partnership with the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt undertake a veteran tree survey of the District on a Parish basis. Prioritise parishes of Chigwell, Nazeing, Ongar and Waltham Abbey.
Local Nature Reserves.	To work in partnership with Ongar Town Council to create a new nature reserve within the town beside the Cripsey Brook. Continue to work towards the designation of Norton Heath Common, High Ongar as a Local Nature Reserve.
Country Walks Leaflets	Create web-based leaflet for two of Countrycare's Country Walks – Epping and Fyfield in partnership with Essex County Council's Parish Paths Partnership Project.
Site Management Plans and management agreements.	To complete reviews of the existing plans for Roughtalley's Wood LNR and Weald Common LNR. Produce full new plans for Old Shire Lane, Waltham Abbey and Copy Wood Field, Nazeing. Investigate management agreements for All Saints Church, Berners Roding and Foster Street Burial ground.
Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan	Begin to implement the new Biodiversity Action Plan for the district in partnership with EFDC's Environmental Coordinator and Steering Group.