

*The CMS invests in its volunteers –
It's official now – see p7*





The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with landowners and communities to develop projects that enhance landscape and biodiversity, as well as encouraging people to understand and enjoy the countryside. The service plays an active role in encouraging volunteer and local action groups to identify and become involved in projects. The CMS also provides opportunities for informal recreation through events, guided walks, cycle routes linking towns and the countryside, leaflets and interpretation.

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The Countryside Management Service is sponsored by Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, North Herts District Council, St. Albans City and District Council, Three Rivers District Council; and is also supported by The Borough of Broxbourne, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.



The CMS environmental management system is certified to ISO14001



Boxmoor Trusts CMS to bring in the funds

The Countryside Management Service track record in attracting funding for the Hertfordshire countryside took another step forward recently. Working closely with the farm manager and supported by Herts Biological Records Centre and the Historic Environment team, the CMS has put together a successful application for Higher Level Environmental Stewardship for the Boxmoor commons at Hemel Hempstead.

The Boxmoor Trust is a charitable organisation that has managed the land here since 1594. The commons cover 450 acres of chalk downland, historic parkland and ancient woodlands on Boxmoor itself and at Roughdown and Sheethanger Commons. All of these have open access, allowing people from Hemel Hempstead and nearby Berkhamsted the opportunity to freely enjoy the countryside close to where they live. Belted Galloway cattle and Norfolk Horn sheep graze these pastures and are a distinctive feature and a local landmark in their own right.

The grant will enable more appropriate habitat management, support the Trust’s educational work and help to launch a sustainable wood-fuel project. Environmental Stewardship Higher Level

Scheme is a national/EU funded scheme administered by Natural England, the government’s nature conservation advisory body. The scheme encourages farmers and land owners to change the way their land is managed to deliver increased public benefits from biodiversity, landscape and public access.

The CMS continues to develop schemes with other farmers and local councils. Over £5 million pounds of funding has been secured through this route in the past three years.



Orchids at Roughdown Common



The 20 Year Vision takes shape

The rides and glade are greening up again at Broxbourne and Bencroft Woods this summer as new plants take advantage of the extra light following tree felling last winter.

As a result of a new management plan for these fine woodlands, the CMS has helped Hertfordshire County Council access funding from the Forestry Commission for large scale forestry works. This is the first step in achieving the 20 year vision for the county council's part of the Broxbourne Woods National Nature Reserve, benefiting wildlife and creating new vistas for visitors.

Contractors and volunteers worked hard to form new glades in Broxbourne and Bencroft Woods during the winter months. Existing rides, which had become narrow and shady, are much wider, creating suntraps for flowering plants. With the scrub that regenerates along the woodland edge, they will feed and provide shelter for more birds, insects and mammals than before.

A Woodland Improvement Grant has funded forestry work, new signs and leaflet reprints and will help fund future coppicing, tree planting, further ride and glade creation and a gradual change from dense conifers to more open mixed,

broadleaved woodland. The timber was converted into shavings and sold as horse bedding helping to repay remaining costs.

After several years of growth a rotational system of cutting will be established to maintain a range of ages and structure. Wood Warden volunteers continue to maintain the access routes around the woods as well as coppicing wet woodland and maintaining the heather patch. If you would like to join them and work in Hertfordshire's only National Nature Reserve, contact CMS Northeastern Area

Recently, volunteers strimmed and raked the bridleway edges in the glow worm colony to maintain an open edge for glowing female glow worms to be seen by passing males.

The popular pack of three leaflets for the Broxbourne Woods National Nature Reserve walks is available again. One covers the history and conservation of the area, another features the all-ability sculpture trail and a third, the walkers' guide shows the main paths.



Minister visits Bricket Wood Common

A small group of important environmental decision makers enjoyed a fact finding visit to Bricket Wood Common in June with the Countryside Management Service. MP Richard Beynon, the Under Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, was accompanied by Poul Christensen, the Chair of the Board at Natural England and Shaun Thomas their Regional Director. They met officers from St. Albans City & District Council and the CMS, and volunteers who are restoring heather which was once prolific here. The common, south of St. Albans, is a rare example of wet, lowland heath and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



News from Watling Chase

In 2009-2010, CMS supported 11 environmental projects with grants and volunteer help across Watling Chase Community Forest.

Here are examples of schemes that went ahead last year.

Printing of a new leaflet designed by the Friends of Hanstead Wood, who used their time managing the wood as match funding.

A new surfaced footpath at Hillmead Nature Park- a pocket park owned by Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC) in Bushey – which forms an essential link with the wider countryside. CMS volunteers and contractors coppiced blackthorn to create new wildlife friendly areas and improve visibility across the site.

Coppicing blackthorn to prevent encroachment into the grassland at Wash Lane Common – a County Wildlife Site and a vital refuge for wildlife, with grassland, wide hedges and ponds near South Mimms services.

Hedge laying and community planting day (when 250 trees were set) at Netherway Green, Chiswell Green, owned by St Albans City & District Council (*pictured above left*).

Restoring the old hedgerow pattern at Attenborough Fields, Bushey, involving coppicing old hawthorns, replanting gaps and fencing to protect from grazing horses

by the Friends of Attenborough Fields and Hertfordshire County Council’s Rural Estate.

Improving access at Woodcock Hill Village Green in Borehamwood. The Friends, working closely with HBC, have installed a vehicle access gate and cut back large areas of invasive bramble to restore areas of important grassland.

Coppicing and pollarding trees adjacent to Park Street School; thinning trees to allow natural regeneration on the railway embankment at Park Street recreation ground and installing bird boxes in St. Stephens Parish.

Restoring a pond at Aldenham County Park where CMS volunteers installed a new liner and planted it up with native wetland plants. (*pictured above right*)

To help achieve objectives like these, small grants of up to £2,000 or 50% of the costs are available for suitable projects. WCCF covers 72 sq. miles in Hertfordshire including the Borough of Hertsmere, the southern part of the District of St Albans and part of the London Borough of Barnet and was launched in 1991.



Ivel Springs - Wetlands for Wildlife

Ivel Springs is a 15ha open space just north of Baldock, with a long history stretching back more than five thousand years and a rich diversity of wildlife. Chalk springs on the site give rise to the River Ivel which flows north into Bedfordshire to join the Great Ouse River. The area includes a former rubbish tip but has evolved into a rich mixture of habitats with wildflower meadows, reedbeds and extensive woodland. It is now a County Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve. The Countryside Management Service helped North Herts District Council (NHDC) to develop a Greenspace Action Plan to manage the site and source funding to implement the plan.

As part of an existing Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) extra capital works were applied for to undertake the wetland works. During February 2010 willows around the wetlands were pollarded extend their lives and to benefit wildlife. Pollarding is a practice where a tree is cut above head height, which prolongs the trees life and promotes lots of new growth – this was traditionally the method used to stop grazing animals eating the new shoots. Other tree works on site included opening up part of the bank edge to allow more natural light into the River Ivel which will help the native plants and animals to thrive and the removal of sycamores to

create more grassland glades along the edges of the footpaths.

Once the tree works were complete we enlisted the help of a large tracked excavator complete with driver to clear the silt from the ditches and excavate pools. The silt which had built up over many years was removed from the inlet ditches and the seasonal pools by the boardwalk were extended to enable them to hold water for longer periods and to allow visitors the chance to watch majestic dragonflies and damselflies hawk above the open water catching insects during the Summer months. The main reedbed has been enlarged and deepened which will create not only more suitable habitats for water voles to return to the site but greater wildlife viewing opportunities.

The wetland works were undertaken at Ivel Springs to protect, enhance and benefit a wide range of species and habitats, helping to make the local nature reserve richer in both plants and wildlife. Work enhancing the reedbeds, pools and wetlands will help to contribute to Hertfordshire's Wetlands Habitat Action Plan (HAP), while wetland birds, insects and mammals, especially water vole (Biodiversity Action Plan species) will all benefit from the works.

The local community group 'Friends of Baldock Greenspaces' (FoBGS) volunteers established in 2004 run dedicated practical work parties to enhance and maintain the Local Nature Reserve. Over the winter they have been working hard at Ivel Springs clearing back bank edge vegetation, putting up bird boxes and keeping glades and viewing areas open. If interested in joining the FoBGS please contact Phil Charsley 01462 895665 phil@charsley.org.uk



Volunteer Training Programme 2010-11

Staff news: Matt moves on

We wish the best of luck to Matt Perry, who left the CMS in April to become a consultant with a land advisory business.

To help volunteers play a more fulfilling and independent role, the CMS has provided a structured Volunteer Training Programme for the last three years.

In 2009, 168 volunteers attended 12 courses. Importantly, 47 more volunteers are now qualified to plan and lead practical conservation tasks and 46 volunteers are first aid- trained, allowing more events to proceed smoothly and safely.

Other courses include planning and leading guided walks, recruitment and publicity, and safe use and maintenance of tools. Particularly popular have been the habitat management and wildlife events, which to date have covered woodland,

hedgerows and an introduction to wildlife identification.

New courses and events are taking place in 2010. The first at the end of April enabled 35 people to gain an introduction to farming, when farmer, Jon Birchall, kindly showed the volunteers around Offley Hoo Farm. Other events later will include managing grassland for conservation and a practical woodland management skills course. If you have any suggestions for future training, please let us know by contacting your local CMS office.





CMS excels at Investing in Volunteers

Following a year-long review of our management of volunteers, Volunteering England has given the prestigious Investing in Volunteers award to the Countryside Management Service .

The assessor, Beryl Jeffreys, met groups of volunteers in May to talk about their experience of working with CMS and was impressed by their enthusiasm. She found that volunteers welcome the ‘opportunities provided by the CMS, to actively involve people in looking after their environment, as evidenced in their comments’.

Beryl continued, ‘Interviewees were positive about the training opportunities afforded to them: *“I love learning new skills”, “the training is a good way to improve skills that you can add to your CV”, “the varied things that we do provide new challenges”*’.

In a glowing report to the Quality Assurance Panel for the final round of judging, Beryl observed that ‘the CMS recognises that volunteers are an essential part of its ethos to promote ownership of the environment within the community. Staff commented that, *“volunteers are a wonderful asset”, “volunteers are our eyes and ears and they bring a whole range of practical skills”* and *“volunteers epitomise*

our ethos – not doing for, doing with”.

Over the past year, the CMS has worked with volunteers to design a new Volunteer Policy, Volunteer Role Descriptions, induction process and a section on the website dedicated to volunteers.

CMS Area Manager, Tony Bradford, thanked Verity Roberts, who has co-ordinated the CMS application for Investors in Volunteers, and commented, “We have nearly 300 people who are regularly active in Hertfordshire at present and are proud that thousands of volunteers have worked together with us during the last 33 years. To hear that the service we offer volunteers is held in such high esteem is incredibly gratifying. But the hard work doesn’t stop here! Our support of volunteers remains under continual review to ensure we offer the best service we can. I offer a big thank you to all volunteers for their hard work and encourage them to keep it up! We will look into celebrating receiving this award at an event shortly. Thank you particularly to the 65 volunteers who attended meetings with Beryl, spoke to her on the phone or completed the questionnaire. Your involvement has been an essential part of this process and we’re very grateful for your continued support.”

Examples of what the volunteers told our assessor include:

“I am doing something I like, keeping an eye on a valuable local resource so that it is safe for people to use”

“it’s great having an opportunity to contribute, the CMS is a catalyst for us”

“they encourage a sense of community and involvement”

“we are grateful to have such supportive staff that we know we can rely on”

“they are supportive, helpful and encouraging in every sense”

“whenever I need them they have never failed”

photos above, far left and front cover: CMS volunteers find out more about farming



CMS volunteers fill the gaps

Parish Paths Partnerships

A new path leaflet for the Buntingford area is due out this summer. Ask for a copy at the Town Council office or at the library.

The CMS has arranged the creation of many permissive path agreements with other recent ones at Walkern Bury Farm and at Furneux Pelham. The first regularises the use of an important and well-used route between Walkern and Ardeley, courtesy of Walkern Hall Farms. The second between Gt Hormead and Furneux Pelham, links footpaths which failed to meet at the parish boundary, thanks to Major Ted Barclay.

The Parish Paths Partnership could help resolve access problems in your area. If your Parish has not yet joined, contact the CMS for details.

CMS volunteers have created 4.7 km (nearly 3 miles) of extra route for walkers in the Buntingford area, plugging significant gaps in the rights of way network in the process. The permissive paths, at Stonebury and Alswick Hall farms, link together three footpaths and a bridleway which either stopped at a road or at parish boundaries. They create new routes between Buntingford, Hare St, Little Hormead and Dassels near Braughing, including several possible circular walks. Users will get fine views across the valley of the River Quin and may well see a buzzard and a large herd of fallow deer which often frequent the area.

The CMS arranged for the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) representatives for Buntingford, Braughing and Hormead to discuss the issue with the Stonebury farm manager in 2008, but the land was sold before an agreement was reached. The CMS approached new owner, Ralph Scott, and he offered the use of a modified route. Neighbouring land owner, Michael Johnson, who chipped in by adding an additional path at Alswick said, "Riding my pony along here as a small boy gave me much pleasure and I am happy to let others enjoy the views." Twenty-five volunteers- some from the

local Buntingford P3 group and others from the CMS midweek teams- built three bridges, installed twenty five waymark posts, levelled surfaces and cleared bushes to make the routes safe and easy to use.

Property owners can dedicate permissive paths on their land to clear up any confusion for walkers and riders, pending permanent changes to the Public Rights Of Way network. The Definitive Map, which records them, can only be altered after the correct legal processes have been followed, and this can take several years to arrange and implement. Contact the CMS for further information.





Restoring the Shenley hedges

During March, CMS volunteers helped to undertake some hedgerow restoration works at Hillcrest Meadow, Shenley. As part of the agreed management plan for the site, small Hazel whips were planted in the gaps of the mature hedgerow that borders the site. This work will improve the hedgerow condition, which provides an excellent wildlife corridor for birds, small mammals and invertebrates. The hedgerow had been out of management for some time and had some height reduction carried out to it last year.

Hillcrest Meadow is an important Wildlife Site, which supports plants such as the

Cuckoo Flower, Pignut, Lesser Stitchwort and Black Knapweed. Proposals for this year will include the installation of an interpretation board to raise awareness about the wildlife importance of the site.

Hillcrest Meadow is owned by Hertsmere Borough Council and managed in partnership with the Countryside Management Service. For further information on how to get involved with volunteering opportunities in Shenley, please contact the CMS on 01727 848168.

Biodiversity boost for Hartspring Meadow

CMS volunteers have planted over 300 meadow plants into short amenity grass at Hartspring Meadow in Bushey (pictured left). This Hertsmere Borough Council-owned area is already a Wildlife Site with Bee Orchid, Lesser Stitchwort and Common Mouse Ear present. Along with new seats, plants such as Meadow Vetchling, Birds-foot Trefoil and Tufted Vetch are making

the site more attractive for visitors and insects are taking advantage of the new nectar sources. Additional plans this year include a willow sculpture event for the local community, installing an interpretation board and hedge planting next winter.

You can help as a volunteer on this or any other sites mentioned in CMS News, by contacting us. Find our details on page 2.



Oughtonhead Common

Oughtonhead Common is a beautiful wetland site on the edge of Hitchin. Here you can spot kingfishers along the River Oughton, listen to warblers amongst the reeds and watch the docile Longhorn cattle grazing the flower-rich meadows. A few years ago an information leaflet was produced for the Common. This proved so popular that it has now been reprinted, thanks to a grant from the Chilterns Conservation Board and match funding from CMS. Copies are available from local libraries and outlets and can also be downloaded from the CMS website www.hertslink.org/cms and the NHDC website www.north-herts.gov.uk



Greenway Spinney

Improvements underway at Tanners Wood

Visitors to Tanners Wood, a small Wildlife Site in Abbots Langley, should find their walks are more enjoyable, thanks to the CMS management plan. Owners, Three Rivers District Council, have installed three fine, new cedar wood welcome boards. The interesting design features a Woodmouse, Comma Butterfly and Great Spotted Woodpecker- typical species found in the ancient woodland and acid grassland. Old fencing and structures which had become eyesores have been removed. Further improvements will include an interpretation board, bird and bat boxes and restoration of an ancient hedgerow.

The Countryside Management Service has helped another community group bring order to a valued local site. Residents in part of Harpenden formed the Friends of Greenway Spinney to help care for a well-loved woodland near their homes.

Laurel bushes had taken over the area (thought to have once been part of the Aldwickbury Estate), narrowing paths and making it dark. St Albans City & District Council own the land and agreed to clear the laurel, and the CMS are providing advice, support and training for volunteer action. During last winter, the Friends planted 400 trees and shrubs using native species such as Hawthorn, Hazel and Wild Cherry. The Friends' next goal is to apply for funding to restore a historic hedgerow along the boundary.

Brian Rapier, Chairman of the Friends of Greenway Spinney said "After consultation with our neighbours, it was clear there was a great desire to improve the spinney, and with the right advice and support, we took the lead role in the transformation of the site."

Contact the CMS for advice about looking after your local greenspace.



Walkers taking their 'First Steps' to health in St Albans

Hertfordshire Health Walks march on

Over 20,000 – this is the staggering number of attendances on the Hertfordshire Health Walks over the past year. Setting up walks in new areas of the county and re-launching our 'First Steps' walks has helped nearly 1,500 more people across the county to regularly visit their local countryside, get healthier and meet new people, all for free! If you would like to join them please visit our website at www.hertslink.org/cms/healthwalks/ where you can find out where your nearest walks are and choose from a wide variety available, including the new St Albans 'First Steps' health walks. People of varying abilities, including those living with Parkinson's disease and Rheumatoid Arthritis have attended since they began in June. The walks continue every Tuesday from the car park at the Charters Health Club, Hill End Lane at 1.30pm.

Much of our success is down to the 150 committed volunteer walk leaders who led 1,700 walks between them in 2009-10. If you like the sound of getting outside, meeting new people and learning more about your local countryside by leading health walks, please get in touch. We are always on the look out for new volunteers in order to ensure we can keep offering more

people the opportunity to walk and gain all the associated benefits. Also due credit are the administrative assistants who, like the leaders, give their time so generously in order to make the walks happen.

There are currently seven programmes, with walking opportunities in Dacorum and Harpenden, Bishops Stortford, Hitchin, St Albans, Hertsmere, and Watford & Three Rivers. Further pilots are being supported in Welwyn Garden City, Cheshunt and Stevenage. All opportunities are promoted through dedicated web pages, promotional material, and regular printed walks diaries/brochures.

Funding for the Hertfordshire Health Walks scheme is short-term, comes from a variety of discretionary sources, and requires time to prepare annual bids, but builds on the foundation provided by the CMS core funding partners. Together, these resources support and coordinate the scheme, the promotional material and most importantly, the training and development of the volunteer walk leaders. For more information contact Michelle Roberts on 01462 459395 or michelle.roberts@hertscc.gov.uk

Tribute to Sandra Baker

We would like to pay our respects to one of our longest serving, most active and committed walk leaders, Sandra Baker, who passed away on 19 June following a long battle with cancer. Sandra was integral in setting up the Abbots Langley walk: she built it from scratch to the weekly event it is today, attracting 40 or more walkers on a regular basis. Over the years her enthusiasm and effort has touched so many people and helped forge numerous new friendships between walkers. On behalf of them and everyone at the Countryside Management Service we would like to acknowledge her significant contribution. Our thoughts are with her family and friends.

Old woods, new houses, new trees

Woodlands are not found in every area of modern housing but they are a welcome feature at Great Ashby. Use of the 2½ mile Great Ashby woodland walk that connects them and the District Park with its views across the Beane valley (*pictured left*) shows how popular they are with residents. Most would agree that the woods need conserving for future generations to enjoy. However, woodlands change constantly as the trees, other plants and wildlife are living, growing organisms- jostling for space and feeding off each other. Large trees get most of the light and nutrients and water from the soil. Unless one blows down or dies, new trees struggle to become established. When many trees are the same age, they may reach the end of their lives at around the same time if the wood isn't managed.

The Countryside Management Service works with woodland owners, North Hertfordshire District Council, to plan for their future and is keen to start a new generation of trees. During last winter, volunteers widened paths in Brooches Wood by cutting down non-native Red Cedars and a contractor felled large Sycamore, improving visibility for visitors and allowing plants like Bluebells to spread. These species will continue to be removed gradually and volunteers will plant native trees such as Hornbeam and Oak in their place.

Next to Great Ashby District Park, Claypithills Spring has some magnificent Oaks but beneath their canopy, parts of the wood are hollow with little growing underneath. Here, we will encourage a new understorey of bushes, which will benefit small mammals and birds. To facilitate this, the contractor cut down some medium-sized Ash trees

and volunteers planted Hazel in March (*pictured lower left*). These will grow up along with new stems from the Ash stumps within an area fenced with a 'dead hedge' of branches to keep out browsing deer.

The Woodland Walk is perfect for family groups. Tina Honeysett told us "My 4 and 6 year olds really enjoy the Great Ashby walk. We love the trails as the kids enjoy looking out for waymarkers and it makes a walk in the countryside more of an adventure than just a walk!" Download the Great Ashby Woodland Walk leaflet from www.hertslink.org/cms

If you want to enjoy the Hertfordshire countryside, the new CMS web site gives you many route suggestions for walks and rides. It also lists dozens of activities coming up in the next few months. This summer's *Walks and More* programme is in full swing, led by a range of people, including local experts, some of them volunteers, and Countryside Management Service Project Officers. Find details of events on the CMS web site – www.hertslink.org/cms

Going further afield this year?

Regular *Walks and More* walk leader, John Harris, has now created the website that tells you all you need to know. 'Walking in England' has thousands of free walks to download and print plus details of walking clubs and books of walks. Find it online at www.walkinginengland.co.uk

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