

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Open Spaces	14 May 2012	
Subject: Visitor Numbers at Burnham Beeches		Public
Report of: The Burnham Beeches Conservation Officer		For Information
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Summary</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full visitor count survey was carried out for Burnham Beeches in 2010/2011. This was a repeat of a similar exercise done in 2002/2003 • It is estimated that 585,106 visits to Burnham Beeches were made in 2010/2011 this is an increase of 2.4% on the previous count made in 2002/3. An estimated 215,502 dogs visits are made to the Beeches each year • 85% of visits are made by adults. The majority of visitors arrive through the Lord Mayor's Drive east entrance by car. The number of visits made by cyclists and horses has decreased since the previous count. • An average of 70 cars arrive through Lord Mayor's Drive east each hour at weekends and 37 per hour on week days. • A model has been produced to enable automatic traffic counter data to be used to give an estimate of the number of visitors each year. <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to receive this report 		

Main Report

Background

1. In 2002/3 an estimate of the numbers of visitors to Burnham Beeches was produced. The numbers of visitors entering by car and on foot were counted, and the data analysed at Manchester Metropolitan University and a final report produced. It was estimated that there were at least 560,000

visits made to Burnham Beeches per year at that time with a modelled estimate of 572,415 (taking into account bank holidays etc.).

2. This report presents the results of an updated survey to estimate the numbers of visitors to Burnham Beeches.

2010/2011 survey - methods

3. A repeat survey was conducted during 2010/11 to gain an update of the number of visitors and to reflect changes to the management of the site since the last survey, notably:
 - The closure of the western end of Lord Mayor's Drive to traffic, stopping vehicles from driving through (rat running); a significant feature of the previous survey.
 - The closure of the café and toilets at the western end of Lord Mayor's Drive and the opening of the new café and visitor information point at Victory Cross
 - The closure of some smaller outlying car parks
4. In order to minimise the costs of the survey some changes were made to the original method. The number of entrances covered was reduced (for example where two pairs of entrances had previously yielded similar results); the counting days were split so that some were half days and the people doing the counting were entirely staff and volunteers rather than agency staff as was previously the case.
5. A pilot was carried out to check the methods and forms. 15 survey dates were then undertaken from October 2010 to August 2011. These covered all four seasons, weekdays, weekends and one bank holiday. Visitors were counted at five entrances. At the main entrance i.e. the east end of Lord Mayor's Drive, all vehicles were stopped and a count made of the occupants. All visitors were categorised as adult or child, their mode of transport noted (for example walking, bicycle, horse or wheelchair). The number of dogs with them was also recorded.
6. A permanent traffic counter loop was installed at the entrance to Lord Mayor's Drive east and data from this was used to obtain the number of vehicles accessing the Beeches each day of the year. From the manual counts the number of people per vehicle could be estimated on different days of the week and times of day so gaining a more accurate picture of the total number of visits.

7. Data entry to spreadsheets was undertaken by Burnham Beeches staff and volunteers.

2010/2011 survey - results

8. It is estimated that 585,106 visits to Burnham Beeches were made in 2010-2011 this is an increase of 2.4% on the comparable number modelled in 2002-3 which was 571,415.
9. An estimated 215,502 dog visits are made to the Beeches each year, 50% of which are brought in cars which enter through Lord Mayor's Drive east. This is an increase of 67% on the estimated number of 128,921 in 2002-2003 at least partly due to the more accurate method of counting them (stopping cars and asking rather than just observing). However, the increase is noted and remains of potential concern.
10. The proportion of visitors arriving to the Beeches at Lord Mayor's Drive east has increased from 50% to 63%; this is largely due to the closure of Lord Mayor's Drive west to traffic.
11. Fewer visits are made on weekdays than weekends and bank holidays. The peak seasons are autumn and spring.
12. Over 85% of visits are made by adults. The majority arrive by car to Lord Mayor's Drive east (56%). 4% of adults and 5% of children arrive on bicycle; 0.02% of adults and 0.49% of children arrive on horses and 40% of adults and 35% of children arrive on foot or park in one of the outlying car parks and walk in through a smaller entrance. Some 0.32% of adults come in to Burnham Beeches in their wheelchairs (this is higher than the previous count and probably due to a small number of very regular visitors with electric models).
13. Several changes have been recognised from the previous counts made in 2002/3, aside from the overall increase in visitors and dogs. Bicycle usage and access by horse has declined whereas arrival at the site by wheel chair has increased.
14. The majority of vehicles driving into the Beeches are cars or 'people carriers'. Only one minibus and one coach were recorded during the surveys. Very few motorbikes were recorded. The number of vehicles servicing the site (e.g. café deliveries) averages at less than 1 per day.
15. On average there are 70 vehicles per hour entering the site through Lord Mayor's Drive east at weekends and 37 per hour on week days.

16. A model has been produced which uses the automatic traffic counter data to produce annual estimates in future.
17. The number of days with accurate counts was necessarily limited due to financial and time constraints, more days of counting would make the data more accurate, as would counting at all the smaller entrances but this was deemed impractical in terms of the resources available.

Use of the data and future proposals

18. The data gathered has since been used to inform a report on the impact of local housing developments on Burnham Beeches and is likely to be quoted in a variety of documents both internal and external such as grant applications. The updated figure for the number of dogs being brought to the site will also provide valuable evidence in relation to the management of dog related incidents on Burnham Beeches.
19. This survey will be repeated in 2019-2020. Minor surveys may take place in the interim to reflect changes to the site as required.
20. The numbers of visitors to Stoke Common have not previously been counted but automatic counters have recently been installed on the gates, funded in part by a Higher Level Stewardship grant. In future years it should be possible to obtain estimates of visitor numbers to this reserve as well.

Financial and Risk Implications

21. The cost of the external consultant in design of the project, design of recording sheets and database, training in data input, analysis of data and production of a final report was £4,000.
22. Staff time was required for management of the project, planning and managing staff and volunteers during the counting and data input. Staff time amounted to 410 hours (equivalent to £8,200) and the volunteers contributed 381hours.

HR Implications

23. Financial savings were made by using volunteers rather than agency staff, although they required more support from City of London staff. The process was managed by an Assistant Ranger but did require co-operation and involvement from all staff and had a minor impact on most staff workloads.

Strategic Implications

24. This project is listed in the Burnham Beeches management plan and Open Spaces Business Plan.

Conclusion

25. An updated estimate of the number of visitors to Burnham Beeches has been obtained, including information about the pattern of visiting time, how they travel to the reserve and how many dogs they bring with them. This information will be useful for future reports and grant applications and can be used to seek to influence visitor behaviour.

Contact:

Helen Read

x6686

helen.read@cityoflondon.gov.uk