

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 £1.4 million project has been provided by Veolia 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 centre off Squadrons Approach, which is a former aircraft dispersal or E-pen, where aircraft would have been prepared for flight.

The visitor centre has been designed to a modest budget, providing a sustainable build to a BREEAM Excellent standard. BREEAM is the world’s foremost environmental assessment method and rating system for buildings. Great emphasis has been placed to have a building that sits well with its environment.



Green Woodpecker and Weasel: Martin Le-May’s remarkable image, taken in Hornchurch Country Park in March 2015, became an online news sensation

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The partnership between Essex Wildlife Trust and Havering Council began in the Ingrebourne Valley in 2005 with the start of the Ingrebourne Valley Project, funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund. Two Essex Wildlife Trust staff posts were seconded to the Council to deliver the project which included community events and activities, infrastructure improvements such as path work and directional signage, practical conservation projects, interpretation, wildlife surveys and establishing a ‘Friends Group’ of Hornchurch Country Park and the wider valley. All of this was a great success. Alongside this project was the development work of the visitor centre itself which has now been achieved. Essex Wildlife Trust, the Council and other important

partners will continue to work well together to create a Living Landscape which aims to be good for wildlife, good for local people and supportive of the local economy as a great place to visit, to be active and discover wildlife.



Wood Sandpiper



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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 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 119.65 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

The Ingrebourne Valley, in which Hornchurch Country Park sits, comprises 261 hectares of unique mixture of interconnecting 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. Plovers and buntings inhabit the arable land and mammals including Weasel, Stoat and Fox can sometimes be seen on the paths and rides and 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 a 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 Bitterns feed and roost in the reeds throughout the winter months.



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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.



Water Vole

AN IMPORTANT HISTORIC SITE

Hornchurch Country Park is the former site of Sutton's Farm airfield which opened on 3rd October 1915, from which biplanes of the Royal Flying Corps defended London in World War One; Lieutenant William Leefe-Robinson took off from the airfield on the night of 2nd September 1916 and shot down the first German Zeppelin airship to crash over British soil. For this action he received the Victoria Cross. Lieutenants Leefe-Robinson, Wulstan Tempest and Frederick Sowrey flew the BE2c bi-plane made of wood and linen to take on the Zeppelin threat.



BE2c attacking a Zeppelin airship

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.



Pilots of 54 Squadron in front of a Spitfire IIA

Various artefacts and relics of the site's RAF history, such as gun emplacements, pill boxes, Tett turrets, 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 in-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 47 years of service history but the pilots, aircrew and ground staff will never be forgotten. The road names of the local airfield housing estate commemorate the airfield and its pilots ensuring that their memory is preserved.



Spitfire P7350 of the BBMF, which flew with 603 Squadron in October 1940
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SUPPORTING INGREBOURNE VALLEY VISITOR CENTRE AND ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST



If you are a member or volunteer of Essex Wildlife Trust, thank you. If not then please join us today. It is the support of 34,000 members of Essex Wildlife Trust that has formed 87 nature reserves and 10 visitor centres in Essex to protect wildlife for you to enjoy. Essex Wildlife Trust is one of 47 Wildlife Trusts in the British Isles with over 2,000 nature reserves and over 800,000 members.

So please join us!

Name Mr/Mrs/Miss Ms _____

Address _____

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Signature _____

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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 £3 per month/£33 per year for individuals, £3.50 per month/£40 per year for joint, £4.25 per month/£49 per year for family.

I therefore enclose a total of £ _____

Please make cheques payable to Essex Wildlife Trust

It helps the Trust if you pay by Direct Debit; there is a form overleaf. Members receive a voucher for a superb book 'Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves Guide' which you can collect from any of the Trust Visitor Centres.

☐ **GIFT AID** I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for the current tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for the current tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. Please treat this, all future, and donations made to Essex Wildlife Trust in the past four years, as Gift Aid donations.

Please return this form to:

Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbotts Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ. Or phone 01621 862964 or go online at www.essexwt.org.uk