



*Countryside Management in Action!*



**SURREY  
COUNTRYSIDE  
PARTNERSHIPS**



# Volunteer Handbook



# Welcome

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A warm welcome to the Surrey Countryside Partnerships. By volunteering with us you will be part of a large, friendly group that helps us to carry out seasonal countryside management work across Surrey and South London.

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting our established, knowledgeable team to manage, maintain and restore beautiful countryside and to improve public access across our partnerships' area, for all to enjoy. We work together on chalk grassland and heathland, in woodlands and on commons and ponds.

Our service is supported by around 23,000 volunteer hours each year, a fantastic amount. In fact, more hours are completed by volunteers than by our small staff team, so all voluntary help really does make such a difference and is greatly appreciated.

## About the Partnerships

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The Surrey Countryside Partnerships comprise of three main partnerships:

- **Downlands Partnership**
- **Lower Mole Partnership**
- **Surrey Heathland Partnership**

There are also two sub-partnerships with their own branding that are part of the Downlands Partnership team:

- **Downlands Partnership: Grazing**
- **Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area Partnership (SWCA)**

The first partnership (Lower Mole) was established in 1983. There are weekly area-based volunteering opportunities on offer with each partnership, plus a livestock checker rota with the Grazing service.

Please refer to the quarterly Volunteer Task Programmes per partnership and our website information for full details, including our task working days of the week, timings and site locations.

### Where do we work?

- Downlands Partnership: northeast Surrey from Tadworth to Tatsfield, in Croydon and Sutton
- Lower Mole Partnership: north Surrey from Byfleet to Epsom, and Dorking to Kingston
- Surrey Heathland Partnership: west Surrey, principally Guildford and Woking
- Downlands Partnership Grazing: based at Old Lodge Farm near Carshalton/Banstead; the grazing service is delivered across the Downlands Partnership area, on key sites in the Lower Mole Partnership area and in Bromley
- Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area Partnership: works specifically on the SWCA

### How is our service hosted and funded?

The Surrey Countryside Partnerships are supported by ten core funding partners from borough and district councils, in addition to host local authority Surrey County Council which funds the full service. John Whitgift Foundation is also a core funding partner of the SWCA. We work in close partnership with all our core funding partners and with private landowners as well.

We are pleased to also be supported by our two dedicated, registered independent small charity partners. These two trusts are run by volunteers: Downlands Trust and Lower Mole Countryside Trust.

# What is volunteering?

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A volunteer is defined as 'a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task'. Volunteers are at the heart of what we do and are essential to the running and continued success of our established partnerships and regular, popular task programmes.

## What to expect as a countryside volunteer

Volunteers help us to carry out practical conservation work and there are also opportunities to volunteer as a stock checker or farm volunteer with the Grazing team. Task sessions range from scrub clearance to making wooden signage. Jobs that you may get involved with seasonally include:

- Invasive scrub management on grasslands and heathland
- Clearing invasive species, such as ragwort and Himalayan Balsam
- Hedge-laying
- Pond clearance
- Step building and fence installation and repairs
- Indoor carpentry work in workshops, helping to make signposts and benches
- Surfacing on bridleways and path maintenance
- Helping out on our stands at public shows and fairs

## Who can volunteer?

We encourage volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to join us if they can take part safely. Our work is aimed at over 16s, but volunteers over 8 years of age can join in on suitable tasks when accompanied by an adult. We also welcome corporate, community and school groups for team volunteering days by arrangement. All volunteers can work at their own pace and everyone is shown exactly what to do and how to use the hand tools provided. You do need to be fairly fit and enjoy getting out and about in the great outdoors.

## Why volunteer with us?

There are many reasons to countryside volunteer. By volunteering with us you will get the chance to work on a multitude of glorious countryside sites and to join an existing friendly volunteer conservation crew which can also:

- Be fun, sociable and offers a great opportunity for healthy exercise
- Be great for mind, body and spirit as volunteering in the countryside has proven widespread health & wellbeing benefits
- Give you a great sense of personal achievement and self-worth
- Give you an opportunity to develop new skills, learn about habitat management and meet likeminded people
- Improve your employability by giving you valuable experience
- Be a safe, professionally led volunteering experience, as all our tasks are run by trained staff and are fully insured



# Roles and responsibilities

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## Volunteer responsibilities:

- Pay attention to your task leader and follow instructions
- Treat others with respect and thoughtfulness, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependants, age, physical/mental disability or offending background
- Whilst on site behave in a way that should reflect that you are representing Surrey County Council and our partners
- Take care of the health and safety of yourself and others. No alcohol to be consumed during the task day please.
- Work at your own pace, within your own abilities, training and experience
- Make your task leader aware of any medical condition or personal needs you may have
- Take care of any tools or equipment issued to you
- New volunteers are asked to complete a registration form
- Ensure the task leader is aware of your arrival and departure to/from the site
- Comply with the Surrey County Council Social Media Guidelines for volunteers
- Wear/bring suitable outdoor clothing and footwear, weather appropriate, including waterproofs or sun protection
- Bring a packed lunch if staying all day

## Our responsibilities:

- Provide a friendly welcome
- Give you a relevant induction, including health and safety procedures
- Show you how to use the equipment safely.
- Treat everyone with equality, fairness and dignity and give everyone the freedom to discuss matters openly with your task leader
- Not push you past the pace that you set for yourself
- Be open allowing you to feel free to raise any concerns with your task leader at any time and ask any questions you may have.
- Have a trained first aider and kit always on site on task days
- Provide you with appropriate safety equipment such as gloves, goggles and safety helmets. Regular volunteers are provided with safety boots. You can bring your own gardening gloves if preferred.
- Ensure that you are not left alone to work without supervision
- Provide provision of public liability and personal accident insurance
- Cancel the task in extreme weather
- Provide the essential tea/coffee/squash and biscuits! You can bring your own mug if preferred.



# Important Information

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## Registration and induction

All our volunteers are asked to register with us by filling in the registration form, this information is securely held and only used by appropriate staff members. The information stored will allow us to contact you and support you with volunteering and to contact your appointed person in case of an emergency. All details are kept confidential and will not be passed on to any third party.

## Representative

As a volunteer you are informally representing the partnerships to the public, whether as an events volunteer or even as a work party volunteer who happens to be chatting to a walker passing through the site. As you get more involved you will learn enough about the partnership to be able to chat to people about the basics of what we do. You can always refer the public to a member of staff or other appropriate person if they are asking about difficult or sensitive issues and media enquiries should always be referred to a member of staff.

## Supervision

All tasks are led by a member of staff. All volunteers have the opportunity to ask questions, raise any concerns and can discuss work you are involved in.

## Training

The partnerships are always looking to offer new opportunities to our volunteers. If you have been with us for a little while and think you would like training in skills such as brushcutter use or in the operation of plant machinery such as dumper trucks and mini excavators, or to become a volunteer task leader, please let us know. When we have enough interest, we can organise our own training courses for certain skills. Courses are free to volunteers who regularly attend our tasks. Volunteers are required to sign to acknowledge their training as a record that they have received it.

## Conduct

If a volunteer has any issues they would like to raise, their main points of contact are the Senior Partnership Officers at Downlands, Downlands Grazing and Lower Mole Partnerships (also covers Surrey Heathland Partnership). We encourage each team to have a volunteer representative who can gather feedback from the volunteers to give to the staff and vice versa to relay messages to the volunteers.

## Health and Safety

The partnerships work across a wide area on a range of habitats doing a range of jobs. This means that it is important to understand the risks of Tetanus, Weil's disease and Lyme disease. We ask that all volunteers are up to date with their Tetanus jabs and that you are aware of Weil's and Lyme. We supply hand sanitiser for every task.

We ask that volunteers wear steel toe caps/sturdy footwear to every task and suitable outdoor clothing, including waterproofs as required. Any additional PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) that is required will be provided by the Partnerships. This is all covered in our risk assessments and covered by the introductory talk at the start of each session.

## Policies and procedures

### Safeguarding:

Safeguarding is the protection of members of society who may be more vulnerable due to age, illness, capacity or position in society. Surrey County Council, as the host authority of our service, is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.



The partnerships only accept volunteers aged 16 or over, unless accompanied by an adult aged 18 or over. We welcome vulnerable adults to volunteer with us via a third-party organisation such as Surrey Choices, where a member of their staff will accompany the volunteer on site until its mutually agreed that the volunteer is able to join in unsupervised. We actively avoid any one-to-one situations between staff/volunteers and vulnerable volunteers. As we advertise for volunteers to join us in a variety of ways there is potential for an individual to turn up on site without any prior introduction, in that situation the member of staff on site would ask the volunteer to complete a contact details sheet on site.

#### Equal Opportunities:

Surrey County Council is committed to the fair treatment of its employees, potential employees, and volunteers, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependants, age, physical/mental disability or offending background. The Council will treat all volunteers fairly and will not discriminate unfairly against volunteers based on a conviction or other information revealed.

#### Health, Safety and Welfare:

By law, everyone is responsible for looking after their own safety and that of their colleagues at all times; including volunteers. You must read or listen to and follow any health and safety guidance you are given and you must ask for clarification of anything that you are unsure about.

You must provide us with details of any medical conditions relevant to your role and provide emergency contact details as requested on the volunteer registration form. You should also let us know if these details change. If you observe anything that you think might be unsafe or you are involved in or see an accident or near miss you must report it to us.

At the start of each task the main risks should be identified and the task will be fully explained. There is always a site risk assessment on site that can be looked at if you would like and all activities have a specific risk assessment held on our system, if you would like to see a copy of any of them just ask.

The staff task leader may cancel a task day in extreme weather conditions, such as heavy rain, strong winds or excessive heat.

#### Insurance:

It is important that when carrying out work, often in areas with public access, you are not exposing yourself, your organisation or Surrey County Council to risk from third party claims. All volunteers under our guidance are indemnified under Surrey County Council's insurance policy against claims for injury or damage to property. Personal injury cover is also provided for volunteers. Provided you follow this guidance and any other specific advice from the task leader on site, you will be covered by this policy.

#### Privacy:

We collect your personal data for the following reasons, in line with GDPR guidelines: service delivery, service improvement and planning, statistical analysis and reporting, safeguarding and for in the event of an emergency. We will only collect what is necessary.

To process your personal data, we will explain to you what we are asking you to agree to and why. If we have consent to use your personal data, you have the right to remove it at any time. The full policy is on our website or can be provided if asked for.

We ask for your consent to be included in photos taken on task for use on social media and for reporting and you can opt out when initially registering with us or at any later time.



# Social aspect and communication

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## Social events

The different partnerships hold their own social events, mainly BBQs in the summer and winter, as well as an annual joint summer event, usually held at Old Lodge Farm.

## Newsletters

Volunteers' names and email addresses are added to our mailing list. You will receive a quarterly e-newsletter with links to the Volunteer Task Programmes and all our latest news. Also other occasional emails regarding SCP events and matters of interest. Volunteers without email addresses can receive quarterly task programmes and news updates by post.

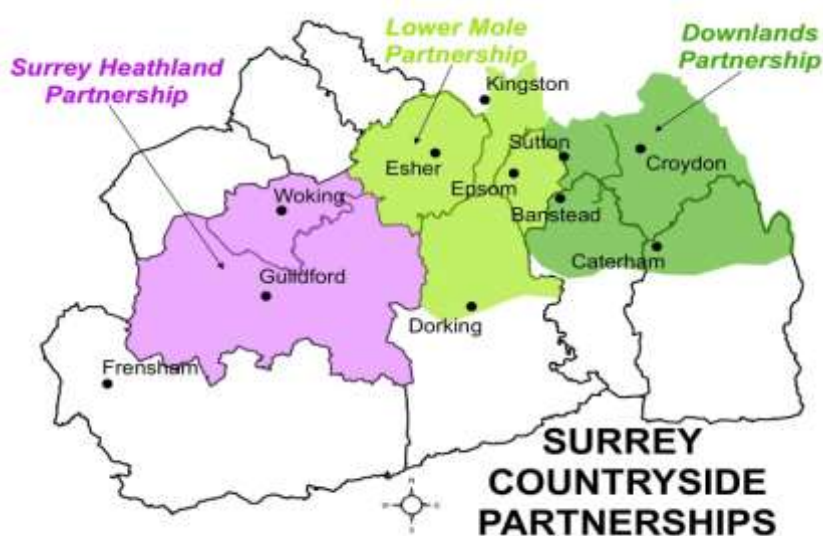


## Feedback

We always welcome feedback, if you have anything you would like to tell us or ways you think we could improve please speak to a member of staff or send us an email. We circulate a biennial volunteer survey to gain confidential feedback and to review our volunteering offer and best practice.

# Map of Surrey Countryside Partnerships working area

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# Contact Details and other useful information

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If you would like to contact us and/or receive copies of all our service information, please email us at:

[countrysidepartnershipsteam@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:countrysidepartnershipsteam@surreycc.gov.uk)

Information can also be found on the [Surrey Countryside Partnerships](#) webpage.

Find out about the [Surrey Volunteer Promise](#) on the Surrey County Council website.

**Thank you for choosing to volunteer with us**