

1. Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons Committee	20 May 2019
Subject: Superintendent's Update	Public
Report of: Superintendent of 'The Commons'	For Information
<p style="text-align: center;">Summary</p> <p>This report provides a general update on issues across the nine sites within 'The Commons' division that may be of interest to members and is supplementary to the monthly email updates.</p> <p>Recommendation Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

1. The quarry site at East Burnham ceased operating for 4-6 weeks while preparations were being made for working the next phase. An annual report on the dust levels over the last year has been received which concluded that, on average, dust deposition rates at most locations were slightly lower than the previous year. There was however no significant increase or decrease from previous years. A few monitoring periods registered results that are defined as 'objectional' but it was not possible to conclude whether these were due to quarrying activities or natural seasonal variations.
2. Officers have received an advanced copy of the South Bucks District Council (SBDC) Local Plan prior to public consultation under Regulation 19 in mid-June. Two areas relating to Burnham Beeches are yet to be finalised pending reports from consultants, so the proposals are lacking some details, including those of the mitigation strategies. A meeting is planned with Planning Officers and Natural England to finalise those details.
3. A meeting was held with a sub group of the Farnhams' Parish Council who are working on a neighbourhood plan. Officers reminded them about the need for a Habitats Regulations Assessment and gave them the background to our work with the District Council and Natural England in relation to planning issues.
4. The Superintendent gave a presentation to the full cabinet of SBDC which included an update on various issues in relation to Burnham Beeches and outlined the City's position in relation to the new Local Plan and the issues raised through the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The Superintendent also provided Councillors with an

update of dog-related Public Space Protection Orders and their important role in maintaining a balanced approach to recreational use across the site. The opportunity was also taken to inform Councillors of the Open Spaces Act, 2018 and the influence and opportunities it provides. Councillors expressed their thanks and appreciation for the work of the City at both Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

5. An application has been submitted to Wood, consultants for Heathrow Airport, for funding under their requirement to deliver biodiversity net gain as a result of the third runway development. Officers have received an indication that they will be invited to a meeting with Heathrow to discuss the proposals further. The Conservation Officer also attended a workshop about the biodiversity work carried out as part of the planning process.
6. Work has continued under the Countryside Stewardship grant and liaison maintained with our Natural England Officer over the requirements for monitoring.
7. The Beeches hosted a regional meeting of Natural England (NE) officers in March which included a walk led by the Conservation officer and Head Ranger. This was a useful opportunity to discuss joint working and future help that NE could provide for ongoing and future protection of the Beeches.
8. Work on the new Burnham Beeches management plan has continued with a series of staff consultation days focussing on key elements of the plan.
9. A new 3-year lease to run the Cafe in Burnham Beeches was been signed just before Easter and works to fit out the café are virtually complete. While the café was closed the opportunity was taken to undertake a range of necessary cyclical maintenance works and these have now been completed. The new café operated as an effective temporary 'pop up facility' for the Easter Weekend and is now open again 7 days a week
10. Two specialists in lichens working for PlantLife under the 'Back from the Brink' Heritage Lottery Programme spent two days in Burnham Beeches transplanting a Red Data Book lichen, *Pyrenula nitida* from (what was thought to be its last host in the Beeches), an old pollard that had died, onto suitable donor trees nearby. They also did a little more survey work and found the same species on a couple more trees and another related even rarer one, *Pyrenula nitidella* as well. A full report is expected in due course.
11. Volunteers and staff have now moved on to spring and summer work programmes – with preparations underway for the return of grazing animals in late April and May when cows and ponies come back to the Beeches and cows to Stoke Common. Works have included fence repairs and invisible fence testing prior to the return of the livestock.

12. Staff and volunteers have also undertaken a range of signage improvements – with new entrance information signs being installed at four locations at Stoke Common and a new sign at Druids oak at Burnham Beeches. An element of the sensory trail - the sound sticks – had started to rot away so a local artist has been employed to remake the item and volunteers will help install them soon.
13. Volunteers are undertaking the annual whole site reptile survey at Stoke Common during April and May. They have also helped the team tidy up the external café seating area before the new tenant took over. Staff and volunteers have also continued to undertake a range of monitoring work – from the ‘Eco volunteers’ checking response of young pollard trees to cutting experiments to staff working with the local bird club and other volunteers to undertake early morning surveys for lesser spotted woodpeckers.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

14. The Buildings Research Establishment (BRE) presented interim findings of the test panel trials designed to identify a solution to the thaumasite sulphate attack issue that has occurred during the restoration of the heritage features of the airfield. Some deterioration was noted in the alternative mortars being tested, but further analysis is required to ascertain if this is due to sulphate attack. Colleagues in the City Surveyor’s Department are being consulted on how best to interpret the final report when it arrives in June so that a technical solution can be considered.
15. The City’s legal advisors, Beale and Company, are providing guidance on the options available to resolve the dispute over responsibility for the issues experienced and how to remedy them. However, it is clear that the matter must now await the final report from BRE before the protocol for construction and engineering disputes can define responsibility for costs and delivery of the agreed remedial works. At this moment in time it is not possible to determine if the process will take a commercial or legal route. A formal report to this committee will follow once a way forward has been determined. Legal costs are currently being met locally and noted for any potential claim or commercial agreement.
16. The new PIP funded Legacy Officer, Linda Duffield, started on April 1st. She brings with her a wealth of knowledge about Kenley’s history and WWII.
17. School workshops delivered at Trinity School and Hillcroft School engaged 80 students in the story of Kenley.

18. A display about Kenley was visited by 70 people who attended an event to meet the new calves at Merlewood.
19. The company manufacturing the 23 new interpretative signs, 'Allsigns', have concluded that they cannot manufacture two of the sign types (large and small wings) in metal as originally specified. The Kenley Board decided to accept their recommendation to make them using Glass Reinforced Plastic instead. This change will not be obvious to the casual observer and brings the benefit of greater strength and ease of replacement should the need arise. Croydon planners are currently being consulted on this minor material change.

Proposed NNR.

20. Progress continues to be made on the declaration of the proposed National Nature Reserve covering the Coulsdon Commons and Happy Valley. Media plans and a launch event are being developed by the partners (City of London, London Borough of Croydon and Natural England) in readiness of final confirmation with draft dates under consideration. Details to follow once available.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

21. The bye-law board along Wood Way (Spring Park) had fallen over and was reported by a member of the public. The Ranger team has been working closely with the City Surveyor and have assessed all remaining bye-law boards. Consequently, eight were found to be faulty and have been removed from the various sites.
22. The recruitment for Information Ranger has been successful the new Officer has recently joined the team.
23. A series of management Plan 'visioning' meetings have been organised to discuss the future management of the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons, Spring Park and West Wickham. The vision meetings for Farthing Downs and Kenley have now been held and focused on habitat management, Ranger tasks, onsite.
24. The grazing management across Coulsdon Commons is also being reviewed and a report written which was discussed during a staff meeting at the start of April. A follow up meeting has been organised for June. Following the discussions, three potential future grazing models are being evaluated in depth
25. The cattle have left the barn at Merlewood Estate Office and are grazing across the Coulsdon commons. Wilf, the bull, has also joined the cows and calves on Lower Woodplace Farm field.

26. In parallel to 23 above, similar reviews are taking place at Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and Ashtead Common to identify the detailed costs of the various 'historical' models adopted at each site and ascertain if efficiencies can be achieved.
27. High and medium risk tree safety inspections have been carried out across all sites and the resulting work specification submitted to City Procurement and a contractor has been appointed. The work will be carried out over the next few weeks.
28. A contractor has cleared trees along Hayes lane, Kenley, to mitigate the tree safety risk.

Ashtead Common

27. Winter work concluded with the completion of veteran tree management work in district 10 at the northern edge of the common. Approximately 75 veteran trees were climbed by contractors, and many more were halo released by contractors and volunteers.
28. Bat detectors have been installed in two of the veteran tree districts. Ranger Zuza Featherstone is conducting an MRes study into the effects of the veteran tree management programme on bats.
29. A meeting with Natural England on April 12th explored the options for Ashtead to apply for Countryside Stewardship funding from January 2022. Key to this is a consideration of the extent to which the veteran tree management programme will need amending to suit the schemes requirements.

Incidents

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

30. There were 16 reported incidents during the period
31. Three incidents related to fires at the Beeches which were all small scale, 2 at site bins and one in woodland, and dealt with by the ranger team
32. A group of 8 traveller caravans and associated vehicles moved into the main car park on Lord Mayors Drive, at Burnham Beeches, late afternoon on Sunday the 3rd March. They moved on by early evening on the 4th March following actions by site staff and by Bailiffs at a cost to local risk budgets of £4000. Plans to install height barriers to reduce this type of incident, have been brought forward.

33. The other incidents include 3 fly tipping incidents at the Beeches and Stoke Common and 2 incidents with dogs not on leads in the on-lead area requiring follow up action – both resulted in final warning letters to the parties involved.
34. An unpaid FPN issued for an incident relating to a dog being walked off lead in the on-lead area at the Beeches in October 2018 – has been passed to the City Solicitor for follow up action

Ashtead Common

35. Motorbikes on the common – reported to the police.
36. Sewage leak on footpath 28 – currently being investigated by Thames Water.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

37. Coulsdon Common – Children throwing stones in to the yard; Theft of wood from Stites Hill Road, three incidents of youths chasing cattle in Merlewood paddock. Ranger patrols now increased and local Safer Neighbourhood Team informed; contents of two dog waste bins emptied and contents scattered across the Common; dead fish reported in car park at Coulsdon Common football pitch.
38. Farthing Downs – A dead pony was reported as being 'dumped' but the animal was in fact on Croydon land and reported to them.
39. Kenley Common – Theft of felled timber along Hayes Lane
40. Riddlesdown – Reported rough sleeper. Safer Croydon Team advised and person has now moved on.
41. West Wickham Common – Car crashed on West Wickham Common, but occupants were uninjured. The car has been recovered and no significant damage to the Common.

Filming, major events and other activities

Burnham Beeches

42. Events at the Beeches included: Easter half term trail and 4 'simply walk' events, meet the Ranger events – one in march attracting 160 people to look at reptiles and amphibians in a 2 hour period. The Beeches also hosted a number of school events and a day for the Ancient Tree Forum attended by 25 delegates, from a variety of organisations including CoL staff, to promote the VETcert certification for specialists working on veteran trees and which included a walk to show case some of the recent work on the veteran trees.

43. The West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

44. The Ranger team delivered 3 guided walks – 2 x Ramble with the Farthing Downs Ranger events and a Healthy Hearts walk on Coulsdon Common Coulsdon.

45. Caterham Scouts visited Coulsdon Common and supported the Ranger to clear the pond.

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