Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	3rd November 2014
Subject: Update on the expansion of conservation grazing at Burnham Beeches	**Public**
Report of: Superintendent of Burnham Beeches Stoke and City Commons	**For Decision**

Summary

Previous reports have outlined the need to graze Burnham Beeches and provided details of trials using 'invisible fencing'.

Trials of new equipment at Epping Forest have continued throughout 2014 although some equipment (for shorter loops) was not provided by the manufacturer as anticipated.

The 2014 Burnham Beeches trials, using the 'original' invisible fence equipment, has reinforced the view that it provides a safe and reliable method of containing livestock at Burnham Beeches. However, from the recent Epping Forest trials it is clear that the technology still has some way to go before it has matured and becomes available to the point that it can provide the best and most cost effective solution for Burnham Beeches.

If approved, this report describes a short term and pragmatic solution to the expansion of conservation grazing across Burnham Beeches using invisible fencing alongside the existing traditional stock and temporary electric fencing.

This approach has the twin benefits of ensuring the expansion of conservation grazing across new areas of the site continues, whilst retaining the ability to make the most of any technological improvements as they become commercially available.

The aim of reducing reliance on traditional wire and/or electric stock fencing remains.

Recommendations.

Members are asked to:

- Approve the continued and expanding use of invisible fences at Burnham Beeches as technology allows.
- Approve the retention of existing traditional stock and temporary electric fencing until such time as reliance on them can be satisfactorily reduced by use of invisible fences.

Main Report

Background

1. The re-introduction of grazing at Burnham Beeches commenced in 1992 with a small post and rail enclosure of approximately 7ha. Since that time this fenced enclosure has expanded so that 43ha are now grazed by cattle and ponies (and in the past, pigs) each year. In addition, conventional temporary electric fences are occasionally used for small plots both within the fence to increase grazing pressure and external to it.

2. The conservation grazing scheme at Burnham Beeches has the approved aim of grazing up to 95% of the site. This is considered to be essential for the management of the nature reserve by Natural England and is reflected in the Higher Level Stewardship agreement. Initially it was anticipated that cattle grids and several kilometres of fencing and myriad gateways would be necessary to prevent the livestock from roaming from the reserve on the arterial roads.

3. The Epping Forest team then identified the option of invisible fencing that presented an alternative method of achieving grazing across large areas. This approach was adopted at Burnham Beeches to greatly reduce the cost of the grazing expansion project.

4. In May 2012 your Committee approved a report that set out a phased trial of invisible fencing across Burnham Beeches. In November 2013 Members were updated on the progress of the various trial areas.

Current Position

5. The principal of grazing as much of Burnham Beeches as possible continues to be the primary management aim, accepting that there are small areas for which grazing is either undesirable (major car parks) or where the invisible fences and virtual cattle grids allow the reduction of risk by excluding roads and where desirable, some very narrow wooded verges.

6. Currently a mix of fencing types are used on the site i.e. post and wire fences, conventional electric fencing and more recently, invisible fencing. Each achieves the aim of containing livestock in different ways and all have benefits as well as disadvantages.

7. Retaining some of the physical fencing, in the short term, would provide a secure area for stock if required (for example in the event of invisible fence failures) and is secure for ponies and pigs for which invisible fencing is currently unsuitable. Conventional electric fences remain useful to seasonally increase the grazing pressure of small areas if necessary.

8. In 2014 invisible fence trial areas 1 and 2 (see Map 1) were again grazed with cattle. In addition a new loop was installed (area 3) surrounding 10.24ha and grazed. Thus in 2014 40ha has been grazed using invisible fencing, bringing the total area grazed within invisible fences and traditional fencing to 83ha (38% of Burnham Beeches).

9. During this period staff have gained greater experience of and confidence in the invisible fencing equipment currently available. In addition the local

highways authority now accepts its use as ‘virtual cattle grids’ as the norm on some of the public roads.

10. Trials of various technical improvements to the invisible fence equioment took place at Epping Forest in 2014. When commercially available these will widen the options for its use. This includes the ability to use both longer and shorter loops as well as lighter boxes for the collars.

11. Longer loops have the potential to increase reliability and reduce costs whilst shorter loops may provide further options re the use of ‘virtual cattle grids’. Both are necessary at Burnham Beeches to ensure the safest, most cost effective use of the technology.

12. Lighter collar boxes could lead to the use of ponies and pigs within invisible fence enclosures, something that is highly desirable at Burnham Beeches and is needed to reduce much of the post and wire fencing currently found on site.

13. The 2014 Epping Forest trials show that good progress has been made with longer loops and lighter collar units. However the equipment is not yet readily available. Progress concerning shorter loops is awaited.

14. To accommodate this situation a short-term, modified approach is now proposed at Burnham Beeches.

Options

15. Trials continue to indicate that virtual fencing is a reliable method of achieving grazing throughout Burnham Beeches. Its use greatly reduce costs and adds flexibility beyond that which could be achieved using cattle grids and traditional fencing. This indicates that the aim of achieving grazing across much of the 220 ha of the nature reserve is a realistic one.

16. Continued use of all three types of fencing i.e. invisible fences, existing post and wire fences and small, temporary electric fence enclosures would provide a good, short term option and allows time for further development and if necessary, testing of new invisible fence equipment. It would also accommodate a period awaiting wider availability.

Proposals

17. Expansion of the grazing scheme should continue by installing additional loops of invisible fences where use of the original technology allows.

18. Longer loops and/or shorter loops and lighter collars will be used as the equipment is made more widely available.

19. In the meantime a mixture of invisible fences, conventional electric fences and physical barriers would continue to be used. The proportion of each of these will vary over time as more invisible fences are installed, reducing but probably not totally eliminating the need for the other types.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

The production of the management plan supports the ‘Protect, promote and enhance the environment’ and ‘Support Communities’ elements of the ‘City Together Strategy’.

The plan to expand conservation grazing across Burnham Beeches is a key project within the Departmental Business plan. The provision of conservation grazing across Burnham Beeches will assist the City to:

Economic — Prepare for and adapt to the likely impacts of climate change.
Support local workforces, SME's and community activities.

Environment — Encourage best environmental practice in service delivery by the City Corporation, its stakeholders and contractors.
Encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport.
Improve or create habitats for wildlife.

Social — Enhance and encourage preventative health services, activities and education.
Consult, inform and engage the community in decision making.
Reduce crime and fear of crime.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced for this project and has concluded 'no negative impacts' to the relevant groups.

Legal Implications

20. The installation of the Boviguard invisible fence system required the City of London Corporation to obtain a street works licence from the local highway authority under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. This was a largely administrative cost with some legal costs payable to the grantor of the licence. The licence for each highway location is required to enable the laying of cable apparatus in the public highway.

21. An agreement between the City of London and Buckinghamshire County Council has been entered into in respect of the road markings installed in connection with the "virtual grids" and following consultation with relevant Buckinghamshire County Council officers about the proposals.

Property Implications

22. The Superintendent remains responsible for ensuring that the implementation and use of the invisible fencing along with the subsequent animal grazing continues to be appropriate for the conservation of Burnham Beeches. In addition the operation of the trial should take place with minimal impact on any existing infrastructure or buildings located at the Beeches.

Financial Implications

23. The original estimate for this project was £60,000 (May 2012) including livestock purchases. This estimate was reduced to the range £35,000 - £50,000 (Nov 2013). The Superintendent is confident that the final project costs remains within that range and will be dependent upon the final balance in use of invisible and traditional fencing**.**

24. The Superintendent will apply for 80% capital funding from Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme to fund the cost of installing the invisible fencing and virtual grids. The remaining 20% will be provided from local risk budgets**.**

HR Implications

25. The expansion of the grazing herd (estimated at between 10 and 15 livestock units when up to 95% of the Beeches is grazed) will alter the emphasis of this element of our work.

26. The Superintendent has liaised closely with the Director of Open Spaces and the Human Resources Department to accommodate this change by minor adjustments to the current staff structure and individual responsibilities.

Conclusion

27. Further invisible fencing trials have been conducted at Burnham Beeches in 2014 without major incident and have been shown it to be a reliable method for containing livestock. Grazing the majority of Burnham Beeches is now a realistic target.

28. Trials held at Epping Forest of new invisible fencing equipment have made good progress but some elements await development and/or wider availability.

29. The Superintendent proposes to continue the expansion of conservation grazing across Burnham Beeches using invisible fencing, including longer or shorter loops and lighter collar as appropriate and when they become commercially available.

30. In the meantime, the Superintendent also proposes to continue using existing traditional fences and small electric fence enclosures to maintain the use of Exmoor Ponies. These 'traditional' fences will be removed as expansion of and improvements to invisible fencing allow.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Map showing invisible fence trial areas

Background Papers:
Report to EFCC - May 2012
Report to EFCC – November 2013

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