

The Common

The newsletter from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

Volume 25 Autumn 2024



Heather is the most important plant on Horsell Common, providing shelter for ground nesting birds, nectar and pollen for insects. This year, the flowers were profuse with a soft mauve spreading across the Common and the air richly scented with nectar. Much of the conservation work on the Common aims to enhance and enlarge the areas of heathland. Heather is featured in this copy of the newsletter.

You are warmly invited to join us at Horsell Common Preservation Society's AGM Wednesday, 9th October at 7pm at the Dianthus centre , Goldsworth Park

We are delighted to welcome Michael Jones (Education and Engagement Officer, Thames Basin Heaths Partnership) as our guest speaker. He will give an illustrated talk on heathland species and his work with heathland education. There will be a short talk by Jack Smith SCC's Green Health and Wellbeing project manager on how we can work together.

See all AGM details inside. We really value your membership with HCPS and your vote will count.

Caroline Hughes (Editor)

Out and about

Estate Manager's Report

New water treatment facilities

Horsell Common Preservation Society (HCPS) is undertaking an essential upgrade to the sewage treatment plant at Heather Farm, marking a significant improvement in the environmental management of the site. Heather Farm is known for its beautiful wetlands, diverse wildlife, and as a key recreational area for the community.

However, with the increase in popularity of its facilities, HCPS needs to upgrade the existing sewage treatment system to process waste more efficiently and effectively, reducing the environmental impact on the surrounding natural habitats.

By employing advanced treatment technologies, the new system will ensure that the water released into the environment meets the highest quality standards, thus protecting the delicate ecosystems within Horsell Common.



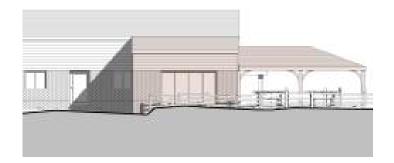
Ready to install the new tank

This project is part of HCPS's commitment to conservation and responsible stewardship of the land.

An improvement to Heather Farm.

HCPS is also pleased to announce a major improvement to Heather Farm. The marquee, which was installed during the Covid crisis, will be replaced with a new wooden barn, complete with a small extension, that will enhance the visitor experience and support our ongoing conservation efforts.

The new barn, designed to blend seamlessly with the



existing building, will provide a warm, inviting space for the community to enjoy, with its wonderful outlook over our wetlands.

Construction is scheduled to begin in September 2024, with completion expected by early December 2024. During this time, every effort will be made to minimise disruption to visitors.

Dead Hedge

Over the last few months, Surrey Choices Growth Team has been helping us to construct a dead hedge along the bank of the River Bourne. They have now completed 160 metres! This section of the R. Bourne has suffered heavily from erosion caused by dogs, and the hedge has been a great success in preventing further erosion and has proven to be a very popular task. Surrey Choices provide a range of support services to help improve the life skills and confidence of people with a range of disabilities in the local community.

Dead hedges get their name as they are made of branches cut from trees rather than living plants. It is a rather misleading name as these types of hedges are in fact full of life and provide a great habitat for insects, birds and small mammals. There are other sections of the river which would benefit from this protection, and we expect to continue our partnership into 2025.



Dead hedge along the R. Bourne

Access improvements

This year we have been improving access in various parts of the Common in the Bourne Fields and Mimbridge Meadows. High levels of rainfall and flooding events are becoming commonplace and many of our paths have deteriorated. Some sections will require making up with hogging on a regular basis and other areas need a better solution. In the flood plains behind Heather Farm, we will be adding an extra 160m of boardwalk this year and have already built small sections of raised boardwalk to allow flood waters to flow underneath. These raised sections will hopefully allow the water to flow around the site more easily in the wet seasons and help prevent further damage to other areas of the raised paths.







Repairing paths and installing board walks

Celebrations at The Peace Garden

This year we were pleased to host a unique Eid Milan party and poetry gathering at The Peace Garden organized by former Mayor of Woking, Cllr Raja Ilyas. It was attended by political, social, literary and scholarly figures from various cities in the UK.



Peace Garden gathering

The Peace Garden was originally the site of 27 graves of Muslim Indian soldiers who died in the two world wars. The original Woking Muslim Military Cemetery was opened in 1917 by the British Government to counteract German propaganda that Muslim Indian soldiers from the army of Undivided India were not being buried according to their religious rites. Tributes were paid to these soldiers during the celebrations.

The party was well attended by the local community and we hope to be able to host again next year.

Jeremy Dalton

Senior Ranger's Report

Butterfly survey

I am very grateful to local butterfly enthusiasts, Simon Lumsden and Andy Brook, for walking our new transect every week throughout this Spring and Summer. The route is 2834 metres long divided into 8 sections covering all the habitats on Grasslands. At the time of going to press, they have recorded the following:

- A total of 1251 butterflies observed with 21 species present.
- Meadow Brown (477) and Gatekeeper (333) the most numerous - the orchid field was particularly good for the former.
- Of the key heathland species, 147 Silver-studded blue butterflies across 4 of the 8 sections, and 13 Graylings across 5 of them.

Simon mentioned that of most surprise and delight to him was the presence of Marbled White butterflies - it hadn't been on his radar as being present on Horsell.



Marbled white—photo by Simon Lumsden



Grayling—photo by Simon Lumsden

Simon's thoughts on helping with the survey.....

"I can only speak for me, but I have really enjoyed being involved with the important work of recording the butterflies on Grasslands. Butterflies are a key indicator species, so it provides vital data as to the health of this part of the Common. The start of the season was very frustrating as there was a lot of bad weather, so it wasn't easy planning when to complete the transects.

Being a weekly walk, I have really enjoyed seeing how the Common changes over the course of the Summer, not just the butterflies but also the dragonflies, birds and particularly the changing colours of Grasslands. As the Summer progresses the often-drab looking heath bursts into colour with the yellow of Gorse, then purples provided by the flowering of the Cross-leaved Heath followed by the Bell heather and Ling, making it a magical place for a walk.

I have particularly enjoyed walking the transects with Andy and Rupert. Apart from the company, it helps to have a second pair of eyes looking out for the butterflies, as well as helping with ID when there is doubt, particularly when butterflies are in flight. Another advantage is sharing out the click counters!

I guess the real non-butterfly highlight was the close encounter with a Nightjar when Margo was on the walk. It then sat obligingly on a pine tree in full view for the rest of the day. Completely missed by most people walking by."

Simon Lumsden



Meadow brown—photo by Michael Jones



Silver-studded blue—photo by Michael Jones



Gatekeeper—photo by Michael Jones



Nightjar—photo by Simon Lumsden

How lucky to get a photo of this Nightjar camouflaged so well against the branch of the tree! The mix of woodland and open heathland is the ideal habitat for Nightjars that migrate over 3,000 miles from sub-Saharan Africa and arrive on the Common in May for the nesting season. They are rarely seen in the daytime but can be heard at dusk churring and clapping their wings as they hunt for insects. Their nests are well concealed on the ground, amongst the heather.

(Editor)

Reptile survey

It's a big thank you to Jamel Guenioui from Surrey Amphibian & Reptile Group (SARG) and ex work colleague Jamie Neaves, for helping me set up a reptile survey on Horsell. We now have 20 discreetly-placed refugia across the whole common, and I've been surveying them once a month from April this year.



Slow worm under refugia —photo by Rupert Millican

Of the 6 native UK reptiles, I have so far recorded 4 of them: Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard, and Slow Worm.

It was quite a surprise to find 4 young grass snakes all under one refugia near the sand pit back in April, probably due to the nearby availability of amphibian prey.

I will survey the refugia annually from March to September, building up a reliable data set to inform our habitat management decisions. It will help us to estimate the extent and range of reptile populations on the Common.

Volunteering

Our Tuesday volunteers and corporate groups have proven highly effective at managing bracken out on the open heath. They simply pull it up, stopping it from shading out the heather which thrives in its absence.



Menzies LLP corporate volunteers pulling bracken

This doesn't require any harmful chemicals, or use of heavy machinery to cut or roll the bracken flat, just a well -drilled and ideally large group of dedicated volunteers every week, systematically working their way through areas where it is spreading out on to the heath from adjacent woodland. If we repeat this process several times each year, we should eventually starve it of the energy it needs to produce any more shoots .

Tree-poppers continue to be a very effective weapon in the perennial battle against invasive Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel. Used in combination with mattocks and root cutting saws, the crack volunteering team manage to remove whole bushes complete with their root balls.



lan and Colin with Rhododendron and uprooted root balls at the base of the tree.

Our corporate groups have assembled another 35 nest boxes, this time for swifts as well as woodland birds. We will install the swift boxes just under the roof eaves of buildings around Heather Farm, and play recordings of their calls nearby to help them find the boxes. It would be amazing to establish our own colony of swifts next to the café and our offices!



Menzies LLP —showing off their nest boxes.

Habitat management

Young Cross-leaved heath is colonising areas of bare ground we have created in the model aircraft field, extending favourable habitat for the rare Silver-studded blue butterfly.

This Autumn and Winter, we will continue mowing heather to increase its structural diversity, providing more habitat niches for insects and invertebrates as follows:



Heather regrowth in model aircraft field

- Short (young) heather essential for Silver-studded blue butterflies, ants and spiders.
- Building (growing) and mature heather a favourite of various moths and ground beetles
- Mature heather with patches of bare ground supports the rare Grayling butterfly, a key indicator species for heathland.

With more habitat niches available, there are potentially a greater variety and quantity of invertebrates available for birds, small mammals and other species to feed on.

Senior Ranger's 'Conservation Safari' guided walk

On 10th April, I ran a guided walk for 15 people around Grasslands, describing the work we do to keep the Common safe and healthy for both its wildlife and visitors.



Courtesy of our own obliging and well-behaved herd of Belted Galloway cattle, that remained seated just behind me for the duration of my explanation, I had a rare opportunity to highlight all the benefits of this particularly hardy and versatile breed. Everyone seemed appreciative and engaged, with many questions asked, and it was a boost for me to receive several emails of thanks from attendees in the days following!

Natural England Report

Parts of Horsell Common are designated as SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and SPA (Special Protection Area) Much of the conservation work on the Common has extended the areas of open heathland which provide the ideal habitat for several endangered and rare species. Every year, Natural England visits Horsell Common to assess how successful this work has been. HCPS values the work carried out every week by volunteers and by Corporate Groups and the importance of their work has also been recognised in the report.

I would like to share with you the conclusions of Natural England's recent report on Horsell Common, which reads:

"The areas of heathland have improved with the recent management and direction from the managers since the last visit.

Connecting corridors are being established and heather ages and bare ground are in place within the site. Pine and birch regeneration is low with efforts now directed to reduce common gorse levels.

An extensive volunteer membership provides management success and adds significant value to the site. The addition of butterfly transects, and reptile tins is going to provide good recording data alongside the bird data and visitor survey data already established. The SANG at Heather Farm is successful at reducing visitor numbers on the sensitive areas of the heathland and with future firebreaks and mowing regimes in place this will be developed along with better fire resilience.

The wet and dry heathland features including ling and bell heather, sphagnum species, bog asphodel and pond marginal plants are present with good heather age ranges and bare ground. Litter is low, scrub levels outside of higher than ideal common gorse is within target. All three SPA birds are recorded on the site and the silver studded blue population is stable. The sand and invertebrate assemblage are being maintained with additional scrapes and sand bank maintenance at the major site of The Sand Pit.

The reptile sightings and recordings will provide a better picture of species present over the following years. The site has large areas of woodland both pine, birch and mixed secondary woodland supporting the assemblage of breeding birds. The indications are encouraging as a direct result of the considerable amount of work that has been undertaken across the site and meeting the Countryside Stewardship agreement indicators of success."

Thanks again to all the volunteers, for all the time and hard work you offer, which is paying off with excellent results!



Volunteers' BBQ

Rupert Millican

Guided Walks

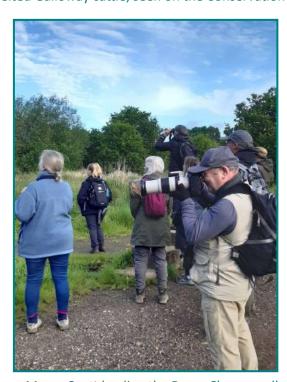
From April to October, HCPS and TBHP have organised walks on the Common, to find out more about the Common and its wildlife. A huge "thank you" to Jeremy Dalton, Rupert Millican, Margo Scott, Andrew Halstead, Michael Jones and Richard Alder for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with us. The walks included, Dawn Chorus, Incredible Insects, Conservation Safari, Horsell Common Management, Fungi on the Common and how to discover heathland on your phone.

Many walks were oversubscribed and we are sorry if you were disappointed. All walks for 2025 will be advertised in the Spring 2025 newsletter. You can look up all our recent newsletters on the HCPS website:

https://horsellcommon.org.uk.



Belted Galloway cattle, seen on the Conservation walk.



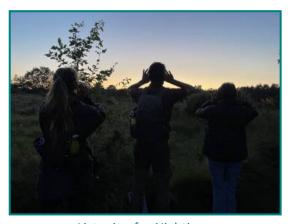
Margo Scott leading the Dawn Chorus walk.

TBHP Walks

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership had 6 events on Horsell Common during Heath week. There were 3 Nightjar walks, 2 Insect walks and a Scavenger Hunt.

Sarah Bunce of Thames Basin Heaths Partnership writes:

"A huge thank you to those of you who came along to Heath Week events this year! We had great fun and hope you did too. We're so fortunate to have beautiful heathland on our doorstep, and what better way to showcase Horsell Common than with twilight Nightjar walks with the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership team, insect walks with Trustee Andrew Halstead and a repeat of Senior Warden Zoe's ever-popular Sensory Scavenger Hunt. If you missed it this year, we'll be doing it all again next year. Put a date in your diary, Heath Week 2025 will be Monday 28th July to Sunday 3rd August!"



Listening for Nightjars



Origami activity during Heath Week 2024



Fly Agaric (Amanita muscaria) fungi.

Heather Farm Walk

Preserving the Common for wildlife and for recreation

Jeremy led the most recent of the informative walks out and about on HCPS land. As back marker, I was as interested as the other 20 who had signed on for the walk.

The estate manager's job is very wide ranging. We started off by going to the shed where all the wood chippings are stored for the biomass boiler before striding across Mimbridge meadows to the Bourne where the banks have been reinforced near the bridge and a dead hedge built along the river bank.



Further along the walk, we saw the new board walks being installed in the Bourne fields, which will make winter walking easier, and we saw where the perimeter path has been improved. Flooded muddy paths are a real problem in the wetter months.

We then moved onto the Danewell gutter and an area of acid bog where sundew and bog asphodel and a huge variety of mosses flourish.

A programme of tree felling in the winter months has opened up a long corridor connecting areas of heather.



This work extends the areas birds, butterflies and other insects can use.

These are just a few things that Jeremy has to manage but he also enjoys getting on with the physical work too.

It was great to hear that very little is wasted. The felled trees are chipped for the biomass boiler. Cut branches have been used to make the dead hedging. Chippings are also used on paths. Continuing the conservation theme, benches are made from HCPS wood, and the sun's energy is captured by solar panels which supply power for Heather Farm buildings.

Leaky Dams

Three leaky dams have been installed in the Danewell gutter. Andrew, Rupert and Jim made a series of mini dams with brushwood, which will help to preserve areas of wet lowland heath by maintaining a moist microclimate. This acid bog supports acid loving plants including bog asphodel, round-leaved sundew, cross-leaved heath and many species of rare mosses.



Making a leaky dam.

Winter volunteering

Winter volunteering continues every Tuesday and also every second Sunday in the month, from 10 am to 1pm. Tree poppers and loppers are the main tools used for important conservation work to clear Scots pine and silver birch from areas of heather.

Sunday dates:

October 13th
November 10th
December 8th
January 12th
February 9th

Please check https://horsellcommon.org.uk/support-us for more information.

Heather on the Common

Heather is the standout species on Horsell Common. In winter it can look drab and brown but in late summer, the Common is transformed into a sea of mauves and purple



and the air is scented with nectar.

Did you know that there are three species of heather growing on Horsell Common?

Bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) is the first to flower with its deep magenta flowers. This has done particularly well this year.





Cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) prefers damper areas. Its leaves grow in whorls of four and its pale pink bell-shaped flowers are at the top of the stem.

Common heather or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) flowers in August and September, with lots of tiny mauve flowers growing thickly up the stem.



Why is so much conservation work needed to maintain areas of heather?

On Lowland Heath, Scots pine and Silver birch would very quickly outcompete the low growing heather. Heathers grow in other places in the UK, on the upland moorlands, and on cliff tops in coastal areas. The salty winds of the Atlantic and the harsher climate of the uplands reduce tree

growth allowing the heather to thrive.

In Cornwall, heather and gorse make a patchwork of neatly rounded cushions! Even the gorse growth is low to avoid the strong Atlantic winds.



Commoners were once allowed to graze their sheep and cattle which nibbled away at young tree growth as well as the new heather tips. The heather had many uses. It was cut to make brooms and bedding, fuel and thatch. It made a yellow dye for wool and tanned leather. In the Middle Ages, it was used to flavour beer, before hops were widely used. Today we think of heather nectar as a source of honey. Heather honey has an unusual jelly texture, until stirred

Andrew Halstead, a long-standing HCPS trustee, is a beekeeper. In fact, he won first prize for his honey at the Horsell Village Show. He is an expert on all insects and does regular surveys on the Common, often discovering rare insects.

"During late July to mid September, heathland provides an abundance of nectar and pollen while various heathers are in flower. Honey made from ling heather nectar has a flavour that commands a premium price. Apart from honeybees, there are other bee species that use heathers as a primary source of the nectar and pollen they use to feed their larvae. These include the Heather mining bee, *Andrena fuscipes*, the Heather Colletes, *Colletes succinctus*, the Green-eyed flower bee, *Anthophora bimaculata* and the Heath bumblebee, *Bombus jonellus*, all of which can be found on Horsell Common."

Horsell Common has been awarded "SPA" status (Special Protection Area) because of the rare species which thrive and depend on the Common, crucially, on the heather. These include the Silver-studded blue, the Nightjar, the Dartford warbler and the Woodlark. The programme of conservation is aimed primarily at preserving, restoring and enlarging areas of heather to protect these species.

And who was responsible for associating heather with bringing good luck charm? Could Queen Victoria have brought the idea from Balmoral?

Editor

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership



Our Amazing Heathlands!

I feel very fortunate to be able to share my love of the natural world with local schools as part of my job as Education Officer with the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership.

I love being outside and part of nature. I love listening to birds and following butterflies around – there's something magical about butterflies! I love heathland. I love the sea of purple heather and the coconutty scent of gorse. I love the fact that Dartford Warblers always sound like they're in a hurry. I love watching solitary bees and wasps dig their tunnels in the sandy ground – they all have different digging styles.

And, the thing I most love is being able to share all this amazing nature with others.

I am incredibly grateful to the Horsell Common Preservation Society for allowing me to use Horsell Common as an inspirational outdoor classroom for local children. Thank you.

Connecting children with heathland

Over the academic year from September 2023 – July 2024, I ran thirty-five sessions at Horsell Common, which totalled almost 700 engagements. Over the same period, my wider engagements across the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area were approaching 8800 over 223 sessions. That's a lot of children benefiting from our project across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire!

In these sessions, children discovered just how amazing our local heathlands are, learned about the fantastic species that live in this rare habitat and how they can all help to protect it all.

We sniffed gorse and looked for tiny spiders at the same time. We listened for Dartford Warblers – sometimes even catching a glimpse of a long, perky tail disappearing into the heather. We observed Bee wolves catching Honeybees – the jury was out on whether this was a good thing or a bad thing... and always concluded that it was a good thing ecosystem-wise, but perhaps not so for the individual bees! We searched for tiny mushrooms growing out of pine cones and checked deadwood for the beautiful bright blue-green staining of Green Elf Cup. Would we find the infrequently seen miniature Elf Cups themselves? During

one session, we even heard a daytime churring Nightjar – the first time this had happened with a school group present. It's great when something rare and magical you're talking about makes an appearance to prove it actually exists – even if the moment is only fleeting.

With every moment sensing the nature around us, the children developed their connections with nature, excited and enthused by what they were experiencing. Even the most initially sceptical children left with a nature experience that would likely stick with them for a long time. At the end of sessions, children felt empowered to go away and spread the word to friends and families about how special heathland is and how they can all help to look after it.

Whilst immersing ourselves in the wonders of heathland, we covered a multitude of curriculum aims: food chains, seasonal change, lifecycles, habitats, animals, plants and positive and negative changes to a habitat, but also reaped the wellbeing benefits of being outside. An outdoor classroom is such an inspiring and versatile place.

Some schools used the heathland visits as an introduction to project work, with some designing posters to help protect ground-nesting birds from disturbance. Great work everyone!

Get involved!

Teachers - If you'd like to connect your children (and yourself!) with local wildlife, please get in touch as we offer a variety of free, fun sessions for schools both inside and out on the heath.

If you need any persuading to join in, one of my favourite quotes from a teacher this year was 'the children have loved it, and even the parents have said how much they have learnt from their children. I think we have all learnt how valuable it is for the children'.

Michael Jones

Education Officer – Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

tbhschools@naturalengland.org.uk

www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools

AGM Notices

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Dear Member

Horsell Common Preservation Society is pleased to invite you to the 2024 Annual General Meeting. This is your opportunity to meet the Trustees and other members of the Society and to hear what we have achieved in the last 12 months.

Attached is the formal Notice of the Annual General Meeting to be held on Wednesday 9th October 2024 in the Dianthus Building, Goldsworth Park, Woking GU21 3RT @ 7pm.

Please arrive in time for a prompt start at 7pm.

As is usual three of our existing Trustees must retire by rotation and all three are standing for re-election. They are Andrew Halstead, Paul Downes and Paul Robinson. This year we also have three new Trustees standing for election, attached is a short bio of each.

On the AGM notice we have an item of Special Business. This is to request an amendment to the Society's Articles of Association. More information will be given at the AGM but the amendment is to allow the Society to further utilise the land that is owned by HCPS for the greater benefit of the community in the area.

All other documents including the accounts and previous year's minutes can be found on our website. If you require hard copies then please email us on accounts@horsellcommon.org.uk

Once the formal business has been concluded there will be an illustrated talk on heathland species and his work with heathland education, by Michael Jones of the Thames Basin Heath Partnership.

Any queries should be emailed to accounts@horsellcommon.org.uk

Kind regards

Janette Dalgliesh (Secretary)

Directions from Woking town centre for the Dianthus Building

- ♦ Go onto Lockfield Drive (A324)
- ♦ Go through two roundabouts
- ◆ Turn right onto Clifton Way
- ♦ Take second left onto Kirkland Avenue
- **♦** Take third right onto Wishbone Way

The Dianthus Building is situated towards the end of the road, to the right of the car park and next to Toad Hall Nursery.

Further Information

For further information on the agenda for the meeting and proxy voting procedures refer to:

HCPSNoticeAGM-2024.pdf (horsellcommon.org.uk)

Charlotte Brackley

I am partner at Moore Barlow LLP, specialising in rural property law matters and based in the firm's Woking office.

I grew up in Woking and have lived in Horsell since 2009, now living close to HCPS' new lakes by Wheatsheaf Common, my family enjoy walking our dog on Horsell Common, whether that's a quick turn around the lakes or a longer walk over to the Muslim Peace Garden and McLaren or Heather Farm.

Having enjoyed the benefits of living on the doorstep of the Common for so many years, I am proud to become a trustee of HCPS in 2024 and to bring my legal expertise to support the dedicated Trustee and Estate management teams.

Colin Kemp

I have used the skills gained during my working and political life to work with neighbouring authorities, partner organisations and developers guiding the outcomes towards greener and more inclusive outcomes, whilst at the same time, working with boroughs and districts across the region, overcoming political differences and challenges to deliver outcomes for residents. My skills include listening and communicating, my natural enthusiasm is infectious, and my leadership style is inclusive, and I take people with me towards a mutually agreed goal.

I have always worked towards being an effective board member/non-executive director of any organisation I have been involved with. Setting outcomes and targets that meet the organisations vision and put in place interim goals. Also, over time scrutinising KPI's and financial reports questioning areas where there seems to be underlying issues and working with teams to look for solutions to get these projects or areas back on track.

Sebastian Purbrick

I moved to the Woking area with my wife in 2016, after many years living and working in London. Having moved onto the Anthonys, I immediately found a community of neighbours to get to know and build relationships with, having not known anyone in the area when we moved.

This also gave me a wonderful opportunity to get to know the common, spend time outside walking, gaining all the benefits that come with being outside in nature and taking time to enjoy the immediate surroundings. Having public access to such fantastic resource is something I am passionate about, and I joined as a Trustee, to help ensure this continues for future generations.

My professional background is in accounting and tax, having worked with large multinational accounting firms for 15 years, I now work in financial advice.

Stop Press

New water treatment facilities (update)

Further to my report on page 2, the new water treatment plant is now in place!

Jeremy Dalton



Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter.