

Hartley Wintney Central Commons

The Hartley Wintney Commons have a history going back to Saxon times. Traditionally they were used by Commoners for grazing, gathering fuel and for recreation such as cricket, which has been played on Cricketers Green since 1770. Today they are still a much valued part of the life of the community and with their magnificent old Oaks; they are a haven for wildlife.



The best known trees in the village are those on the central green, dating from 1807 and planted by Lady St John Mildmay in response to a call for the planting of Oak trees by Admiral Collingwood after the Battle of Trafalgar. These old Oaks are fantastic for bats, the cracks and crevices in their



branches and trunks ideal as summer roosts. On warm summer nights they can be spotted darting among the Oaks catching insects in flight.

In other wooded parts of the Common, there are even older Oaks, with the oldest going back to the 16th Century. These woodland Oaks have been pollarded and have re-grown with the spreading habit typical of trees that have developed in the open. This suggests that in the past these parts of the Common were probably wood pasture, with Commoners grazing their animals under widely spaced trees. Indeed, local farmers were still grazing parts of the Commons until the late 1940's, and children were playing games between the Oaks. These areas are now more heavily wooded, but are alive with wildlife such as birds, fungi and invertebrates.

The Commons are owned and managed by Hart District Council, which is keen to consult locally before producing a new management plan. Previous plans have been largely concerned with habitat management for the wildlife of the Commons. This remains a vital part of any future management strategy but it is clear that the Commons are an important open space for local people and a cultural and historical feature which is highly valued.



Hart District Council has engaged Footprint Ecology to produce a management plan. They are a company that have specialist experience of carrying out consultations relating to Common Land. Information regarding the consultation process, and how you can get involved, can be found on their website at www.footprint-ecology.co.uk.