

<b>1. Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons Committee	10 March 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of 'The Commons'	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Summary</b>	
<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>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	
<p>Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

## **Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common**

1. Regular meetings and discussions have continued with officers from South Bucks District Council (SBDC), Natural England and SBDC, Lepus (the consultancy conducting the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Council) regarding the Local Plan. Further traffic modelling has indicated that the increase in numbers of vehicles using the roads through the Beeches expected as a result of the local plan is insufficient to trigger further modelling of air quality. The recreation mitigation strategy has become much clearer but there are minor issues to resolve, revolving around the scale of developer payments for new dwellings in the zone between 500m and 5.6km from the Beeches. Agreement on the detail is now close between all partners. Mitigation payment levels will ensure key benefits to the Beeches as well as being proportionate to the level of development planned. The first part of the Examination in Public (EIP) will be held in the week of 16 March. The deadline for notifying a desire to speak at the EIP was prior to complete finalisation of the mitigation strategy therefore Officers have given notification that they may wish to speak. This option does not need to be taken up if the results are agreed satisfactorily prior to the EIP.
2. A positive meeting was held with Planning Officers from Slough Borough Council to discuss the impacts of a large development in relation to the Habitats Regulations Assessment which is required to carry out some mitigation for the impact of recreation. Options were discussed and will be further explored at an additional meeting with the developer and Natural England. There is now appears to be a timetable to produce the Slough Local plan and a willingness to engage with the City

of London Corporation over impacts on the SAC. This process is likely to continue until the adoption of their plan in 2022.

3. The Memorandum of Understanding with Heathrow Airport is close to being finalised and a meeting is planned for a review and to plan the next steps with the potential partners.
4. Following approval of the draft 10-year Burnham Beeches Management Plan by this Committee the document has been finalised and sent to Natural England (NE) to grant consent. A Habitats Regulations Assessment needs to be carried out, but it is hoped that this will be a relatively simple process that will be carried out by NE.
5. The old pollard work was reduced this year because the impact of two dry summers was visibly stressing some of the trees. The work on 10 trees was sufficiently urgent to continue with and this was done by Burnham Beeches staff using the access platform and arborists from Hampstead Heath who look forward to their visits to work on the old trees each year.
6. Because of the reduced old pollard work programme, the programme for the young pollards was increased. Over 120 young pollards have been cut in rotation as part of the Countryside Stewardship grant funding and around 50 more created in areas of wood pasture restoration around the Beeches. A mobile access platform was hired to do some of the work on the larger/taller trees.
7. During their visit, the Hampstead Heath arborists carried out some small-scale clearance of trees to let light to an area where transplants of the rare lichen *Pyrenula nitida* had been carried out by 'Plantlife' earlier in the winter. This was done using some techniques to make the area look like a storm had passed through.
8. Wood pasture restoration close to Victory Cross has been carried out using contractors and regular volunteers. Scrub cover has been cleared, some larger trees removed, some new pollards created, and the restoration is making good progress. This work is funded by the Countryside stewardship grant.
9. Volunteers have also been busy at Stoke Common continuing with birch clearance. A replacement All Terrain Vehicle has been purchased with multiple seats which will be used to transport volunteers to and from tasks.
10. A re-survey and review of all the young pollards is underway with help from the ecology volunteers who are also continuing with dust monitoring and sorting of invertebrate samples.
11. The Beeches was shut for short periods during Storm Ciara and Storm Dennis. Several trees were blown over or lost large branches. Unfortunately, both storms

were at weekends, which had an impact on car park revenue and café trade. The February half term week was also dominated by very poor weather

12. A small group of travellers arrived during storm Ciara and gained access to a car park by cutting the lock on the gate. They initially proved difficult to evict due to lack of police support and remained on site for four days finally being moved on the 13<sup>th</sup> February when bailiffs were well supported by police.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Kenley Revival update**

13. The City Funded Legacy Officer has delivered several events during this period, including two mini-museum exhibitions displaying archaeological finds ( 25 January and family activities including a historic re-enactment (22 February).
14. The City's legal advisors Beale & Co wrote to Clyde & Co who represent the project's Principal Designer reaffirming that we are pursuing a resolution to the conservation works issue. This followed receipt of a report from the Buildings Research Establishment that gives reassurance on the City's position that the Principal Designer is responsible for the failure of the works. In a letter dated February 20 Clyde & Co refuted this assertion. Beale & Co Wrote back on February 21 pressing for a more satisfactory response by March 6.
15. The Superintendent and Head Ranger visited the factory of 'Allsigns' on February 3 to view progress of the on-site signage. Near complete examples of each type of sign were seen, and the company confirmed that they will be ready for installation in early March. Consequently, two applications have been submitted to Croydon Planners: one to discharge a condition to provide samples and the other to inform them of a non-material change relating to construction materials.

### **The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons**

16. Following the two successive winter storms, Rangers carried out checks on all medium and high-risk routes for tree damage and remedial work to remove fallen or damaged trees. Several large trees came down including a large Oak over a residential road at Spring Park, which was dealt with by rangers outside of working hours.
17. The Assistant Ranger commenced her role on 15 January 2020. This is a twelve-month fixed term contract, during which they will assist the team across all sites.
18. An egg search for Brown Hairstreak Butterfly, (*Thecla betulae*), at Spring Park produced encouraging results. A total of 67 eggs were identified within a series of Blackthorn compartments, managed for Brown Hairstreak butterflies. This is now the

highest number of surveyed individuals, within Kent. This has been a concerted effort to manage Blackthorn growth in sections to provide continuity of valuable habitat for egg laying. This is very positive news considering the substantial national decline in this species.

19. Most of the cows have now calved; a total of 16 is expected. The Livestock Ranger has been checking cows around the clock with assistance from the Ranger team. A 'Meet the Calves' event is planned for 28 March 2020 and, with its popularity from previous years, should provide a good opportunity to engage the local community before the cattle are back grazing the Commons in late Spring.
20. Contractors have been on site carrying out remedial works from tree felling on Famet, Riddlesdown to extend and improve chalk grassland habitat. Poor weather in December and January prevented access and movement of machinery, temporarily delaying the work.
21. There has been liaison with Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) including a site visit to Norbury Park to see how Ash dieback disease is being managed. It is expected that the disease will kill up to 95% of Ash trees across the UK. The Coulsdon and West Wickham Commons have several locations where the extent of the disease on native ash is evident and progressing. The SWT visit included management examples, experience of contractors and how they inform members of the public was informative in advance of preparing woodland management plans for the Commons.
22. A letter of thanks on behalf of this committee, was sent to the Principal of the Riddlesdown Collegiate for the continuing programme of student participation in support of the management of the Common

### **Ashtead Common**

23. Rangers have conducted site inspections on several occasions in recent weeks because of the recent storms. Fortunately, there has been very little damage to trees on the Common. The Ashtead Residents Association again expressed their appreciation for the flow control structure on the Rye Brook, which has held back peak flows during recent periods of heavy rain. They are sure that properties downstream would have flooded without it.
24. The winter programme of habitat management work was completed by February 14 and tree safety work by February 21. Approximately 90 veteran trees were worked on this year, slightly fewer than planned mainly because of delays caused by OPM.
25. Scrub/grassland and ride management works were largely completed by Christmas. A project to remove willow from the ditch around Woodfield using an excavator received several compliments from residents.

26. Work is currently underway on the first draft of the 2021-2031 management plan. The team has been consulting the local community on the vision for the Common for some time now and will shortly be presenting the aims and targets for the next 10 years to the Ashtead Common Consultative Group.

### **Support Services Team**

27. The team is busy with end of year processes, procurement initiatives and protocol to ensure a timely and successful financial year end and forecasts predict that all is on track.

28. The new Administration Assistant for the Merlewood and Ashtead Estate Offices begin her role on 24 February and will be a very welcome addition to this small team who have been covering these duties for several months.

29. Recent bad weather has increased the work of the team with increased reporting of fallen trees from members of the public and rapid response to arrange emergency tree contractors for the Ranger team.

### **Grant Funding - Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment**

30. The Open Spaces Department’s “Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment” grant is managed by the Central Grants Unit. Awards are made annually upon submission of satisfactory submissions. Awards range from between £2k and £15k and are given to community, charity and voluntary groups under 4 sub themes:

1. Connecting communities with their green spaces
2. Improving the conservation value of the green spaces
3. Improving our knowledge of the biodiversity of the green spaces
4. Improving mental health through the use of green spaces

31. Eighteen grant submissions were received this year across all the Open Spaces totalling £225,000.

32. A budget of up to £132,000 was available to award. Eleven applications across all divisions have been awarded a total of £120k. Five projects were funded across The Commons as outlined below.

<b>Organisation Name</b>	<b>Purpose of the Grant</b>	<b>Funding Awarded £</b>
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Downlands Trust	Practical volunteer task days and the grazing of 9 goats at Riddlesdown Quarry throughout the year, both of which will improve the sites' biodiversity.	<b>14,988</b>
Friends of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley	Renew and extend the Nature Trail which connects the varied iconic landscape with the surrounding urban community in Farthing Downs and Happy Valley.	<b>6,200</b>
Friends of Stoke Common	Replacement of tools and equipment to enable continued work on the Stoke Common Management Plan 2019/28	<b>6,945</b>
Lower Mole Countryside Trust	Implementation of the Rye Brook Restoration Project (stream improvements, vegetation management and public access improvements) on Ashtead Common over a 3-year period.	<b>15,000</b>
Plantlife International	Increase knowledge and plan for habitat restoration for vascular plant, lichen and bryophyte interest in the wider Burnham Beeches landscape. The information will help place the plant and fungi interest of Burnham Beeches within a wider context and provide both information and guidance on the management and restoration of habitats within this wider landscape.	<b>12,374</b>

One application from Farnham Commons Middle School unsuccessful.

## Incidents

### Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

33. Incidents in the period included: traveller incursion, a roe deer injured by a dog at Stoke Common and 4 PSPO warning letters being issued for dogs being off a lead in the on-lead area.

### Ashtead Common

34. None

### The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

35. Five separate occurrences of fly tipping have taken place across the WW&CCs - the most significant was a large volume of asbestos on Ditches Lane. Rangers worked with the Police and London Borough of Croydon (LBC) officers to clear the site which involved closing the road for most of the day. There has subsequently been a meeting with, LBC, Tandridge and City of London looking at the introduction of high

definition cameras on the section of road that crosses Farthing Downs. There is also a joint operation taking place with Police and Enforcement Officers stopping suspicious vehicles using the downs and checking their waste transfer licences. The City will support this by making a section of our land available along the roadside for the duration of the operation.

36. There have been two separate incidents of sheep worrying, fortunately no fatal attacks have occurred. Rangers are sharing information with the local police, and Croydon Enforcement. One individual is known to us and is due to be visited by Croydon Enforcement early in the new year following further intelligence coming to light recently.

### **Filming, major events and other activities**

#### **Burnham Beeches**

37. The Beeches organised several events including Woodland Explorers at half term, bird box making and meet the Ranger focussing on filming.
38. The Beeches also hosted some Simply Walks.
39. A talk was given to the Stoke Poges Society about the Beeches and Stoke Common with over 60 people attending.

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