

1. Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons Committee	9 September 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. Dust and hydrology monitoring in relation to the quarry operations continued during the period. Levels of both continue to fluctuate but do not show any major concerns.
2. Comments were submitted on the Draft South Bucks District Council (SBDC) Local Plan following approval by the Chairman. The SBDC Officer working on this has since accepted a secondment to central Government and is no longer working on the plan and there are concerns over the consequence of this, as the mitigation schedule for recreation pressure has yet to be agreed. Questions were also raised over the work carried out by consultants working SBDC's behalf with regard to air quality modelling. At the recommendation of Natural England SBDC have employed another consultant to peer review both the air quality modelling and the proposals for mitigation. It seems likely she will find in favour of a lower level of mitigation being needed.
3. Officers have held meetings with Natural England, the Portman Estate and the National Trust in relation to the Heathrow Biodiversity offsetting project and are now working on detailed documents to use as a focus of discussion over individual land parcels. A further meeting with the Dorney Wood Trust is imminent. The Conservation officer attended a public consultation event about the Heathrow expansion. We await the draft Memorandum of Understanding from Heathrow Airport Limited. Further progress will be limited until that matter is approved.
4. Work is continuing on the management plan consultation event that will be held on 26, 27 and 28 October on the Main Common. The Burnham Beeches Consultation

Group meet on 17 July and were treated to a tractor and trailer ride to visit areas under discussion in relation to the management plan. The meeting was well attended, and positive discussions were held on key issues for the next 10 years. A similar event was held for members of this committee on 7th September.

5. The old pollards due for work this coming winter have been checked for condition. Due to the dry weather conditions 2018 - 2019, a modified/reduced programme is likely. Young, newly created pollards have been tagged and recorded. Other practical work has included bracken spraying on Stoke Common and minor control of Rhododendron regrowth in the Beeches.
6. The cattle and ponies have been grazing various parts of the Beeches over the last couple of months including another, larger, area of the Main Common. The ponies have recently moved to the North Common at Stoke Common and some of the cows are grazing a field at Penn for a short time. The grazier's cattle are still grazing the Main and West Common at Stoke Common.
7. There have been changes in the ecology volunteers with one graduate leaving for a full-time job in the sustainability sector and an 'A' level student joining for the summer. Tasks include the regular monitoring, sorting and identification of invertebrates, butterfly transects, vegetation monitoring and the recording of beech tree condition.
8. Practical volunteers have been 'bashing bracken', moving the temporary electric fences for the livestock and helping to replace a post and wire fence. The line of the latter is being moved slightly in order to include more land within the grazed area. The Friends of Stoke Common made a visit to some Surrey Wildlife Trust sites to look at heathland management there.
9. As part of a Nationwide survey, pheromone traps for a rare beetle, the Noble Chafer, were erected and one quickly visited by a beetle (sadly no others were seen!). This is a new species to the Beeches and is exciting because it has previously only been found in the UK in orchards with hollow trees. The fact that it has been found in the Beeches suggests it may be found on a wider range of tree species. We hope to run the traps again next year.
10. Both Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches achieved Green Flag Awards this year. Burnham Beeches also received the Green Heritage Award

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

11. The Buildings Research Establishment's final report on the performance of materials on trial has been received. It concludes that none of the test panels succumbed to thaumasite attack, even those that replicated the LBC commons (brick)/ Mastercrete (cement) combination that was subject to thaumasite attack in 2017. Unlike the 2017 works, the trial panels were all waterproofed and drained, and this may be the cause of the difference. Colleagues in the City Surveyor's Department are currently being consulted on how to interpret the report.
12. The City's legal advisors, Beale and Company, advised that proceedings initiated under the Pre-action Protocol for Construction and Engineering Disputes against the Principal Designer should wait until the outcome of the BRE report is established. A meeting with Beale and Co will follow once the issues raised by the BRE report have been carefully considered internally
13. The Kenley Revival Project travelling exhibition is nearing completion and is due to be delivered soon. Agreement on the installation of the site signage is making steady progress. A single example of each of the three sign types is being produced, and a proposed installation date is expected soon. Initially just three signs are being installed to discharge a planning condition to provide samples.
14. A total of 18,671 people have now been engaged directly by the project. This figure includes 30 school students from Kenley Primary School who visited on July 3.
15. Staff and volunteers participated in an event at Brookwood Cemetery on June 28 and 29 to tell the stories of the Kenley personnel who are buried there. A total of 121 people were engaged.
16. An additional community archaeology fortnight, made possible by the extension to the project, ran from July 15 to 26. Volunteers explored the eastern edge of the former airfield to better understand some of the features and how the airfield functioned. A total of 458 volunteer hours contributed to the project.
17. A youth volunteering programme was also made possible by the extension to the project. Participants between the ages of 16 to 18 have been involved in community archaeology, giving guided walks and using social media. They will also have the opportunity to do some hands-on practical conservation work.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

18. Following the recent dismissal of a ranger at West Wickham Commons, the resignation of another, the further loss of another due to a successful job application

and maternity leave, the team at WWCC is significantly depleted. In the short term, the Ranger team has been joined on secondment by a ranger from Burnham Beeches. It is intended to fill the remaining vacant posts with fixed term contract (FTC) staff until the implications of the Fundamental Review upon the structure of the Division are better understood. In the meantime, the remaining team continue to provide a first class albeit operationally reduced service and this will remain the case until recruitment is complete.

19. The South London Downs National Nature Reserve (SLD NNR) was officially launched at a 'Discovery Day' event on Thursday 25 July. Dignitaries, local volunteers and members of the public attended and took part in a variety of events including a guided walk of Farthing Downs and adjacent Happy Valley. Over 100 people including volunteers, staff, members of the public and dignitaries attended the event. Representatives from the co-hosts were invited to deliver speeches and interviews to media outlets. The WWCC team played a pivotal role in the organisation of this event, which went extremely well despite it being the hottest day ever recorded in the UK.
20. An inaugural meeting of the SLD NNR (Officer) Working Group will take place in September where a partnership opportunity with the London Wildlife Trust to deliver their 'Brilliant Butterflies' initiative, will be discussed. If successful, this will be an exciting and early opportunity to make use of the NNR's status and commence its ambition to engage visitors in environmental science projects.
21. The Ranger team have completed a survey for OPM across Spring Park. One nest was identified and removed.
22. The Merlewood Estate Office team rounded up the cattle on the main grazing area of Farthing Downs. Following a check-up by a vet, 21 cows are expected to calve in January and February next year.
23. All six of the West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons received Green Flag Awards for 2019/20. In addition, Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown Common, Kenley Common and West Wickham Common achieved Green Heritage Site Awards.
24. Hay-cutting has started in earnest across the commons with a contractor on site for much of August and September. The hay meadows are being cut at Kenley, New Hill, Coulsdon Common Spring Park, Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown Common.
25. Members of U3A Croydon have been conducting lowland grassland condition surveys at Riddlesdown Quarry.

26. Removal of Ragwort has almost finished across the Coulsdon commons with local volunteer groups and TCV volunteers carrying out most of the work. The removed plants have filled an 8m³ skip.
27. Burning platforms have been set up on Hilltop, Kenley Common so that contractors can carry burning of this year's brash produced by our chalk grassland habitat restoration work.
28. Visitors to West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons have been increasingly active in sharing interesting species records and photos on social media platforms. Notable sightings have included a Common Whitethroat at spring park, Wheatear at on Farthing Downs, Broad Leaved Helleborines at West Wickham Common and Dingy Skipper recorded, for the first time, on Kenley Common.

Ashtead Common

29. A significant increase in Oak Processionary Moth infestation is being recorded. At the time of writing approximately 1,000 nests have been identified in around 500 trees. This greatly surpasses last years' total of 264 nests. Nest removal has commenced using a risk-based approach to target areas with higher footfall. Elsewhere the nests will be left unless they are in an area due to be worked on during the autumn and winter.
30. The site successfully retained its Green Flag and Green Heritage awards.
31. Lepidoptera species generally appear to have had a good year, with a noticeable degree of defoliation evident on many of the oak trees. To an extent, the rainfall through June enabled the trees to counteract the effect. An assessment will shortly be made to determine if the veteran oak pollard programme should be modified considering the stress suffered by the trees earlier in the season.

Incidents

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

There were fourteen reported incidents during the period

32. In August five gates were stolen from a Cattle catch-up pen at Stoke Common. These gates were branded with Col information and were secured with welded hinges. However, the thieves cut the gate post holding the gates at ground level to remove them – in total about £1000 of damage caused - police informed,
33. Two incidents related to campfires at the Beeches that were both small scale and dealt with by the ranger team.

34. The other incidents include three minor fly tipping at roadsides (all dealt with by South Bucks District Council), unauthorised camping and a dog attack on another dog. Police are investigating the latter.

Ashtead Common

35. Three cases of Lyme Disease have been reported. Two volunteers and one member of staff have been affected during the summer months. Fortunately, all three have since recovered. An investigation is underway and the City's Health and Safety Manager and OH are being consulted to establish what new controls and changes to working practice are needed.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

Nine incidents have been reported during this period.

36. Two incidents were related to quadbikes and off-road vehicles being driven across the Commons. Both were referred to safer neighbourhood team.
37. A stolen vehicle was deliberately driven into the electric gates at Farthing Downs and set alight in the early hours of July 9th. This incident was attended by the Fire Service and Police and Ranger team. The gate was damaged during the fire and the Rangers have since been opening the gate manually. Three persons involved in the incident were arrested shortly after leaving the area.
38. Three incidents took place in car parks across the Commons. One anti-social behaviour and drug use incident was reported at Riddlesdown and two incidents of vandalism were recorded at Farthing Downs causing minor damage a sign on the gate and a fuse box in the toilet facilities. Due to the incidents recorded here and in para 37 the Head Ranger is reviewing possible methods to reduce this type of incident.
39. Several cattle escaped the main grazing area on Farthing Downs through an open pedestrian gate and were found heading towards a road. Local residents and rangers managed to get them back into the grazing area. The number of gates in grazing enclosures is to be reviewed to reduce the likelihood of this type of incident. Youths were also witness by a member of the public chasing cattle on Farthing Downs.
40. A stray dog seen wandering around on Riddlesdown was seen and reported to the local council dog warden.

Filming, major events and other activities

Burnham Beeches

41. The Beeches hosted numerous external events: including with schools both before and during the summer holidays; running events including the Burnham Jogger's ½ marathon and JAWs 5K.
42. Events have included several guided walks including the themed 'On location' and the 'Plants at Burnham Beeches' and one focusing on the tree management for the Countryside Managers Association. The new self-guided trail for professional arborists (a joint project with the Ancient Tree Forum) was advertised through a day for professionals, with staff from Hampstead Heath joining those from the Beeches to explain in detail the management of specific trees. The summer children's 'wildlife wonders' activities have been popular and regular visits by Beavers and Cubs have continued.
43. Thee Beeches hosted 8 days of filming activity (3 actual filming days, 5 preparation and strike) in July and August with Netflix and Argos

The West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

44. The Ranger team delivered several events including a series of wildflower walks across the commons, butterfly walks, a health walk and a grazing walk and talk. Two further events were cancelled because of bad weather.

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