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www.essexwt.org.uk
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Ingrebourne Valley Visitor Centre
At Hornchurch Country Park

People, Wildlife, and Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Essex Wildlife Trust, in partnership with Havering Council and with important financial support of funders, has built the Ingrebourne Valley Visitor Centre, at Hornchurch Country Park.

The centre provides a focal point, an information resource and the provision of toilets and refreshments that have been a longed for addition to this fantastic park and the surrounding landscape of the Ingrebourne Valley.

The centre is open to the public following a Grand Opening on 3rd October 2015. The Ingrebourne Valley Visitor Centre will welcome visitors seven days a week, 9am-5pm with a café, toilets, shop, education and community room, informative displays and a wide range of events to engage the whole community with the fascinating wildlife and heritage of the park and the surrounding Living Landscape and Thames Chase Community Forest.

Visitors can enjoy fantastic views of the river, marsh and reedbeds of the Ingrebourne River Valley from the visitor centre.

The Ingrebourne Valley, in which Hornchurch Country Park sits, comprises 261 hectares of unique mixture of interconnected habitats, including river, open water, marsh, grassland, reedbed, secondary and ancient woodlands with rides, scrub, hedgerows and important arable farmland. It is also home to London’s largest remaining continuous freshwater reedbed and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve. Hornchurch Country Park is well connected to other green infrastructure in the borough, south to Ingrebourne Hill and Rainham Marshes and north, using the Ingrebourne Way, to Harold Hill.

This varied and unique landscape in turn attracts a diverse selection of wildlife with birds such as Cuckoo, warblers, wildfowl, waders and owls, all to be seen and heard along the marsh. Flowers and bumblebees inhabit the arable land and mammals including Weasel, Stoat and Fox can sometimes be seen on the paths and rides in the woodland. Meadow Pipits and singing Skylarks are a spring and summer feature on the grassy meadows and slopes. Also in this large mixed habitat is an flourishing insect population with butterflies, bees and other insects taking advantage of the enormous amount of flowering trees, shrubs and other flora growing in the park throughout the year. Migrating birds feed during the spring and autumn, these include Wheatear, Whinchat, Redstart and flycatchers, while Bittern feed and roost in the reeds throughout the winter months.

THE VISITOR CENTRE

The visitor centre has been named Ingrebourne Valley Visitor Centre as it provides a focal point and gateway to the wider landscape of the Ingrebourne Valley.

Funding for the $4 million project has been provided by Vosita North Thames Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund, City Bridge Trust, UK Power Networks, Tarmac, Biffa Award, The Headley Trust and Sanofi.

Essex Wildlife Trust members and local residents generously contributed to an appeal raising a fantastic £57,000, completing the required funds.

The location was selected due to its accessibility and close proximity to the impressive network of foot and cycle Greenways, the ‘Ingrebourne Way’ (National Cycle Network route 136) part of the London Loop and popular play area. The centre and park are served well by public transport with Hornchurch tube station within walking distance and bus route 252 in Suttons Lane, close to the park entrance. There is a car park close to the entrance and a pick up/drop off point for the centre. The centre of the park is very accessible.

There is a large community event area.

The centre supports excellent information technology, including a river camera, making information about the wildlife and heritage of the site easily accessible to all. There will also be a ‘memory booth’ in the centre which will enable visitors to upload their memories of this historical site.

HORNCHURCH COUNTRY PARK

Hornchurch Country Park is owned and managed by Havering Council. It is managed by a full-time Park Ranger, supported by the volunteers of the Friends of Hornchurch Country Park. The park comprises 189.5 hectares of green open space, of great wildlife importance and is hugely valued by the local community, who use it regularly, all year round, for walking, running, cycling, dog walking, playing, family visits and much more. The children’s play area includes a climb-on model Spitfire and a variety of play equipment for a range of ages and abilities.

The park also offers an outdoor gym and ‘trim-trail’ circuit which extends throughout the park.

The park and adjoining open spaces offer well surfaced paths with a range of linear and circular routes to take. Use the map in this leaflet to navigate the network of paths supported by way-markers. The map provides pointers for good spots to view wildlife and the many heritage features of the site.

A LIVING LANDSCAPE

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This page contains no new information relative to the previous pages.
The River Ingrebourne, 27 miles (43.3km) in length, is a tributary of the River Thames. It flows from Brentwood through Havering roughly from north to south, joining the Thames at Rainham.

Visitors may also get a chance to enjoy the wonderful but all-too-rare ‘plop’ as a Water Vole enters the water or the flash of blue as a Kingfisher dashes downstream.

AN IMPORTANT HISTORIC SITE

Hornchurch Country Park is the former site of Sutton’s Farm airfield, which opened on 3rd October 1915, from which blimps of the Royal Flying Corps defended London in World War One. The airfield was ideally situated as the most renowned Spitfire stations in Fighter Command. The Spitfire’s bi-plane made of wood and linen to take on the Zeppelin threat.

The airfield closed shortly after World War One. The land was requisitioned in 1923 because of the expansion of the RAF and the airfield reopened as a much larger fighter station, RAF Hornchurch.

Fighter squadrons from Hornchurch were prominent in the Battle of France over Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain and it became one of the most renowned Spitfire stations in Fighter Command. The Spitfire squadrons based here were flown by many famous airmen, including Robert Stanford-Tuck and Al ‘Sailor’ Malan. The airfield was ideally located in bomb alley to cover both London and the Thames corridor from German air attacks. It was a key air force installation between both wars and became the RAF’s Aircrew Selection Centre during the 1950s.

Various artefacts and relics of the site’s RAF history, such as gun emplacements, pill boxes, Trenches, tunnels and trenches which were all part of the airfield’s Second World War defence system are evident in the park today.

In 1962 the airfield closed and the site was sold for gravel extraction. In 1980, following ground reinstatement, after quarrying and re-filling with landfill. Greater London Council carried out a massive landscaping project to create Hornchurch Country Park. The legacy of the airfield had ended after 37 years of service history but the pilots, aircrew and ground staff will never be forgotten. The main names of the local airfield housing estate commemorate the airfield and its pilots ensuring that their memory is preserved.

Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbotts Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ.

Please return this form to: Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbotts Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ.

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Visit Hornchurch Country Park and discover the history behind this former battlefront.

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Please return this form to: Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbotts Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ.

Telephone

Signature

Date

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP

☐ Single

☐ Joint

☐ Family

Family includes up to 2 adults and 4 children at one address.

I WOULD LIKE TO PAY

☐ £5 per month ☐ £60 per year

☐ or other £ per month/year

☐ To join Essex Wildlife Trust you must pay a minimum of £5 per month (£55 per year) or £60 per year. £4.25 per month £49 per year for family.

I therefore enclose a total of £

Please make cheque payable to Essex Wildlife Trust

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